

## SOUTH SUDAN PROTECTION CLUSTER STRATEGY 2017-18

### **Context**

Since July 2016, the conflict in South Sudan has spread and evolved – deepening ethnic tensions, bringing conflict to new areas and causing widespread displacement. Recent months have also seen the emergence of a number of new armed groups in opposition to the government, and with them the multi-layered conflict drivers in the country have multiplied and become more entrenched. With the peace process critically undermined, the political and conflict dynamics in the country are evolving towards a lower intensity conflict that is more fragmented and spread out as it increasingly reflects a series of communal conflicts fought along ethnic faultlines. These more localised conflict dynamics are being reinforced by a process of decentralisation, exclusionary politics and a brutal counter-insurgency campaign that often targets civilians.

The conflict is destroying particularly the greater Equatoria and Upper Nile regions as well as western Bahr el-Ghazal and has resulted in a dire crisis, with significant displacement, serious and systematic reported human rights violations and abuses against children as well as adults, including the killing of civilians, arbitrary arrest, detention, torture and other inhumane and degrading treatment, conflict-related sexual violence including rape, and looting and destruction of civilian property. The parties to the conflict are not meeting their obligation to prevent these horrendous crimes and hold perpetrators accountable. It has been reported to the UN Security Council that attacks on civilians are deliberate, not collateral to the conduct of hostilities.

Continued insecurity has led to a further deterioration of the humanitarian situation, with famine declared in parts of Unity, where just over 100,000 people are facing starvation. A further one million people elsewhere in the country are on the brink of famine. The number of people displaced internally has reached 1.9m and the number displaced as refugees in neighbouring countries is now 1.6m, meaning that over a quarter of the population of South Sudan is now displaced. With the government on the offensive and all civilians at risk of being associated with rebel groups, an increasing number of people are being forced to leave the country.

The situation in South Sudan tells a story of dislocation of people from their homes and separation of children from their family but also disruption of social norms, protective community structures and livelihoods. Rather, harmful cultural practices and negative coping mechanisms are exacerbated. The brunt of the conflict weighs heavily on women, girls, boys and men with forced recruitment by armed forces of boys and men coupled with abduction of women and girls to serve as wives and cooks. Gender roles have changed as women take up the role of bread winner in the family by moving in search of food, firewood and petty jobs which exposes them to sexual violence especially rape and explosive hazards. Although gender inequality is deeply rooted into the culture of South Sudan and early marriage has been widely practiced, the economic burden of conflict has forced parents to marry off their child daughters and in the few schools that have remained opened, children do not attend in order to support their parents; including girls engaging in transactional sex that exposes them to negative reproductive health consequences.

Against the backdrop of a humanitarian emergency, access to vulnerable groups remains a critical challenge for aid organisations. The violence has involved hundreds of attacks on aid facilities and workers, including killings and rape. In 2016 alone 908 humanitarian access incidents were reported and 24 aid workers were killed. Explosive hazards inhibit freedom of movement and preclude the

delivery of (and access to) humanitarian aid and protection services. All parties to the conflict deploy various tactics to deliberately obstruct humanitarian access or redirect aid towards themselves or their favoured communities. These tactics include deliberately creating an environment of restricted physical access, looting humanitarian supplies and restricting movement by denying access to areas with populations suspected of supporting other groups – or of different ethnicities. In addition to this, South Sudan’s complex legal and regulatory landscape presents further obstacles to an effective humanitarian response. Laws are routinely misinterpreted, unevenly applied and arbitrarily enforced. Added to this, the space for civil society action is increasingly being squeezed with organisations closed and employees jailed for actions deemed critical of the government.

The situation shows little sign of improvement, with minimal progress on the implementation of the Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan, the pursuit of a military solution to the crisis, economic crisis and an increased level of intercommunal conflicts, including cattle-raiding. The underlying factors are present for the commission of mass atrocities.

This strategy forms the basis of the cluster’s coordinated response to the protection crisis in South Sudan. It is intended to provide direction to participants in the protection cluster and the wider humanitarian community about the intended outcomes of response. It is also intended as a guide to the implementation of the [2017 humanitarian response plan](#)<sup>1</sup> and development of the 2018 humanitarian response plan. The strategy will be reviewed annually.

## **Vision**

All people affected or threatened by the protection crisis in South Sudan have their rights fully respected in accordance with international and national law and their protection assured by relevant and timely actions through all phases of the crisis and beyond.

## **Mission**

Within the overall humanitarian response, the South Sudan Protection Cluster works to ensure that protection is central to humanitarian action through protection programming and mainstreaming, including monitoring and assessment, analysis and advocacy. The protection of the rights of people in South Sudan requires a broad range of action by a wide variety of actors, so the Cluster will engage with humanitarian, development, political, peace-keeping and other relevant actors.

