



Update to JRS South Sudan Partners/Donors – 17th April 2020

South Sudan Context Update:

- As of April 17th there have been 4 confirmed cases of COVID in South Sudan restricted to Juba and Torit and all of UN staff. This resulted in some rise in anti-UN, NGO and foreigner sentiment evident through social media and led to NGO cars being stopped/restricted in their movements in various locations including the JRS cars in Yambio. UN and NGO cars were restricted from accessing the Protection of Civilian sites (PoC) which prompted some panic within some of these sites that people were effectively being quarantined. The Government of South Sudan (GoSS) also announced the suspension of all passenger internal flights effective midnight on 15/4 until 29/4). By order of the GoSS all public institutions are now working on half day basis, including the banks. Public gatherings continue to be banned including Church services but enforcement is weak. The GoSS this week reiterated the decision made at the end of March to close all institutes of learning;-

The High-Level Taskforce re-iterates that the decision to close pre-schools, schools, universities, health science institutes and all other institutions of learning, was necessary as a precautionary measure, and to protect our children against the COVID-19 Disease.

- Despite the closure of non-essential businesses/shops, normal market activity continues in many places including Juba. The JRS team in Yambio reported reduced market activity this week with more active policing of the town and market place to ensure compliance with the order that non-essential services be halted. Increased pricing of core commodities is noted in Yambio and Juba but to a lesser extent in Maban. The reality in South Sudan as elsewhere in Africa is that by economic necessity people continue to move and trade with limited capacity to adhere to restrictions introduced by GoSS to respond to the COVID-19 threat. Depressed global oil prices will impact severely the capacity to withstand any serious COVID-19 outbreak.
- The return of approx. 3,000 South Sudan refugees to the country was reported, possibly linked to the COVID-19 lock down in Uganda making life even more difficult for South Sudanese refugees living in settlements in northern Uganda.
- The High Level Task force on COVID 19 continues to meet and issue regular updates through the Office of the President to update on measures being taken, and address issues arising.
- In addition to the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, the Chairman of the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission now has a seat on the High Level Task Force for the COVID-19 response. The RRC is the interface between the Government Ministries and the Humanitarian Community and their involvement in the High Level Task Force increases the GoSS understanding and sensitivity to the access and movement needs of the humanitarian community to be able to continue to respond to the wider on-going humanitarian need.

- As South Sudan has no established social welfare system, the GoSS through the Ministry of Labour is insisting on retention of staff on full salaries regardless of the status of programming, with a prohibition on terminating contract within this COVID-19 period.
- The banks have now reduced their across the counter cash withdrawal allowances to personal and private customers.

Measures taken by JRS South Sudan to safeguard staff and beneficiaries

JRS has actively engaged the NGO Forum with others on issues of the anti-foreigner sentiment, prevention of movement of NGO cars and the suspension of internal flights. All these issues have been addressed with some satisfaction by the GoSS. JRS continues to engage closely with the Director of the NGO Forum on rolling engagement with the Ministry of Labour and with the RRC to press for more nuanced expectations on staffing and related costs where non live saving programming has been suspended. In anticipation of reduced cash availability, necessary contingency planning is in place and continues to be reviewed to ensure sufficient support at project locations. Close on-going communication is maintained with our banks with on-going support on financial risk management provided by our JRS International Office.

All core JRS education initiatives remain suspended to protect beneficiaries with related staff on administrative leave. Entry/exit protocols to compounds including handwashing regime have been tightened. Purchasing of sanitizer and other protective items for field staff is on-going. Social distancing at JRS compounds is introduced and the staff essential to running core operations and adapted programming are collected and dropped by JRS cars to/from their places of residence to reduce the risk of their exposure through the public transport system. Basic food and fuel supply for 2 months is in place for the three JRS locations as well as a contingency cash supply. Local staff at each location have been gathered to assess what practical supports can help them adhere to the prevention of COVID-19 within their own environment and basic hygiene resources are being mobilized accordingly. Means of communication have been reviewed, including phone credit/IT support and a means of cascading core information to all staff have been reviewed and agreed to ensure all staff are reached out to, and all have access to the most important information in the coming weeks/months.

