

# **SAVE THE CHILDREN, SOUTH SUDAN**

## **CHILD RIGHTS SITUATION ANALYSIS**

**JULY 2023**

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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

**ACRWC**- African Charter on the Rights and welfare of a Child

**CAAFG**-Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups.

**CEDAW**- Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Violence against Women.

**CSO's**-Civil Society Organization's

**CRSA**-Child Rights Situation Analysis

**FDG's**- Focus Group Discussions

**KII's**-Key Informant Interviews

**GBV**-Gender Based Violence

**MGCSW**-Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare

**MOGEI**-Ministry of General Education and Instruction

**R-ARCSS**- Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution to the Conflict in South Sudan

**SCI**- Save the Children, International

**UASC**-Unaccompanied and Separated Children

**UNCRC**- United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child

**UN**-United Nations

**UNICEF**- United Nations Children's Emergency Fund.

**VAC**-Violence Against Children

**WASH**-Water Sanitation and Hygiene

**WHO**-World Health Organization

## 1.0 Executive Summary

**Background to the CRSA:** Save the Children South Sudan undertook this Child Rights Situation Analysis (CRSA) generate evidence on the state of children and inform country strategy, program design, prioritize areas of focus for reaching girls and boys impacted by inequality and exclusion to support their realization of rights.

**Country Context:** South Sudan gained independence from Sudan on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2011, making it the newest sovereign state or country with an estimated population of 12.4 million, 53% of the population under 18 years old<sup>1</sup>. Following its independence, internal conflict broke out in 2013 and 2016 and was resolved with the signing of the 2018 Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution to the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). Despite this agreement, pockets of conflict still exist. The Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution to the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan has been extended for two years, postponing elections until late 2024. The continues to face multiple challenges depriving its population of adequate and descent standards of living especially for children. Economic instability and conflict remain key barriers to developing its human capital through progress in health, education, institutional strengthening and sustainable development. Climate change and natural disasters continues to impact on multiple deprivations that its population faces mostly affecting women and children hence jeopardizing recovery and undermining development efforts. In addition, the conflict which broke out in Sudan since April 2023, continues to worsen the humanitarian situation hence exerting immense economic and social pressure on the country especially in communities bordering Sudan.

**Methodology and approach to the CRSA:** This situation analysis is three staged. Firstly, data was collected based on the existing data on challenges, gaps and inequalities that South Sudan face in the realization of their rights through a desk review. This included information gathering on government of South Sudan's obligation to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) using the 2022 concluding observations. These observation highlighted progress and gaps in meeting child rights obligations. Building on these included, information gathering from the perspective of Civil Society Organizations (CSO's) shadow report and an independent report from children which made similar assessments. Other documents included, government policies, laws and reports related to children, studies and reports from various United Nations (UN) agencies and CSO's. Secondly, information gaps were identified from the initial desk review that needed to be collected through primary data. After primary and secondary data were collected and analysed, information was validated by both internal and external stakeholders for additional inputs on key gaps as well as ensuring accuracy and consistency in the information that was consolidated, leading to the consolidation of the final report. This analysis clustered child rights into four main pillars of **survival, development, protection and participation** rights in line with the National Plan of Action for Children (NPAC, 2020 to 2024) as well as SCI- programmatic focus. It further looks at other cross cutting issues, gender, non- discrimination, climate change, conflict, adolescent and youth development. Data collection was done through Focus Group Discussions (FDG's) and Key informant interviews at community level for children, youth and caregivers and KII of relevant state actors, CSO's and SCI implementing partners. Primary data was analysed qualitatively using content and thematic

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<sup>1</sup> Note the last population census was conducted in South Sudan in 2008-2009 with a count of 8,260,490 total population, data based on projections.

analysis across all the pillars and cross cutting themes.

**Analysis of findings:** The Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS) has taken legislative, institutional and policy measures in the implementation provisions of the UNCRC. Among the critical legal frameworks includes The Transitional Constitution of Republic of South Sudan (2011). In section 17 (1) of the bill of rights, guarantees children's rights to survival, development, protection including any form of discrimination or being subjected to harmful practices. Critical to children's realization of children's rights is the Child Act (2008) that re-enforces relevant provisions of the UNCRC, and governments commitment to meeting the relevant obligations including non- discrimination, children's best interest, survival, development, protection and views of children. It further has the National Plan of Action for Children (NPAC, 2020 to 2024) that provides the institutional arrangements for the implementation of the Act. However, there is limited public awareness among the public and children themselves on key provisions to guarantee their protection and wellbeing, while the NPAC has not been operationalized three years after its initiation.

**The child survival pillar;** focused on infant and young child nutrition, maternal and child health, WASH and child poverty. It is clear that infants and young children aged 0 to 5 years are at risk of malnutrition, not being in good health due to limited access to nutritious foods. An estimated 15.6% suffer from chronic malnutrition(stunting)<sup>2</sup>. Barriers to good nutrition and health include low dietary diversity, poor feeding practices, high morbidity, household food insecurity due to climatic shocks and poor hygiene practices. Other barriers include low male involvement in childcare yet are the key decision makers food availability and related costs for health and nutrition. Lack of food is further impacted by low productivity in part due to, lean workforce for extension services for enhanced production and long-term recovery. Infant and maternal health outcomes remain poor. The current infant mortality rate for South Sudan in 2023 is 58.58 deaths per 1000 live births, a 1.94% decline from 2022<sup>3</sup>. Maternal mortality is 1112 deaths per 1,000 live births, and the under-five mortality rate is 135 per 1,000 live births. The maternal mortality ratio is 1150 per 100,000 live births<sup>4</sup>. Barriers include limited access to health services with only 18%<sup>5</sup> of births being attended to by skilled midwives. Low education attainment for women influences health seeking behaviors, coupled with low male involvement in childbirth and care. This affects infant and young childcare, with further limited knowledge and skills understanding key child developmental milestones, impacting on early identification of developmental disabilities needing early remedy. Diseases burden is high and include mostly Malaria which is the number one cause of deaths, respiratory infections and diarrheal diseases. Quality of health care is further compounded availability of services including medical supply stock outs. In terms of Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), only 40% of population have access to safe water a situation that increases vulnerability of the population especially children to water borne diseases. While access toilets provide dignity for all including women, children and those with disabilities, 63% of the population practice open defecation. Barriers include low investment in the sector, social norms, values and practices on hygiene and faecal waste disposal. Health systems remain weak despite being overwhelmed with emergencies and disease burden, due to port budgetary allocation as well as the actual disbursement and limited skilled workforce.

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<sup>2</sup> UNICEF (2021) Nutrition briefing.

<sup>3</sup> Macro Trends (2023) South Sudan Infant Mortality Rate, 1950 - 2023

<sup>4</sup> UNFPA (2022) Annual Report

<sup>5</sup> National Plan of Action for Children (2020 to 2024)

**The development pillar focuses on** (1) access to, quality and equity to education rights for both pre-primary and primary education (2) Social economic development, community and family support systems for children's development. Children that are out of school, has increased from 2.2 million in 2016 to 2.8 million in 2020 representing almost 3 in 5 children, representing almost 3 (59 per percent)<sup>6</sup>. Only 36.5 percent of learners attended pre-school before grade 1<sup>7</sup> affecting school readiness and achievement of foundational outcomes. On the supply side, access is hindered by long distances, limited and poor infrastructure, climate change induced shocks especially flooding resulting in school closures, thus some children dropping out. Access is even more complex for children with disabilities who may need aid, but there are also limited capacities within teachers with relevant skills to meet their learning needs. Quality and equity to education is compromised by high teacher turnover owing to low motivation, thus 51 %<sup>8</sup> of teachers are unqualified and work as volunteers. In addition, teacher qualified teacher pupil ratio is as high as 1 to 100 in some states such as Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile<sup>9</sup>. There are far more male than female teachers in school a situation that continues to re-enforce existing gender inequalities often affecting abilities of girls to learn. Only 45 percent of South Sudan's 3,349 basic primary schools have access to safe water, and a mere 17 percent have adequate sanitary latrines for both girls and boys<sup>10</sup>. Hunger continues to affect learners as most arrive at school hungry while they have to walk long distance to school, affecting their ability to learn. Only 1 in 4 children (24.7 per cent) report having eaten before school<sup>11</sup>. Many of the children that are in school are not learning, as foundational literacy and numeracy skills remain poor with average literacy and numeracy scores for boys being better than girls for early grade learners. On the demand side most families especially in rural areas are challenged by poverty, food insecurity, and displacement affecting their ability to support children's education needs. Cultural and social norms, as well as economic pressures, influences families to devalue education for children especially girls and engage in negative coping mechanisms such as child marriages. At community and family level support systems for enhancing child development remain weak, due challenges in meeting individual and family needs of caregivers. While social protection provides immediate and short-term mitigation measures on the impact of shocks, long term government led safety nets are rarely in place. Non state actors led social programs are impacted by low absorption capacity, inconsistency not being predictable and accessibility to needy communities due to conflict, poor infrastructure and climatic shocks such floods.

**Protection pillar:** South Sudan' s children face multiple protection issues including child marriages with 52% or 1 in 2 young women having been married before 18 years<sup>12</sup>. Gender Based violence is pervasive often affecting women and girls. An estimated 65 per cent of women and girls have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. Other risks include child labour, abduction, children being recruited into armed forces and groups. including exposure to violence and abuse within homes, schools and communities. Violence Against

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<sup>6</sup> UNICEF(2021) Situation of the status Women and Children of South Sudan.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of General Education and Instruction(2020) ,Education Statistical Bulletin.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.unwater.org/downloads/bgground\\_2.pdf](http://www.unwater.org/downloads/bgground_2.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> UNICEF, South Sudan, The Situation of Women and Children in South Sudan (2021)

<sup>12</sup> South Sudan Statistical profile on Child marriage.

Children (VAC) and Gender Based Violence (GBV) is being driven by its social tolerance, the culture of silence and harmful traditional and cultural practices especially impacting on girls. Despite the magnitude of the problem, access to and utilization of comprehensive services is low including most of the children needing Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) because of long-term distress. Access and utilization of services limited by social and cultural norms, in availability of services as well as qualified social workforce to provide appropriate support services. On the other hand, Government led child protection system remain weak and fragmented owing to technical, human and financial constraints.