## **Strategic Objectives**

A response or activity is considered to have a protection outcome when the risk to affected persons is reduced. The reduction of risks, meanwhile, occurs when threats and vulnerability are minimized and, at the same time, the capacity of affected persons is enhanced. Protection outcomes are the result of changes in behaviour, attitudes, policies, knowledge and practices on the part of relevant stakeholders and affected people. A “protection outcome” is defined in the [2016 IASC Protection Policy](#)<sup>2</sup>

**The cluster therefore adopts the following objectives:**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/south-sudan/document/south-sudan-humanitarian-response-plan-2017>

<sup>2</sup> [https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/iasc\\_policy\\_on\\_protection\\_in\\_humanitarian\\_action\\_0.pdf](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/system/files/iasc_policy_on_protection_in_humanitarian_action_0.pdf)

## **1. To prevent, mitigate or end actual and potential protection risks and violations of applicable law**

- The cluster will regularly update its Age, Gender, Diversity (“AGD”) protection risk analysis of affected persons in South Sudan, and of the commitment and capacities of duty bearers to address risk factors;
- To this end the cluster will focus the number of protection assessments and improve the quality of assessments, including multi-sector assessments; the cluster will integrate protection risks self-identified by people and their communities in order to improve its analysis;
- The cluster will continue to provide analysis of the patterns and causes of displacement and obstacles to solutions, including risks from explosive hazards;
- The cluster will continue to support reporting on behalf of or by partners on grave human rights violations against women and children in particular;
- The cluster will work and advocate with humanitarian, development, political and peace-keeping actors to help identify issues for action and areas for response.
- Cluster partners’ humanitarian protection interventions will strive to complement recovery, resilience and service delivery activities, such as those outlined in the United Nations Country Team’s [Interim Cooperation Framework \(ICF\)](#).<sup>3</sup>

## **2. To identify measures to reduce risks, avoid exacerbating risk, stop and prevent violations, avoid the reinforcement of existing patterns of violence, abuse, coercion or deprivation and restore safety and dignity to people’s lives**

- The cluster will pursue protection by presence and the strengthening of peace-makers; it will provide support to training on conflict resolution;
- The cluster will support initiatives to combat hate speech and provide objective and independent information to affected people;
- The cluster will advocate for freedom of movement and promote the freedom of expression, which includes the right to receive information, in order to make informed choices;
- The cluster will pursue the maintenance and strengthening of community structures, including during displacement, with the perspective of solutions to displacement; it will support the work of community protection mechanisms;
- The cluster will reinforce and expand efforts to raise awareness of responsibilities of parties to conflict under applicable international law;
- The cluster will implement a [GBV strategy](#)<sup>4</sup> to prevent and respond to rape and other forms of gender-based violence;
- The cluster will implement a [Child Protection strategy](#)<sup>5</sup> to prevent and respond to protection concerns that include but not limited to family separation, children associated with armed forces and armed groups, psychosocial distress, through strengthening of community-based

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<sup>3</sup> <http://ss.one.un.org/interim-cooperation-framework-icf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/south-sudan/document/gender-based-violence-sub-cluster-strategy-south-sudan-2017>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/south-sudan/document/child-protection-sub-cluster-south-sudan-0>

child protection mechanisms and improve the accessibility to quality child protection services;

- The cluster will implement [mine action](#)<sup>6</sup> to assess and respond to risks arising from explosive hazards and to provide mine risk education;
- The cluster will implement a strategy to strengthen the capacity of local partners.

### **3. To promote the centrality of protection in humanitarian action**

- The cluster will work to ensure that all humanitarian actors, irrespective of their sector-specific expertise, contribute to the prevention of abuse and protection of affected persons by committing to:
  - Address protection issues that intersect with their formal mandates and sector-specific responsibilities;
  - Support the principle of safe access to assistance, and will work to inform analysis on how to improve the choices of affected populations;
  - Engage collectively to achieve meaningful protection outcomes that reduce overall risks to affected persons by decreasing threats, reducing vulnerability and enhancing capacities;
  - Mobilize other actors within and beyond the humanitarian system, as appropriate, to contribute to collective protection outcomes; and
  - Evaluate commitments and progress towards placing protection at the centre of the humanitarian response.
- To this end, the cluster will advocate for protection outcomes; mainstream protection into humanitarian response mechanisms; strengthen early warning mechanisms; undertake lessons learned exercises with other sectors; implement mine action to facilitate humanitarian response; conduct trainings for local organisations and international organisations; identify gaps during monitoring; encourage attention to provision of services to persons with specific needs and promote the inclusion of protection considerations in budgeting decisions.

### **Way of working**

- The cluster works in conformity with and promotes the observance of humanitarian principles;
- Participants in the cluster adhere to the Principles of Partnership [HYPERLINK](#);
- The cluster will share information and assessment data and manage it;
- The cluster is guided by the [IASC Transformative Agenda](#)<sup>7</sup> Reference Module;
- The cluster places affected people at the centre of its work and is accountable to them; the self-identified protection needs of the population and their coping mechanisms guide the work of the cluster;
- The cluster places great importance on the need to communicate with affected people and communities;
- The cluster adopts a solutions perspective in its work;

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.mineaction.org/programmes/southsudan/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/iasc-transformative-agenda>

- The cluster is guided by international law, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, the [2013 IASC Statement on the Centrality of Protection in humanitarian action](https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/principals/content/centrality-protection-humanitarian-action)<sup>8</sup>, the 2015 IASC GBV Guidelines for Integrating GBV Interventions in Humanitarian Action and the 2016 [IASC Policy on Protection in humanitarian action](http://gbvguidelines.org/en/home/).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> <https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/principals/content/centrality-protection-humanitarian-action>

<sup>9</sup> <http://gbvguidelines.org/en/home/>