**Participation child rights:** South Sudan does not have a framework to guide meaningful child participation, provide space, amplifies voices and influence child informed programming. Platforms for participation are limited and later own when provided follow up mechanisms are not in place to ensure issues are incorporated into decision making processes. Children expressed the need for recreation facilities, as an important aspect to promote their socialization, build skills to understand issues and be able to engage with duty bearers, but these remain limited. Other barriers include social norms and values that do not recognize voices of children, and limited capacity by children While the NPAC (2020 to 2024), provides for the Independent Children's Desk and Children's Commission as avenues for foster child participation and other issues affecting children. There are structures promoting efforts for children to be heard at school level such as child rights clubs in some of the schools but do face challenges with support with capacity building needs such as trainings and relevant materials to guide their engagements. Civic space remains poor with limited opportunities for people's participation and later children to influence decision making including in the budget planning and monitoring processes.

**Cross Cutting Issues:** South Sudan is impacted by multiple challenges affecting its path to recovery and development. It is a patriarchal society with deep rooted gender and social norms that often undermine rights of women and girls. Various groups of girls and boys impacted by exclusion and inequality including those living in pastoralist communities, those associated with the streets and those living with disabilities. Conflict continues to be a barrier to children's enjoyment of most of their rights and has left many in need of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS). Climate change induced shocks of flooding and drought continue to affect survival, development and protection rights of children. Despite the country being dominated by children and youths, the majority of youths face challenges to broaden their economic wellbeing, and adolescents are at risk not transitioning safely into adulthood due to limited access to skills and services for Sexual Reproductive Health (SRH) and GBV services.

**Conclusion and recommendation(s):** It is clear that South Sudan's children are deprived of their fundamental rights to thrive and develop to their full potential. To change the situation, it is important that strategic choices are focused on the following broad recommendations.

- To advance child Survival rights, there is need to upscale community capacity building on prevention and treatment of acute malnutrition, promote good feeding practices, promote gender transformative measures on childbirth and care practices to address acute malnutrition and maternal and child health.
- Upscale measures to promote climate smart food production techniques that further focus on improving food diversity for families, advocate for increased investments in Maternal and Child Health as well as WASH.

- Others include, advocacy and service delivery to improve maternal and child health service providers, adequacy, skills and expenditure as critical to child health systems strengthening. There is further need to strengthen efforts to build capacities in adolescents on access to SRHR and GBV services.
- Children are facing multiple deprivations in their realization of development rights, especially that of education. There is need therefore, to promote civic space by promoting platforms for dialogue and negotiation on improving teacher retention, promote female teacher recruitment to reduce structural gender inequalities that often leads to affecting girls education.
- Promote alternative modes of education to ensure the huge number out of school children get the opportunity to learn. There is further need for advocacy to increase investment in education reduce the relevant identified gaps.
- To further reduce vulnerabilities, of families to provide for and care for children, non-state actors should focus on strengthening state led social protection programs, while improving on consistency and absorptive capacities.
- To address protection needs, there is need to strengthen MHPSS interventions to address long term stress of conflict, deprivation and other forms of violence and abuse.
- Advocate for and support strengthening of the social service workforce to ensure adequacy, skills and investment in the child welfare sector for MGSW to have improved capacity to deliver of protection, GBV and participation rights of children.
- Support development the Child participation framework to ensure clarity on meaningful participation of children, that provides them with space, having the voice and influence in the decision-making processes at all levels with a clear model for implementation. This should be built on relevant core principles of child participation. This should further provide guidance on the operational modalities for the Independent Children's Desk.
- Overall, to change the situation for South Sudan's children, there is need to foster triple nexus programming ( humanitarian, development and peace building), that mainstream and integrate climate change, peace building and reach to the most marginalized impacted by exclusion and inequality such as children living with disabilities across all the four pillars of rights through strategic partnerships for greater impact .

## 2.0 Introduction and background

This section provides the political economy of the context of South Sudan and its influence on the realization of children's rights. It further explains the overall and specific objectives of this child rights situation analysis.

### 2.1 Country context

South Sudan gained independence from Sudan on 9<sup>th</sup> July 2011, making it the newest sovereign state or country. The country's total population is estimated to be close to 12.4 million <sup>13</sup>, with approximately 53% of the population under 18 years old<sup>14</sup> with majority the population living in rural areas dependant on subsistence agriculture. The country is administratively divided into 10 States, which are further divided in Counties (78 in total), then in Payams, and finally in Bomas, the smallest administrative division. In addition to the 10 States, there is also one special

<sup>13</sup> OCHA South Sudan, updated population statistics published in June 2022: <https://data.humdata.org/dataset/5116cb9f-5db8-4f56-9766-735d88dcbffa>.

<sup>14</sup> Note the last population census was conducted in South Sudan in 2008-2009 with a count of 8,260,490 total population.



administrative area, Abyei (claimed both by Sudan and South Sudan) and two administrative areas, Greater Pibor and Ruweng with the capital city being Juba.

Its economy largely depends on oil revenues which account to nearly 98% of government's annual operating budget and 80% of its gross domestic product (GDP)<sup>15</sup>. It is generally rich in natural resources such as arable agriculture land, timber and livestock rearing despite its poor economic outlook. Inflation continues to spike the prices of food and non-food commodities and services impact on the population especially on the wellbeing of children. This situation continues to challenge on investment in public services for children and its general population.

Following its independence in 2011, internal conflict broke out in 2013 and 2016. The internal conflict was resolved with the signing of the 2018 Revitalized Agreement to Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS). Despite this agreement, conflict still exists. The Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan has been extended for two years, postponing elections until late 2024. The slow implementation of the plan remains a trigger for violence that may worsen the humanitarian situation in the country that is already volatile. There are recurring and widespread inter-communal violence as well as localized sub-national conflict reported by humanitarian agencies. In addition, the conflict that has broken out in Sudan since April, 2023 continues to further compound the humanitarian situation and exerting immense economic and social pressure on the country especially in border communities. Over 200,000 refugees and returnees have crossed into South Sudan from Sudan. More than 53% of new arrivals are below the age of eighteen, while 9% of new arrivals are older than sixty<sup>16</sup>.

South Sudan continues to face multiple challenges depriving its population adequate and descent standard of living especially for children. It remains vulnerable to climate change and natural disasters that exacerbates its humanitarian situation. Climate change continues to impact on multiple deprivations that its population faces mostly impacting on women and children jeopardizing recovery and undermines development efforts. These include its impact on their survival reflected in poor child health and education outcomes, vulnerability to protection risks and other inequalities.

Overall, the country is in desperate need of measures to strengthen government systems for effective service delivery and public investment in its citizens especially vulnerable groups such as women, girls and boys. Furthermore, there is need to uphold and fast track implementation of relevant peace agreements to guarantee human rights and foster sustainable development. This would further need to focus on strengthening relevant social and economic sectors to mitigate the effects faced by vulnerable populations especially children who make up most of its population.

## 2.2 Background to the Child Rights Situation Analysis

Since 1991, Save the Children International (SCI) has been operating in South Sudan delivering both humanitarian and development assistance n, with the aim of reaching every last child in the most remote and inaccessible villages. It collaborates strategically with children, local authorities, UN mission, thematic clusters, and local and international partners to increase its effectiveness and impact for children. To broaden the knowledge and evidence base and support appropriate programming, SCI undertook a Child Rights Situation Analysis (CRSA) to form a sound basis to inform program design, prioritize areas of focus for reaching girls and boys

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<sup>15</sup> Garcia, COL L. Bortoluzzi (2020-07-27). "[South Sudan Country Profile – Economy](#)

<sup>16</sup> OCHA, 2023.

impacted by inequality and exclusion in order support their realization of rights. This analysis seeks to facilitate for the identification of gaps, shortfalls as well as inequalities and deprivations affecting children and adolescents using a right based and equity focused approach. The CRSA further identifies opportunities for leveraging on to improve the situation of South Sudan's children. This analysis has been informed by a range of perspectives that include girls and boys, youths, implementing and collaborating partners as well as government duty bearers.

#### 2.2.1 Objective(s)

The primary goal of this CRSA was to undertake a human-rights-based and equity-focused situation analysis for children in relation to gaps, inequalities and challenges to fulfilment and realization of their rights as the basis to inform programming. **This analysis more specifically seeks,**

- To better identify and understand the obstacles and constraints to children enjoying their rights from the people's perspective: rights holders and duty bearers.
- To provide a macro-overview and analysis of the environment, current changes taking place in South Sudan and future trends that positively or negatively may affect children's enjoyment of their rights.
- To contribute to the co-recreation of critical national and state-level strategies to integrate priorities for the most vulnerable children into the socioeconomic development agenda.
- To inform strategic decision-making by influencing national and state policies, including the Save the Children Global Strategy, Country Strategy Plan (CSP), and Thematic Strategies.
- To generate evidence on the state of children and inform country strategy, program design, prioritize areas of focus for reaching girls and boys impacted by inequality and exclusion to support their realization of rights.
- Provide an overarching framework and recommendations(s) to guide Save the children South Sudan and its implementing partners on strategic areas of focus to improve the situation of children.

### 3.0 Methodology / Approach

This section provides information of the process undertaken, data sources and the analysis leading to the proposed recommendations for improving the wellbeing of South Sudan's children.

A thorough secondary desk review was undertaken using relevant available information from Save children's, relevant government documentation on relevant laws and policies, various studies and reports from CSO's and UN agencies among others. This review provided a better understanding of the existing situation as regards to gaps, constraints, inequalities as well as progress made supporting the fulfilment situation of children's rights. Based on this review, information gaps were identified for further information gathering through primary data collection. The primary data collection further focused on ensuring a better contextual understanding and analysis of issues as experienced by girls, boys, communities and other stakeholders.

As a starting point, secondary data gathering, and analysis was on the understanding of the Government of the Republic of South Sudan's ability and gaps in meeting the UNCRC state party obligations to fulfil rights of children. Critical to this was the review of the concluding observations of 2022 that provided a thorough assessment of child rights record and measures

for improving the situation. This information was further supported by the children's independent report and the shadow report by independent CSO's working as a coalition. This helped in identifying common gaps that government as a duty bearer as was not meeting from different perspectives. Furthermore, helped to gather information on gaps and challenges for caregivers, including non-state actors as duty bearers to supporting children to realize their rights. For children as rights, older, information on experiences of these gaps, challenges and inequalities were also gathered including challenges for them to claim their rights.

In undertaking this analysis, rights of children were clustered into form main broad pillars of **survival, development, protection and participation** in line with South Sudan's National Plan of Action for Children (2020 to 2024), the Transitional Constitution of South Sudan, as well as the UNCRC principles. Furthermore, Save the Children, South Sudan programming also aligns with these pillars. In addition to these key pillars, the analysis took into consideration other key cross cutting issues impacting on the ability of children to enjoy and benefit from these clustered rights. These include, (i) **Gender, inclusion, non-discrimination** ensures relevant focus on the UNCRC principles on non-discrimination and best interest of the child, (ii) **Climate change crisis & Child rights** (iii) **Conflict and child rights** (iv) **Adolescents and Youth Development**. Building on this conceptual framework, primary and secondary data explored the understanding of existing constraints, differentials, trends, progress and opportunities on the status South Sudan's children.

### 3.1 Data Collection

This situation analysis used a three (3) staged approach. Firstly, a thorough secondary desk review leading to identification of gaps, secondly primary data collection based on the gaps, then data incorporation based on the validation process leading to the consolidation of the final report. This analysis exclusively implored a qualitative approach. Primary data was collected through key informant interviews from relevant government stakeholders, CSO's, and SC direct implementing partners, while Focus Group Discussions (FDG's) targeted girls and boys and caregivers. Further selected case studies were reviewed to understand contextual deprivations and key measures transforming the situation to support the analysis of gaps and what needs to change going forward. Primary data was collected in Data was collected in Juba, Kapoeta, Akobo and Bor. The table below shows the data sources for the primary data collection.

Primary Data Source	Data Collection method		Number reached	Location(s)
	FDG	KII		
Government Actors		✓	7	5, National, 2 County level
Local CSO's actors/SCSS implementing partners.		✓	4	4 National level, County level
Child Focused INGO's		✓	1	National level

UN Agencies		✓	1	National level
Save the Children staff		✓	5	Thematic Advisors at National Level
Girls 10 to 14	✓		2	Tonj East, Bor (13 participants)
Girls 15 to 18	✓		5	Juba, Akobo, Bor (40 participants)
Boys 10 to 14			2	Bor (14 participants)
Boys 15 to 18	✓		5	Juba, Akobo, Bor (32 participants)
Male Caregivers	✓		1	Torit (7 Participants)
Female Caregivers	✓		1	Torit (7 Participants)
Male Youths 19 to 24	✓		1	Torit (6 Participants)
Female Youths 19 to 24	✓		1	Torit (6 Participants)

Before the primary data collection process, a risk assessment was conducted, and relevant mitigation measures put in place to reduce possible risks on the study participants as well as staff collecting the data.

### 3.2 Data Analysis

Bulky of the data from the primary data collection was organized and inputted into an excel template per each of the questions asked across subgroups of respondents such as children segregated by gender, state actors, CSO partners, caregivers/ parents. Analysis was done through content and thematic analysis by identifying emerging themes from both Key Informant Interviews (KII's) and Focus Group Discussions (FDG's). This helped to explain observed patterns from the responses from various sources that were used to analyse the situation and later own compared with the existing evidence where it was available.

### 3.3 Study limitation (s)

Limitations to the CRSA analysis included the following,

- Primary data collection was limited to locations that were convenient for the process time and resource availability, therefore most of the information provided is generalized in terms of general deprivations that children of South Sudan face as opposed to the very specifics by location.

## 4.0 Analysis of findings on the status of South Sudan's children.

This section presents findings from both the desk review and primary data collection processes from various data sources. It further analyses the relevant gaps, challenges, inequalities, potential and existing opportunities to change the situation of South Sudan's children.

### 4.1 Government of South Sudan's progress, challenges and gaps in meeting its obligation to fulfil children's rights.

#### 4.1.1 Gaps in the Legislative and Policy Environment to fulfil children's rights

The policy and legislative environment remain a critical factor and driver to progress or failure in the fulfilment and realization of children's rights and sets the building block for having a just society. This further promotes inclusiveness, non-discrimination.

**Children that are particularly more vulnerable:** In mapping which children are most impacted by inequality and exclusion several of them were identified who are faced with unique challenges and stressors. These categories include, victims of displacement and refugees; those living in conflict affected and remote areas; children associated with armed groups; children associated with the streets (Living on the streets, doing petty jobs, trading or found on the streets but return to their homes). Others include, children out of school, children with disabilities; girls at risk of child marriage; child labourers; girls targeted for abduction and those living in pastoralist communities. Child-headed households are also at great risk of food insecurity as well as protection, education and health issues.

The Government of the Republic of South Sudan has taken legislative, institutional and policy measures in the implementation provisions of the UNCRC. Among the critical legal frameworks include The Transitional Constitution of Republic of South Sudan (2011). In section 17 (1) of the bill of rights, guarantees children's rights to survival, development, protection including any form of discrimination or being subjected to harmful practices. It however, it does not expressly provide for their right to participation as children but rather classifies children as citizens having the right to participate and freedom of expression. This under values the need to ensure children's rights to participation being recognized and later on specific children such as those living with disabilities.

Government signed the 2018 Revitalized Agreement to end conflict which further re-enforces measures within the Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan, 2011 regarding a set of rights that include inherit life, equality before the law including special protection for children not to be involved in armed conflict. The Child Act further provides for measures to ensure children are not engaged in military related activities of any sort. Despite these commitments, intercommunal violence, armed militias continue to operate undermining these provisions and sharply threatening development gains. The government has ratified a few international instruments, such as UNCRC, CEDAW and other optional protocols, including the sale of children, child prostitution and pornography, and protocols on children and armed conflict. It has however, not ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and the Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons.

To advance the rights of children, the government enacted the Child Act of (2008). This provides for rights, duties and obligations on the government for children and covers its obligations to deliver on all relevant rights. There is however limited awareness on its provision including other substantive laws and policies to protect and promote children's rights. Both girls and boys

during the FDG's highlighted that most of the children nor parents are aware of available measures to protect and safeguard child wellbeing. On the other hand, materials to enhance knowledge and skills are not available and is not in a format that can easily be understood by children nor caregiver's, majority of whom are not literate. While the Act further provides for the establishment of the Independent Children's Commission to oversee children's issues at all levels, this Commission is non-existent. CSO's noted that there may be need to review the Child Act to ensure its contextualized going by the sovereign status and social cultural context of South Sudan. This would further be critical step to ensure its alignment with other amendments that may be done in the constitution amendment process following the signing of the amendment bill in 2022.

To operationalize provisions of the Child Act (2008) South Sudan has the National Action Plan for Children (NPAC, 2020-2024). It seeks to address gaps and challenges that affects the development, survival, protection and participation of children. It provides a holistic and comprehensive approach to coordination to address the diverse needs of children and guides how government will ensure child wellbeing. Despite these intentions the NPAC has not yet been operationalized and there is limited information on its objectives, targets, timelines nor resources allocated for its implementation<sup>17</sup>. It also lacks key measures for its operationalization such as the budget and costed activities. Child wellbeing related data is not systematically being collected and updated to ensure informed decision making as the survey on child focused indicators was last done in 2010<sup>18</sup>. The Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare (MGCSW) provides oversight policy direction and implementation of the child sector. It is however constrained by financial, human resource and technical challenges to meet its obligations. As a result, most of the measures related to the protection and wellbeing of children are driven by non-state humanitarian and development actors. These include, coordination, prevention of and response to violence against children as well as case management. Overall, the government led child protection system remains weak, fragmented and undermines sustainability in addressing VAC and child wellbeing.

Budget allocation and later spending on services is critical to translating policy into practice and improving the wellbeing of children. South Sudan's national budget (allocation and spending) in social sectors remain significantly low compared to Abuja and Dakar Declarations on spending in health and education. In 2020/2021 only 2% of the national budget was allocated to health against internationally agreed 15% while education got 11% against the 15 to 20%<sup>19</sup>. Resource allocation to the child welfare sector is low at less than 1% of the national budget. Overall, there are often gaps between what is budgeted for against disbursements for the actual delivery of services for citizens. For example, the Ministry of Health's, Drug and Food Control, had a budget of 15 million South Sudanese Pounds (SSP), but only 3 million (SSP)<sup>20</sup> was disbursed representing 25% of the actual amount budgeted for.

Asked about opportunities for citizens participation in governance issues, CSO's noted that gaps exist in planning process, monitoring to ensure accountability. While social accountability for public and child focussed service delivery is an important mechanism to ensure barriers to service access and quality, opportunities for citizens, pressure groups, CSO's including children themselves to engage and dialogue with government as a duty bearer to demand and monitor delivery of services remain limited. This affects opportunities to foster accountability on laws, policies and budgets to generate demand for improvements in access to and quality of services for children and the general citizenry. This undermines tenants of good governance, that requires citizens participation to strengthen transparency and accountability.

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<sup>17</sup> CRC , South Sudan Concluding Observations

<sup>18</sup> Ibid

<sup>19</sup> UNICEF, 2021 Public Finance Management in South Sudan Briefing Note.

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Finance and Planning National Budget Plan 2020/21

***“Civic space for engaging with government on critical issues affecting citizens remain a challenge especially on accountability for public finances”. CSO Key informant, Juba.***

Despite progress being made in ensuring a favourable policy and legislative environment, translating policy into practice remain a challenge owing to financial, human and technical challenges among most of the state actors, including Ministries of Education, Health and Gender, Child and Social Welfare. Government's ability to meet its obligations on the rights and wellbeing of children is largely being hindered by climate shocks, economic downturn, disrupted livelihoods and conflict/insecurity. Furthermore, challenges by the state to support families and communities to meet the needs of children, continues to compound the situation for children to have a caring, supportive and protective system to realize their rights.

#### 4.1.2 Opportunities for improving the legal and policy environment

Government has, not ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) which is critical to ensure strengthened accountability on the delivery of rights from the relevant charter body at African Union and greater contextualization of rights in an African context. CSO's should therefore advocate for the ratification in order to increase governments accountability on children's rights. There is also need to advocate for the ratification of the optional protocol on trafficking to ensure protection of children from human trafficking.

The President last year (2022) assented and signed into law the constitution-making process bill, 2022; the Transitional Constitution of the Republic of South Sudan (amendment) bill, 2022. This sets out a process for drafting and adopting South Sudan's first permanent constitution. This provides an opportunity broader public participation to ensure the new constitution's legitimacy. Broader CSO's including those that are child focused and alliances to provide relevant inputs into the process and ensure that any gaps related to advancing the wellbeing of children are proposed. The constitution amendment process further provides for the need to ensure provisions for promoting people's participation in governance<sup>21</sup> as one of the of the underlying principle in this process that would lead to greater accountability including for children's rights. SCSS, needs to therefore position itself to be part of the process.

Existing, identified gaps in government systems were consistently pointed out among respondents during interviews including from girls and boys. These include availability and retention of the workforce and low public investment for children's services. This is impacting on access and quality of services especially in health and education. These needs to be key advocacy issues to strengthen systems for child wellbeing.

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<sup>21</sup> The SUDD institute, 2023, Know Your Constitution, Weekly Review



***“ We need the government of South Sudan to protect children in conflict, provide education and bring long lasting peace and trust among communities”*** Child Participate, Children’s Independent report to the Committee on Children’s Rights, 2020.

***“ Government should improve by ensuring more schools for children available to learn, Good health facilities, and food to be available in homes”*** FGD, Girls, 15-18 years, Juba

## 4.2 Existing Gaps, inequalities and opportunities for the realization of child survival rights

According to the Child Act 2008, every child has an inherent right to life. It shall be the responsibility of the family and the Government to promote and care for the survival and development of the child. Child Survival Rights, focuses on the provision of health care for from conception and throughout childhood. It further requires, access to good nutrition, for children to be healthy and develop.

***“The full growth and strong development of a child comes as a result of good feeding and medication, therefore, government should support to vulnerable families in order for them to rise up their children in a better way for their children future and better lives”*** , Children Participants in the Independent Children’s Report to the Committee on Rights of a Child.

**Deprivations in infant and young child Nutrition:** The age 0 to 5 years is a crucial structural foundation for human and social development that is layered in the first 1,000 days of a child’s life. Children need the right foods to grow, maintain good health and develop to their full potential. However, South Sudan’s children in this category are at risk of not benefiting from this window of opportunity due to limited access to food of the right quality to maintain good nutrition. The current humanitarian crisis estimates that 7.8 million people may face food insecurity, with many facing catastrophic conditions, including more than 1.2 million children under age five facing acute malnutrition<sup>22</sup>. An estimated 15.6% suffer from chronic malnutrition with almost 1 in 3 children (31%) being stunted<sup>23</sup>. Dietary diversity refers to the variety or the number of different food groups people eat over the time given, is low. In Akobo West for example 89.4%<sup>24</sup> of households had low dietary diversity as of December 2022, a situation that is widespread within the country. Prevalence of wasting in South Sudan has been consistently high, in 2019 the prevalence of wasting among young children under five years was at 16.2 percent, being above the WHO emergency level (15 per cent). According to the 2022 projections, approximately 1.4 million children will need care and treatment for wasting in the country, with 303,000 children expected to be severely wasted and 1.1 million children moderately wasted. Jonglei has the highest prevalence of under five years children wasting (24.4 per cent), followed by Upper Nile (22.6 per cent), Unity (19.6 per cent), Western Bahr el Ghazal (15.5 percent), Warrap (15.1 percent) and Northern Bahr el Ghazal (14.8 per cent).

<sup>22</sup> UN OCHA, 2023

<sup>23</sup> UNICEF, 2021, Nutrition briefing for South Sudan

<sup>24</sup> Save the Children, South Sudan,(2022) Akobo West SMART survey report.



Infants in IDP's, those with disabilities, girls and boys, those in communities and households economically constrained, flood affected areas/ climate shock prone areas, and those in pastoralist areas are most at risk.

Barriers to access, quality and acceptability of nutrition services for the 0 to 5 include limited access to diverse foods, poor access to health services, morbidity often due to disease burden mostly malaria, diarrhoea and acute respiratory infection. Gender norms influence child upbringing especially for infants and children whose responsibility holly lies in women with little support from their male counterparts. This is despite the labour burden to fend for the family and other house chores limiting their ability to fully care for infants. Inappropriate feeding practices for infant and young children and poor health seeking behaviours further compound the situation. The fact that majority of women have low literacy impacts of health seeking behaviours and practices. On the other, hand hunger is widespread and affecting both women of childbearing age and those lactating. An estimated, 28.5 per cent of women of reproductive age are suffering from acute malnutrition and 40 per cent of reproductive-age women in the country are anaemic, jeopardising pregnancy outcomes, with significant negative impact on survival and nutrition status of the new-born<sup>25</sup>. Hunger further impacts on the nutrition needs of children across all age groups impacting on their learning, development and protection outcomes. Asked what the biggest fears were, both boys and girls highlighted that hunger is a common experience and is seen as one of the biggest which drivers other challenges being faced.

**" Hunger remains the biggest challenge driving other forms of challenges children are facing" ,**  
FG D, Boys, 15 to 18 years participant, Bor

**Maternal, infant mortality and child health**, remains a challenge owing to weak health systems, access to services, medical drug and kits stock outs and availability of qualified and competent health care providers. Despite Institutional delivery under the care of skilled attendants being a proven and effective intervention to avert some maternal and infant deaths, only 19.4% of births are attended to by skilled midwives<sup>26</sup>. This increases vulnerability to infant and maternal mortality. The maternal mortality rate is at 1,150 per 100,000 live births while infant mortality is at 1,150 per 100,000 live births<sup>27</sup>. Key barriers to reducing maternal and infant mortality include limitations in access to health services, limited skilled manpower and poor health seeking behaviors. Conflict and climate change induced such as flooding remain a threat for delivery of both preventive and curative maternal and new-born services limiting access and quality of services. One in ten children in South Sudan does not reach their fifth birthday, with rates higher among boys (63 per cent) than girls (37 per cent). Malaria is the leading cause of mortality, (33 per cent), followed by pneumonia and diarrhoea<sup>28</sup>. Pregnancy, childbirth and health is traditionally a gender related norm regarded as the primary responsibilities of women. Despite this fact, men remain key decision makers in patriarchal characterized communities of South Sudan, yet their role in pregnancy and childbirth is not clearly defined.

**Access to WASH services:** Poor sanitation and unsafe drinking water remains a challenge. Only 40%<sup>29</sup> of population have access to safe water a situation that increases vulnerability of the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid, UNICEF

<sup>26</sup> South Sudan National Plan of Action for Children ( 2020 to 2024)

<sup>27</sup> WHO ( 2022) Annual Report

<sup>28</sup> UNICEF(2022) Annual Country Report.

<sup>29</sup> UNICEF , 2021 WASH Briefing

population especially children to water borne diseases<sup>30</sup>. An estimated 63% practiced open defecation<sup>31</sup>. Access to safe and clean water is hampered by climate shocks, including floods and drought, poor supply chain systems for service parts, conflict and low investment. Cultural norms, myths and practices that impact on safe faecal disposal, climatic shocks such as floods remain a challenge for children's access to hygiene, access to clean water and living in clean environments less prone to water borne diseases. Poor sanitation further remains a challenge on the nutrition status of children.

**Child Poverty:** Poverty increases child morbidity and maternal mortality. Food poverty, that entails the lack of resources, the means to food or access to obtain food to maintain good health lifestyle is common often affecting the survival and development of children. Lack of food is compromised by several factors including conflict, climate change induced shocks such as drought and flooding, and support to communities skewed towards humanitarian than resilience building. Government structures within the relevant Ministries and directorates responsible (Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries, Livestock) remain lean, with challenges in extension services for enhanced production and long-term recovery efforts. The staff are often demotivated leading to high turnover coupled with limited financial resources to deliver on their mandate.

While social protection measures provide an opportunity to have access to food it is faced by several challenges. Firstly, the social protection is led and dominated by non-state actors a situation that compromises sustainability and ownership of government. Social protection assistance remains inconsistent and unpredictable for families to plan for their own priorities and needs yet there is persistent hunger and deprivations in basic needs to provide for children. The food insecurity situation is heightening vulnerability, as the most food insecure regions are also among the poorest in the country. Food insecurity is particularly severe in Jonglei, Upper Nile, Lakes, and Eastern Equatorial, which have some of the poorest counties, but also these locations are vulnerable to climatic shocks, yet most of the households have limited capacity to overcome this challenge.

#### 4.2.1 Opportunities for advancing survival rights

- South Sudan started the development process of the Health Sector Strategic Plan 2023-2027 which is to be launched this year (2023). This strategy unlike the previous one, seeks to provide more comprehensive measures that are targeted on improving among others key outcomes for maternal and child health, school and adolescent health service delivery.
- CSOs and SC will need to leverage on this integrated approach to support health systems to deliver age and gender responsive health services. There is increasing recognition and focus on the triple nexus approach (development, humanitarian and peace) as a durable solution to address the challenges faced by the country. Actors, therefore, need to put in place strategies that concurrently support the three nexus elements (humanitarian, development and peace building) to build resilience for sustainability.
- The recently established Parliamentary Alliance for Food Security and Nutrition, needs to be engaged to influence policies and frameworks in legislation for sufficient budgets and implementation measures that would improve nutrition outcomes for children.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Committee on the Rights of a Child (2022) Concluding observations on the initial report for South Sudan

#### 4.3 Existing Gaps, inequalities and opportunities for the realization of child development rights

Every child has the right to free education at primary level which shall be compulsory. (2) Every child has the right to education regardless of the type or severity of the disability he or she may have according to both the National Plan of Action for Children and the Child Act (2008). The Transitional Constitution of 2011 recognizes education, including the provision of compulsory, free primary education as a right. Child development rights pillar focuses on, early childhood care and nurturing, primary education, social economic development, community and family support systems for children's development.

**Deprivations in access and quality of education:** Children that are out of school, has increased from 2.2 million in 2016 to 2.8 million in 2020 representing almost 3 in 5 children, representing almost 3 (59 percent)<sup>32</sup>. Children most at risk of being excluded include girls often due to early and forced marriages, teen pregnancies, children with disabilities, girls and boys in IDP's, in pastoralist communities and those associated with the streets. While the Ministry of General Education and Instruction (MOGEI) prioritizes **(1) access (2) equity and (3) quality of education**, there are multiple barriers for children to enjoy these three priorities and is far from aspirations. From the supply side, access for both Early Childhood Education (ECE) and primary education is compromised by limited and poor infrastructure, with children often needing to walk long distances to access schools. For those living with disability this remain a nightmare, coupled with exclusion and discrimination while accessibility is a major challenge. For ECE, only 36.5 percent of learners attended pre-school before grade 1<sup>33</sup> yet this is an important milestone for laying a strong foundation for subsequent success in education. An ECE curriculum framework has already been developed but the implementation budget is inadequate and an actual curriculum (with a teacher guide, lesson plans and student workbooks) is still needed. The Ministry of General Education and Instruction has also developed the policy, however due to structural challenges it remains at risk of not being effectively implemented. On the other hand, gaps remain in this sub-sector that do not effectively link with other key elements such as nutrition, protection and other elements that promote optimum child development.

Asked the major external challenges were on accessing education, climate change induced shocks of flooding were cited as also a driver to children dropping out of school, due to temporal closures and hunger. About 191 schools were closed due to flooding in 2021, making some of the children dropping out. Economic challenges force caregivers to marry off children especially girls, forced labour and recruitment into armed forces for boys. Other bearers include schools being over overcrowded with an average qualified teacher pupil ratio at primary in states such as Jonglei, Unity and Upper Nile being 1 to 100<sup>34</sup>. This demotivates teachers, influences children to drop or abstain. Overcrowding is affecting effective teacher, learner engagement resulting in poor education outcomes.

There are structural gender disparities, with most of the learners being boys than girls while there are also more male teachers than female, 39,561 male teachers against 7,221 females<sup>35</sup> at primary level a situation that further re-enforces existing gender inequalities. Quality is further compromised by low retention of qualified teachers due to irregular and low wages, thus 51 %<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> UNICEF(2021) Education Briefing.

<sup>33</sup> Mott MacDonald, Assessment of Early Grade Learners in Literacy and Numeracy in South Sudan, Endline Report, August 2020

<sup>34</sup> Ministry of General Education and Instruction, National Education Census Report last done in 2021.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

of teachers are unqualified and work as volunteers. There is a high turnover of teachers, particularly of female teachers. In Equatorial State for example, female teachers comprise just 26 per cent of teaching staff, out of which 18 per cent are volunteers<sup>37</sup>. Girls and boys noted barriers to education because of hunger and attitudes within communities including by caregivers that undermine their right to education. Access to education for children with disabilities remains a challenge with 40.9% of the surveyed schools reporting that their classrooms were not accessible for children with disabilities<sup>38</sup> while as to sanitation also remains a challenge undermining, they dignity. Children with disabilities are further challenged by the limitations of fewer teachers with skills to meet their learning needs.

***"Teacher training and retention remains a critical aspect that would promote quality of education. Other constraints include funding, High teacher pupil ratio, text book / pupil ratio access well as learners not being able to either come to school or being in school hungry" MOGEI, KII***

***"We want our parents to let us go to school and respect our rights to Education", FGD, Boys 15 to 18 years.***

***"I prefer the schools' feeding programs and teachers' incentives as the best to keep children stay in school and continue studies and motivate the teachers in teaching children well."***  
Girls FGD 13- 17 years, Impact of Hunger through the eyes of children study.

A strong foundation for literacy and numeracy is critical for children's subsequent performance in school. The national education assessment focused on among others the literacy and numeracy of early grade learners found significant gender differences between boys and girls. Boys performed far better than girls. This could be attributed to the general South Sudanese patriarchal society and the imposition of gender norms that place less worthy of education for girls, and have more household chores to take care of, which means taking time away from school. Further Children in schools where learning materials were available performed significantly better, on average, than children in schools where books were not available (average scores of 40.9 percent and 35.6 percent, respectively) <sup>[38]</sup> a clear need for school materials to enhance learning outcomes, yet these remain a challenge.

Only 45 percent of South Sudan's 3,349 basic primary schools have access to safe water, and a mere 17 percent have adequate sanitary latrines for both girls and boys<sup>39</sup>. Limited access to Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) and washrooms remains a barrier for girls access to education, attendance and retention. Slightly over half (50.4%) of schools reported that their female learners have not received any dignity kits<sup>40</sup>. Hunger continues to affect learners as most arrive at school hungry while they must walk long distance to school, affecting their ability to learn. Only 1 in 4 children (24.7 per cent) report having eaten before school<sup>41</sup>.

**Support systems for children's development:** On the demand side of education, most families especially in rural areas are challenged by poverty, food insecurity, and displacement affecting their ability to care and protect for their families and children. Cultural and social norms, as well

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Education Cluster (2022) National Education Assessment

<sup>39</sup> [http://www.unwater.org/downloads/bgground\\_2.pdf](http://www.unwater.org/downloads/bgground_2.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> National Education Assessment.

<sup>41</sup> UNICEF South Sudan. The Situation of Children and Women in South Sudan 2018–2020. United Nations Children's Fund, Juba, July 2021.

as economic pressures, influences families to devalue education for children especially girls and engage in negative coping mechanisms such as child marriage, child labour and exploitation. Distressed families are likely to practice parenting practices that do not support the safety and wellbeing of children. Thus, children during focus group discussions consistently mentioned homes being a source of stress due to abuse that happens, notwithstanding limited access to food which also stresses them. Financial constraints further affect access as there are hidden costs in as much as primary education is free that put pressure on caregivers to meet. While social protection provides immediate and short-term mitigation measures on the impact of shocks, long term government led safety nets are rarely in place. Non state actors led social programs are impacted by low absorption capacity, inconsistency not being predictable and accessibility to needy communities due to conflict, poor infrastructure and climatic shocks such floods.

#### 4.3.1 Opportunities for advancing development rights

- There is need to leverage on existing platforms and role that SCI has as a co led within the education cluster to join forces with others to advocate for citizens voices including that of the trade unions to voice out on quality, equity and financing for education.
- It further needs to explore evidence generation on access, equity and quality to help evidence-based programming and advocacy among various actors in the education sector.
- As the country gets into the constitution making process, SCI working with other CSO's as allies should advocate for strengthening of measures for civic participation in the governance systems.
- The Ministry of Education and Instruction has recently developed the ECE policy that seeks to increase access to school readiness for children. Therefore, SC and its partners needs to leverage on this and ensure children are supported to have a good start to life by promoting integrated approaches that incorporate nutrition, protection / responsive caregiving that builds into the nurturing care framework.

#### 4.4 Existing Gaps, inequalities and opportunities for the realization of child protection rights

Children, especially girls face multiple protection violations including early and forced marriages estimated at 52% with 1 in 2 young women having been married in childhood<sup>42</sup>. This is despite the minimum legal age for marriage being 18 years. This is set out in both the transitional constitution and the Child Act of 2008. Child marriage is deeply rooted in gender inequality and harmful social norms, while poverty continues to be a major driver as a coping mechanism to lessen the burden of caring for girls in preference to dowry. Gender Based violence is pervasive often affecting women and girls. An estimated 65 per cent of women and girls have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime, among the highest rates in the world<sup>43</sup>. During focus group discussions, girls pointed out that their fear gender-based violence that happens within homes, communities and schools, but also how young girls are married off limiting their prospects to progress in life, but also other risks that comes with being married at a tender age.

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<sup>42</sup> South Sudan Statistical profile on Child marriage.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

*"Girls are being forced to marry early or sometimes sexually being abused when abducted by men and boys especially in communities where conflict is common." Girls, 15 to 18 FDG participant.*

*"Marrying Girls is common we have seen a number of friends stop coming to school only hear that they have been married off. Girls", FDG 15 to 18*

Other harmful cultural practices exist such as girls and boys are given marks on forehead, stomach, face and removing of lower teeth and all these are done to distinguish tribes, which later bring easy identification and target tribal killing within societies<sup>44</sup>. Violence in schools has also been reported despite schools socially perceived as being safe. This includes peer to peer violence, gender-based violence as well as schools being targeted by armed forces. Although South Sudan has prohibited corporal punishment the practice exists and is socially accepted. Girls and boys, particularly those without appropriate care, are vulnerable to being trafficked for the purposes of exploitation including sex work or labour, particularly by abduction. Cases of abduction have been reported that impact on children especially girls that have been sexually abused and struggle to shake off the memories of violence and abuse impacting on the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing. Other risks include child labour and experience of physical and humiliating punishment within homes. An estimated 66%<sup>45</sup> of girls and boys experienced punishment or aggression by a caregiver in the last one month.

Other risks include worst forms of child labour such as use in armed conflict and forced labour in cattle herding and abductions for labour and sexual exploitation especially for girls. Majority of children involved in child labour are in the agriculture sector, 62.2%<sup>46</sup> for girls and boys aged 10 to 14 years. Due to the increasing cases of inter-communal violence, cattle raiding, child trafficking, as well as climate induced shock of flooding and prolonged drought are contributing to a rise in Un accompanied And Separated Children caseloads. UASC cases documented in 2022 as compared to 2021. i.e. 1533 (728Girls :805 Boys and 882(347Girls :535Boys)<sup>47</sup> respective fully. Child abduction similarly remains one of the highest protection concerns among children and communities at 15%<sup>48</sup>. Access to and utilization of relevant support services remain low due to limited knowledge and skills on support services. Gender and social norms and practices that promote the culture of silence especially among girls, as well as masculinity for boys affect reporting and later own accessing support services.

Despite these various risks and violations, support systems for prevention of and response to violence against children remains weak. The MGCSW as the main actor is under funded and staffed coupled with limited technical capacity to protect children. Among the major gaps to poor formal protection systems is the limited social service workforce, with no clear institutional and regulatory framework for the social work profession nor the child welfare sector. Capacity building and training has been done notably by humanitarian and development actors, but gaps remain to ensure that there is adequate, competent and motivated workforce to drive the policy and legislative framework for protecting children. There are also no mechanisms in place to focus on monitoring the social workforce as a key driver to the protection of children.

Progress is being made to address child related GBV as Juvenile Court was inaugurated in 2020. This specialized court provides dedicated and expedited trials of gender-based violence and

<sup>44</sup> Concluding Observations, 2022

<sup>45</sup> SCI (2023) Draft, assessment report of Child Protection work of Save the Children on Mozambique and South Sudan.

<sup>46</sup> US Embassy (2021) South Sudan.

<sup>47</sup> Child Protection Information Management System (CPIS+) hosted by Save the Children, South Sudan.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

juvenile cases, including labour and commercial sexual exploitation. However, the existing five Justice for Children courts in South Sudan have not been staffed due to funding<sup>49</sup>. The inability to implement and enforce existing policies and laws remain a challenge and thus non-state actors run most of the measures on child protection, including the child protection information management system, being hosted by SCSS. Either state nor non-state actors do not have a toll-free child help line that needs to offer gender and child friendly support services including psychosocial support.

The current Sudan conflict continues to increase vulnerability of girls and boys to violence and abuse for both those on the move seeking asylum, refugees and those within the host communities especially in the border communities of South Sudan. As the situation worsens, both formal and informal protection systems for children is being overwhelmed and thus being weakened. Girls and boys impacted by this conflict are in acute and severe need of protection. Risks include , psychosocial distress, family separation, abuse, neglect, abduction, exploitation, sexual and physical abuse.

#### 4.4.1 Opportunities for advancing protection rights

- As the constitution amendment process gets underway, MGCSW intends to also review the Child Act and therefore SCSS, its implementing partners and wider CSO's focused on children need to identify and address the relevant gaps within the current Act.
- As the NPAC will be ending in 2024, and ideally a new one will be needed. The development process provides further opportunities for incorporation of key actions that will build into existing gaps.
- The recent assessment of the social welfare workforce (2022), provides an opportunity for strengthening the formal child protection system. Improving investment in this area remains a critical advocacy issue going forward.
- Considering that the country has put in place a number of policies and strategies to protect children, there is need to build into these to complement, reinforce and incorporate actions to implement relevant actions. These include, national plan of action to end child marriages, social protection policy, the Gender Policy among others.
- Similarly, humanitarian and development actors should use engagement with communities to incorporate and support wider awareness and understanding of the policy and legal provisions. This also need to ensure that messages are simplified for better understanding among communities including children themselves.
- Violence against children remain a complex phenomenon in South Sudan and therefore, for effective delivery of sound strategies, evidence building on research remain a critical aspect to enhance children's protection and wider GBV systems strengthening work.

***'Existing data on children protection, may be worse than what is known. The 52% prevalence of child marriage which most actors refer to may be an underestimate as this practice risk is very wide spread. The need for data is a critical need and would be a key recommendation to actors in this sector' INGO, KII respondent.***

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid



#### 4.5 Existing Gaps, inequalities and opportunities for the realization of participation rights

Children of South Sudan are deprived of their right to participation as outlined in articles 12 to 15 of the UNCRC, and articles 7 to 9 of the ACRWC. Article 12 of the UNCRC recognizes that children have a right to be heard, their views given due weight according to their age and maturity. Participation at individual level of the child promotes development of life skills, empowers, enhances self-esteem, confidence and helps prepare them for leadership.

Despite the Child Act 2008 providing for the establishment of Children's Desk established within the South Sudan Human Rights Commission, it is operational only in Juba. The Independent Children's Commission foreseen by Article 193 of the Child Act (2008) has not yet been established. Gaps remain in development of the policy and operational guidelines to deliver on its mandate as well as financial challenges faced by MGCSW and later own the Commission to be established for its operations.

***"In terms of participation we are not allowed in community talk show, government rallies, and in peace building table negotiations to present our opinions and discuss issues related to us due to our ages, in this matter we are disregarded and not represented and later become the victims of what adults discussed and decided for us which exposes us at risk some time e.g. forced marriage" (Children's voices in South Sudan Independent Children's Report, spearheaded by SC SS ).***

There are limited Platforms for children's participation to influence child responsive decision-making processes. Child participation is often event based with limited follow up on issues raised by children for implementation. The lack of platforms is more pronounced especially for marginalized children such as those living with disabilities, the out of school and those in the hard-to-reach areas. Schools were commonly mentioned as the major platforms where children's voices are heard through various clubs, although children bemoaned the lack of support through relevant trainings and materials to have better understanding on relevant issues that affect them.

Cultural barriers undermine children's participation especially negative gender discriminatory social norms that undermine views of children especially girls as being of no value. Girls are often at a greater loss to have opportunities to participate as they are often expected to be subservient as opposed to their boy counterparts. This is usually a result of deep-rooted gender inequalities within communities.

***"The major platform that allows children to participate at national level is the children's parliament. However, the children that usually participate at this level are those from the urban areas especially Juba itself, while children from rural areas have limited to no opportunities to participate especially those living with disabilities", KII Boys 15 to 18 years.***

The Ministry in charge of child affairs (MGCSW) remain constrained to foster the institutionalisation of child participation. On the other hand, the country does not have a framework to guide implementers of child participation in a way that would ensure standards which are safe, ethical and meaningful, considering the evolving capacity of children. Therefore, most of the actors spearheading child participation are not guided by a standard framework and guidelines that would ensure children are provided with the space, voice and audience and



ensure that their voices influence key decision making processes to their best interest by the relevant duty bearers being able to act on them.

Focus group discussions (FGDs) with children reviewed that most of the children are hindered to participating due to the lack of relevant skills on their rights, relevant platforms to air they views and later being able to voice out from an informed point of view. This problem affects children's ability to engage with key decision makers at all levels including their participation to demand and monitor fulfilment of the duty bearers' obligations. Fewer children that have had support through child focused agencies are the only few that are able to engage with decision makers to dialogue on issues affecting children with the majority hardly having such opportunities.

#### 4.4.1 Opportunities for advancing participation rights

- The policy framework as outlined in the NPAC (2020 to 2024) clearly provides for the setting up of the Children's desk including the Children's Commission. There is need to leverage on this and advocate for the speedy implementation of these aspects that would in turn promote and institutionalise child participation.
- The up-coming constitution review process that would include various stakeholders provides an opportunity for child focused CSO's to identify gaps within the existing child focused related provisions in the constitution to enhance key issues affecting children including the right to meaningful participation.
- The existing committee, within parliament on gender and children's matters provides a good entry point to enhance child participation. It can support efforts if well engaged to children's issues within various debates to ensure children's issues are taken into consideration in the policy planning, and budgeting processes including the need to amplify children's voices.
- Since the Child participation framework is not available, measures to have clear guidelines would add a lot of value to ensure children themselves have a better understanding on the importance of their participation, but to also guide actors working with and for children on how to meaningfully engage them to ensure child informed decision on issues that affect them.
- The education system provides good opportunities to children to participate. Partnering with schools would enable the enhancement of child participation at the school level, but also to ensure that children's issues are addressed through schools to various levels for consideration in key decision-making processes.

## 5.0 Cross cutting Issues

### 5.1 Gender equality and non-discrimination

South Sudan's has a Gender Development Index (GDI)<sup>50</sup> of 0.842, which entails it has low equality in human development achievements between female and males. It is ranked at number 185 out of 189 countries. Several gaps exist in the achievement of gender equity and equality in key outcomes on education, protection and health. Significant concerns remain on issues of maternal and sexual health that are impacting on women and girls. Extreme levels of gender-based violence and psychosocial distress are pervasive among women and girls. Poor enforcement and a lack of understanding of the law, and a weak judicial system means that perpetrators are rarely brought to justice. Even police and customary courts refer GBV

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<sup>50</sup> Gender Development Index(GDI), refers to the measure of gender equality based on human Development Index. The GDI calculates HDI separately for females and males using some factors of health, education and economic status.

survivors back home for resolution to be sought within the family<sup>51</sup> which undermines justice, but also other relevant support needed for survivors. Despite this fact, there is limited availability of and access to GBV prevention and response services, limited financial and technical capacity within MGCSW.

Multiple forms of exclusion exist among various groups of children, among them include girls and boys living with disabilities. Children with disabilities face multiple challenges in all spheres of life. In education, long distance to school, negative attitudes, including discrimination and lack of teacher capacity to teach these children. These children often face stigma and discrimination and are vulnerable to all forms of violence and abuse including sexual violence. Vulnerability to often increases with severity of the disability. Children with disabilities, have limited opportunities for participation, face environmental barriers in accessing education and WASH facilities and are at risk of being excluded. Children with disabilities, are further at a greater risk of poor health due to limited access and urgency for measures to ensure early identification and rehabilitation services.

## 5.2 Climate change and child rights

Children are among the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. As consistently highlighted across the various rights of children, climate change is a key factor to depriving the children to health, education and protection alike. Since 2011, the country has suffered a series of consecutive droughts (2011, 2015) and severe floods (2014, 2017, 2019-2022) resulting in loss of lives, livelihoods and continue to increase protection risks due to negative coping strategies.

Despite their vulnerability, children are excluded from decision-making processes on climate change and denied access to information and resources that would help them to engage effectively on the issue. Increasing the voice and agency of children in adaptation decision-making processes is critical to ensuring more sustained efforts. Consultations with children revealed multiple deprivation that girls and boys face because of climate change that is often seen from the perspective of hunger due to persistent droughts and floods.

***"Our neighbouring tribe is abducting the children and raiding cattle, and all these are happening because of this crisis of hunger"***

***"My uncle's children are in the streets because of hunger, they beg in the market but I don't know how to stop them since we have no food in the house"***

Girls participant , 9 to 12 years.

Climate change is making the humanitarian these crises worse and unleashing new challenges, such as conflict, and worsening the malnutrition situation children. It is compounding the threat of hunger, access to safe and clean water thereby increasing vulnerability to disease. The Ministry of Agriculture and food security, sets the urgency and act as a priority to avert the hunger situation and so are the children and other stakeholders. It is therefore critical that humanitarian actors prioritize climate adaptation and resilience building to overcome the persistent crisis in the short and long term.

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<sup>51</sup> AVSI, Gender-Based Violence in Rumbek and Gok State, April 2019

The oil industry has left a landscape pocked with hundreds of open waste pits, water and soil contaminated with toxic chemicals and heavy metals all affecting the environment. There are reports of birth defects, miscarriages and other health problems among residents. There are limited measures to respect and protect human rights and that of children in relation to the environment.

Despite these challenges, the Environmental Policy is not operationalized to ensure clear direction on strengthening resilience of communities and local government to effectively mitigate the effects of climate change. Unsustainable environmental practices are common including indiscriminate cutting of trees for charcoal production, pollution from oil production and other unsustainable agricultural practices. There is dire need to increase investment and diversify income sources and enhance sustainable agricultural productivity of households in the wake of changing climatic conditions as a long-term resilience building measure.

### 5.3 Conflict and child rights

Children in South Sudan are subject to high levels of conflict-related violence. Girls face higher vulnerability to sexual violence, abduction and boys are more at risk of recruitment and use by armed forces and armed groups. Over 419,000 children are reportedly associated with armed forces and groups according to the CAAFG sub working group of the protection cluster. From January to September 2022, the Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting verified 302 grave violations affecting 246 children (141 boys, 105 girls). A total of 66 children (64 boys and 2 girls) were verified as victims of recruitment. Some 65 children (55 boys, 10 girls) were killed/maimed, 45 children (22 boys, 20 girls) were abducted, and 73 girls were victims of rape/sexual violence<sup>52</sup>. Conflict is among the major fears that children are afraid of and do not like to see heavy presence of armed forces within their communities.

Cattle-related intercommunal violence and land disputes with ethnic undertones continued to undermine the peace process. In Jonglei State, cyclical cattle –related incidents in the Nuer, Dinka and Murle territories escalated, with large –scale mobilization extending into the Greater Pibor Administrative Area, resulting in violent clashes and the displacement of over 40,000 civilians<sup>53</sup>. Violence against children during the protracted conflict has left many with physical disabilities, psychological stress, and trauma, and without access to appropriate care and essential services. The current conflict in Sudan is putting many children fleeing into South Sudan to multiple risks. These include being trafficked, forced into exploitative work or being sexually abused especially if they are migrating alone or taking irregular routes with their families.

### 5.4 Adolescent and youth development

Adolescents and young people especially girls are faced with a number of challenges including access to SRHR and GBV services that continue to increase their vulnerability to multiple risks. South Sudan has a very high teenage pregnancy rate, 300/1,000 (30%) and an adolescent birth rate for (15 to years) of 158/1000<sup>54</sup>. Drivers include limited skills and knowledge on sexual reproductive health rights, and access to services. The poor implementation of and inadequacies in policies and widespread illiteracy among adolescent girls and poor access to SRHR services all drive the problem. Limited economic capacity to support children especially girls is resulting in negative coping mechanisms ( forced marriage). Inequalities are manifested in social norms

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<sup>52</sup> Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting.

<sup>53</sup> UN Security Council, February, 2023 Situation in Sudan.

<sup>54</sup> UNFPA (2021)

that put low value on girls restricting their participation , decision making , access to and progression in education , Sexual reproductive health rights information and services.

Adolescents and youths have limited opportunities to participate to influence actions and decisions on issues that affect them. Young people have limited economic opportunities owing to limited skills, are vulnerable to exploitation within the paid labour force including in armed forces.

## 6.0 Conclusion and Recommendation(s)

It is clear from the various deprivations, gaps and challenges highlighted throughout this situation analysis that South Sudan's children need integrated interventions to change their situation. The following recommendations need to take into account in order to support the improvement in key child wellbeing outcomes. These recommendations need to Incorporate key cross cutting issues of gender and disability.

Theme	Highlights of the situation	Recommendation(s)
<b>Policy &amp; Legislative environment for the realization of children's rights</b>	<p>Government signed the Revitalized Peace Agreement of 2018, yet intercommunal violence, armed groups still recruit children.</p> <p>Country signed the Constitutional amendment bill in 2022 and will be undertaking a constitutional review progress.</p> <p>Relevant laws and policies in place to promote protection and wellbeing of children (Child Act, NPAC, Education Act, National Gender Policy among others). However, operationalization/enforce remains a key challenge.</p> <p>Limited awareness on relevant provisions, Child Act, NPAC.</p> <p>Conflict between statutory and customary laws impacting on realization of protection rights.</p>	<p>While South Sudan has made progress related to strengthening the policy environment, several gaps exist in enforcement, citizens participation including children as a standard practice of good governance. <b>The following recommendation needs to be considered,</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate for the enforcement and implementation of relevant laws and policies to promote and fulfil children's rights such as provisions of the child Act 2008. Relevant policies further need to be costed and mechanisms for their implementation put in place to ensure operationalization.</li> <li>• CSO's need to take an active role and participate in the review and dissemination of the national constitution and the Child Act. There are changes that have happened including South Sudan's independence and other emerging issues for children and therefore it is important that it is reviewed, so that on the other hand it also aligns the new constitution yet to be amended.</li> <li>• Ensure relevant laws and policies are translated into local language's and disseminated in a manner that supports better understanding by children and communities.</li> <li>• Promote civic space: As the country gets into the constitution making process, SCl working with other CSO's as allies should advocate for strengthening of measures for civic participation in the governance systems. This will be critical to promoting state accountability on children's rights and that of the general citizenry.</li> </ul>

<b>Child Survival Rights</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 2020/2021 only 2% of the national budget was allocated to health against internationally agreed 15%.</li> <li>• South Sudan's infant and young children 0 to 5 years at risk of malnutrition due to limited access to food.</li> <li>• Maternal mortality rate is at 1,150 per 100,000 live births while infant mortality is at 1,150 per 100,000 live births</li> <li>• Malaria is the leading cause of mortality, (33 per cent), followed by pneumonia and diarrhoea.</li> <li>• Only 40% of population have access to safe water a situation that increases vulnerability of the population especially children to water borne diseases. 63% of the population practice open defecation.</li> </ul>	<p>Malnutrition in children especially those 0 to 5 years is a serious risk to child survival, the following needs to be prioritized,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is need for government and non-state humanitarian and development agencies to promote and upscale knowledge and skills among both female and male caregivers on good feeding practices (Including IYCF during emergencies, owing to South Sudan's volatile humanitarian situation). This should also focus on that promoting good health for infants such as exclusive breast feeding for the first six months, immunization and promotion of dietary diversity.</li> <li>• Hunger remains a major challenge for both mothers and infant, therefore there is need to upscale measures to promote climate smart food production techniques that further focus on improving food diversity for families.</li> <li>• Upscale community-based prevention and treatment of acute malnutrition. This should also ensure relevant community level capacity is built in early identification, referrals and relevant rehabilitation for disability and malnutrition.</li> <li>• Advocacy to government for increased investment in maternal and child health. This should focus on skills building, adequacy and retention of health care workforce. Further increasing access to health services to protect this critical group of children is critical within such initiatives to ensure a strengthened health system.</li> <li>• Advocate for government led social protection that is sensitive to children's nutrition, health and protection needs, and is predictable and consistent for families to have better capacity to care for children for sustainability.</li> <li>• Maternal and child health is being impacted by gender norms that undermine health outcomes for women and their babies. There for, Gender transformative approaches needs to be up scaled. Male partner involvement needs to be recognised and addressed in the health education initiatives as it has potential benefits for both maternal and child health outcomes.</li> </ul>
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased investment in supporting access to safe drinking water including community level capacity building in safe water for domestic use such as purification especially in the hard-to-reach areas. There is need to also address access to service parts for water points.</li> <li>Scale-up social behaviours change strategies on open defecation to reduce vulnerabilities of populations especially children to water borne diseases.</li> </ul>
Theme	Highlights of the situation	Recommendation(s)
Child Development Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Children have low access to education. Children that are out of school, has increased from 2.2 million in 2016 to 2.8 million in 2020 representing almost 3 in 5 children, representing almost 3 (59 per percent) Only 36.5 percent of learners attended pre-school before grade 1.</li> <li>Quality and equity to education is compromised by high teacher turnover owing to low motivation, thus 51 % of teachers are unqualified and work as volunteers. In Equatorial State for example, female teachers comprise just 26 per cent of teaching staff, out of which 18 per cent are volunteers.</li> </ul>	<p>Children are facing multiple deprivations in their realization of development rights. Gaps exists in access, quality and equity of education rights and within family and community support systems for their development. <b>Therefore, the following measures in needs to be prioritized,</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The value of education is not appreciated among most of the caregivers especially in rural areas. There is need therefore to strengthen community engagement and awareness on the importance of both ECE and education in general and implore gender transformative actions to promote girls and boys education.</li> <li>Leverage on the Ministry of Education and Instruction commitment such as the recently developed the ECE policy that seeks to increase access to school readiness for children. SCSS should promote integrated approaches that incorporate nutrition, protection / responsive caregiving in line with the nurturing care framework at community level to build a strong foundation to have a good start in life.</li> <li>There is need to strengthen civic engagement to dialogue with government on the major structural barriers for effective education delivery that includes, teacher training, retention and gender parity among teachers and learners.</li> <li>Poor investment in education is evidenced by poor teacher retention and other key elements such as poor teaching and learning materials. There is need to strengthen advocacy focused on ensuring increased investment in education by government and platforms for teachers to dialogue with government such as</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Only 45 percent of South Sudan's 3,349 basic primary schools have access to safe water, and a mere 17 percent have adequate sanitary latrines for both girls and boys.</li> <li>• Hunger continues to affect learners as most arrive at school hungry while they must walk long distance to school, affecting their ability to learn. Only 1 in 4 children (24.7 per cent) report having eaten before school.</li> <li>• Many of the children that are in school are not learning, as foundational literacy and numeracy skills remain poor.</li> <li>• Schools remain a source of violence for children.</li> </ul>	<p>teacher unions, to address this structural barrier related to teachers affecting access and quality of learning for children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is need for government, humanitarian and development actors to invest in sustainable school feeding programs, that empowers schools and communities to increase food production and marketing opportunities that would support school feeding programs. This would result into improvements in retention and attendance of learners.</li> <li>• Scale up school health initiatives, including menstrual hygiene promotion to ensure equitable access to education.</li> <li>• Prioritize teacher capacity building and access to teaching and learning material including relevant skills to ensure learner centred pedagogies to enhance children's abilities to have improved foundational literacy and numeracy skills as a means to improving prospects for their success in subsequent levels in school.</li> <li>• Considering the long-term humanitarian situation South Sudan finds itself in, that affects the education sector in terms of limited infrastructure, government and non- state humanitarian and development should invest in improving infrastructure to improve access and quality of education.</li> <li>• There is need for MOGEI to develop sector specific child safeguarding guidelines that would guide teachers and education officials on ethical behaviours and practices to learners, but also empower learners with relevant schools to protect themselves. This should be built into pre and in service teacher training programs as well as capacity building and training of children on child safeguarding.</li> <li>• Strengthen evidence generation to promote informed advocacy and programing.</li> </ul>
Theme	Summary of the Situation	Recommendation(s)



<p><b>Child Protection Rights</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early and forced marriages widespread and common at 52% with 1 in 2 young women having been married in childhood. Gender Based violence is pervasive often affecting women and girls. An estimated 65 per cent of women and girls have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime.</li> <li>• 62.2% aged 10 to 14 years children especially boys are involved in child labour mostly in the agriculture sector.</li> <li>• Girls and boys, particularly those without appropriate care, are vulnerable to being trafficked for the purposes of exploitation including sex work or labour, particularly using abduction.</li> <li>• There is an increase in cases of Unaccompanied and Separated Children. UASC cases documented in 2022, 1533(728Girls :805 Boys),</li> </ul>	<p>Children especially those vulnerable due to several reasons are experiencing multiple protection risks. These include, child marriages, child labour, sexual violence and exploitation, abductions, lack of parental care among others as situation threatening their wellbeing. Children's psychosocial wellbeing and mental health are severely affected. <b>It is therefore important that the following recommendations are taken into consideration.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen Social and behaviour change that is gender transformative and vulnerability focused to address social tolerance for violence against children and discriminatory practices that undermine children's protection rights.</li> <li>• To transform social norms, measures should be put in place to partner with those with influence and power such as traditional, religious leaders among others including men and boys to be allies of women and girls.</li> <li>• Strengthen child protection systems, there is need to improve, financial, technical and social service work for a stronger system to protect children by government as this remain a critical need. For SC this should be a key advocacy issues to ensure government led child protection is in place for long term sustainability.</li> <li>• Considering that there is low awareness on the relevant policy and legal frameworks including the Child Act 2008, there is need to upscale awareness. This should further ensure that these relevant laws are simplified and are user friendly to both children and caregivers.</li> <li>• There is need to support capacity building of girls and power on protection and GBV for them to have better capacities to identify and report cases of abuse. There is need to further strengthen their participation platforms so as to amplify their voices on the need to be protected.</li> <li>• The increase in cases of UASC is being driven by several factors including poverty, conflict and poor parental care. There is need to focus on family strengthening initiatives that incorporate positive parenting practices, economic empowerment, gender equality and relevant support services such as psychosocial support for families and children as a preventative measure.</li> </ul>
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	<p>while in 2021. 882(347Girls :535Boys).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children are experiencing violence in the homes. 66% of girls and boys have experienced punishment or aggression by a caregiver in the last one month.</li> <li>• Access to and utilization of support services for incidences on VAC remain low.</li> <li>• Government led child protection systems remain poor due to limited Social Welfare workforce, technical and financial challenges. Policy/ law enforcement remain poor.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data for evidence-based advocacy to effectively advance protection remain a challenge. There is need to strengthen evidence for use in advocacy and programming both in humanitarian and development context.</li> <li>• There is need for government and non- state actors to increase investment in preventative measures as well as comprehensive response services such as justice/ legal, medical care as while as MHPSS services.</li> </ul>
<b>Child Participation Rights</b>	<p>The country has no framework to guide the participation of children in key decision-making processes.</p> <p>National Constitution does not explicitly highlight participation rights for children.</p> <p>Limited Platforms for children to participate at national, state, county or community level.</p>	<p>Child participation platforms remain limited with the country not having a clear framework to guide meaningful child participation that promotes children's, space voices, and influence in decision making processes. <b>Therefore there is need to ensure;</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The policy framework as outlined in the NPAC (2020 to 2024) clearly provides for the setting up of the Children's desk including the Children's Commission. There is need to leverage on this and advocate for the speedy implementation of these aspects that would in turn promote and institutionalise child participation.</li> <li>• Government will need to be engaged to take leadership in spearheading functionality of any key platforms such as children's parliament at national level including the delivery of key actions to institutionalize child participation as envisioned in its key policy documents such the NPAC (2020 to 2024).</li> <li>• Children recommended the need to promote and support child related platforms in schools with relevant skills, materials and exposure. Measures</li> </ul>

	<p>Social norms and practices undermining participation rights for children.</p> <p>Child participation remain event based, with limited follow mechanisms on implementation of issues raised by children.</p>	<p>should further be taken to ensure disadvantaged children such as those not in school are targeted with interventions meant to promote child participation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is need to ensure that follow-ups mechanisms are in place for major engagements with key duty bearers by both the children and actors facilitating for such. Measures should further be put in place to ensure that support children to effectively engage is simplified for their easier understanding.</li> <li>• It is also important that SCSS and its partners support child-led issue identification, analysis and consolidation from grassroots (at community level). This would ensure such issues are escalated to higher levels with clear representation that should influence child-responsive development.</li> <li>• It would also be critical to closely work with key platforms that spearhead child participation for greater influence to ensure children's issues are addressed. These could include special parliamentary committees on gender and child affairs as well as working closely with the child rights coalition.</li> <li>• Strengthen evidence generation to promote informed advocacy and programing.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Cross Cutting issues,</b></p> <p>Gender and non-Discrimination, conflict, Climate change, Youth and Adolescent development.</p>	<p>South Sudan's has a Gender Development Index (GDI) of 0.842, which entails it has low equality in human development achievements between female and males. It is ranked at number 185 out of 189 countries.</p> <p>Various groups of children are at a greater risk of not benefiting from their rights, e.g., associated with the streets, displaced, living with disabilities, Children heading homes, the out of</p>	<p>Several gaps and inequalities exist for children in relation to equality, non – discrimination and growing in conflict environments. Opportunities for them to transition safely with better into adulthood are limited while climate change continue to impact negatively on all aspects of their lives. <b>The following recommendations need to be considered to address the identified issues.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Gender Equality:</b> In promoting gender equity and equality, it would be important that measures being implored are contextual to the needs, values of communities. It is important relevant intervention are informed by evidence. Therefore relevant gender assessments would be important to undertake in both humanitarian and development situations to promote gender transformative actions that are well informed.</li> <li>• <b>Inclusion and non-discrimination:</b> To address inclusion of children with disabilities, it is important for Save the children and its partners focus on advocacy and systems strengthening for such children. This would need to</li> </ul>

	<p>school e.t.c as detailed in the Policy and legislative environment section.</p> <p>Since 2011, the country has suffered a series of consecutive droughts (2011, 2015) and severe floods (2014, 2017, 2019-2022) resulting in loss of lives, livelihoods and continue to increase protection risks due to negative coping strategies impacting on girls and boys.</p> <p>Over 419,000 children are reportedly associated with armed forces and groups.</p> <p>A total of 66 children (64 boys and 2 girls) were verified as victims of recruitment. Some 65 children (55 boys, 10 girls) were killed/maimed, 45 children (22 boys, 20 girls) were abducted, and 73 girls were victims of rape/sexual violence in 2022. These figures may be higher than these considering challenges the country experience related to accessibility and data management in general.</p> <p>Protracted conflict and multiple deprivations (hunger, violence, limited access to family care) has left many</p>	<p>address multiple barriers to accessing assistive devices and technology, educational services, transforming social and discriminatory norms undermining rights of children with disabilities and community based early identification and rehabilitation services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Education programmes and schools should be utilised as key in preventing negative attitudes towards children with disabilities.</li> <li>• To ensure inclusion for children with disabilities, it is critical for Save the Children to foster formal and informal Organizations for Persons with Disabilities (OPD's) for technical support and to increase the level of influence.</li> </ul> <p><b>Conflict and Child rights:</b> Violence against children during the protracted conflict has left many with physical disabilities, psychological stress, and trauma, and without access to appropriate care and essential services. It is therefore important that MHPSS interventions are strengthened across broader programming to address long term impact of conflict on children.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict consistently was being mentioned among all categories of people consulted as a key deterrent to long term recovery and development across all the relevant rights for children and community wellbeing. Therefore, it is important that peace building interventions are mainstreamed across of the thematic program areas.</li> </ul> <p><b>Climate Change:</b> There is dire need to increase investment and diversification on income sources and enhance sustainable livelihoods for households in the wake of changing climatic conditions as a long-term resilience building measure.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In addressing climate change, child-centred approaches to adaptation and mitigation should be included prominently in local and national climate change and development planning processes. This should focus on highlighting is multiple impacts on realization of children's rights.</li> <li>• It is therefore critical that humanitarian actors prioritize climate adaptation and resilience building to overcome the persistent crisis in the short and long term.</li> <li>• Oil production, mining activities are a source of environmental degradation. There is need to engage with the business sector in this area, to ensure rights of children in relation to the environment as provided for under general comment 26 on children's rights in relation to climate change are abided by. SCSS and its</li> </ul>
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	children in need of Psychosocial support.	<p>partners would need to explore the use of the Child Rights and Business Principles (CRBP) approach to promote the business sector in supporting children's rights.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Youth and Adolescent Development:</b> To change the situation for adolescents and youths especially on poor access to SRHR and GBV services, there is need to expand teenage-friendly dedicated services in health service centres alongside promotion of a continuum of care, from pre-pregnancy to antenatal visits, to birth and post-natal visits.</li> </ul>
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