A JRS South Sudan COVID-19 Working Group consisting of the CD, PDs, Programmes Officer, Finance Manager and Human Resources Officer is established. This group is meeting by skype twice a week to update on context specific developments, staffing and wellbeing issues, effective contingency planning including for finance and logistics functions and in support of adapted programming.

Current situation in the project and impact COVID-19 is having

The restrictions imposed by the security forces on NGO movement in Yambio and Juba have not been experienced in Maban. The RRC issued an official letter which JRS carries in our cars now in case we are stopped. No further issue has been experienced, but an increased in police and military on the streets is noted in Juba and Yambio which makes movement in general more challenging. Government closure of all institutes of learning and prohibition on public gatherings has had a severe impact on normal JRS programming and forced the extension of administrative leave for many staff from end March 2020. This we continue to review and adapt in line with our evolving adapted programming.

JRS South Sudan is looking at our programming for the coming weeks/months in 3 respects;

- 1) **Suspended programme** – components of the work that we will not be able to deliver for the coming weeks/months until current restrictions by GoSS are lifted.

- 2) **Adapted programming** – components of the work that can be adapted/delivered in a different way
- 3) **New programming** – responding to new needs surfaced through the work of the PSS/Home Visitor teams to identify and address misinformation on COVID-19 and focus on practical supports needed by the most vulnerable within the communities in which we work.

JRS South Sudan is in the process of identifying how we need to proceed and plan if a return to normal programming is not possible for another 2-3 months. We continue to progress the work of engaging our respective partners/donors on adaptations being proposed, and on the evolution of new risk communication programming. Working in an effective and complimentary way with other actors is essential to achieving maximum impact. We have been engaging the inter-agency set up at each location, and we are working effectively with the lead health actors in Yambio and Maban on the evolution of the risk communication work to contribute to the interruption of human-to-human transmission and are beginning to consider what other contributions we can make to contribute to creative thinking that can minimize the social and economic impact.

COVID-19 specific activities being conducted by JRS South Sudan

Psychosocial Support

In Maban and Yambio partners remain operational with small core teams in place facilitating scaled-back operations. All have suspended non-essential operations and the focus is now on key health messages and preventative measures with the host and refugee communities. Health partners are leading efforts to prepare medical facilities and isolation units. JRS is ensuring community sensitization and prevention messages are coupled with Psychosocial best-practices, especially for the most vulnerable.

Whereas other key actors are focused on the wider dispersion prevention messages with mobile mega phone JRS' value-add is rooted in its accompaniment model – sharing key messages in a personal, face-to-face approach built on pre-existing relationships. As of Wednesday, April 15 in Maban 43 Home Visitors and JRS mobilizers have been trained on WHO

JRS' current contribution to the Covid-19 response in Maban is one of accompaniment – visitation and knowledge sharing with the most vulnerable beneficiaries in the host and refugee communities. Beneficiaries are grateful for one-on-one visits (keeping a social distance) to ask questions about Covid-19 and brainstorm coping mechanisms with JRS Home Visitors who they know and trust on a personal level. People have expressed gratitude at the personal approach JRS is taking to this risk communication work.

best-practices by local health officials, and equipped with basic protective gear, to share with individual beneficiaries in the host community and refugee camps. 140 host community beneficiary families have been visited so far, and over two hundred more will be visited in the coming week including in the outlying areas. Home visits to refugee families began on Friday, April 17 in all four camps. Hygiene support packages are being prepared for all full-time and incentive staff who remain in Maban and are contributing to the Covid-19 prevention campaign. In Yambio despite the planning being hampered by the prohibition on NGO vehicle movement by armed forces, 66 communities' focal persons, including community leaders and religious leaders have been engaged addressing misinformation and rumors around the Coronavirus disease. In collaboration with the South Sudan Red Cross home visitors and community outreach workers have also been trained on Covid 19. More community workers within the JRS Yambio Peace programme will be targeted in the coming period. Soap will shortly be distributed to facilitate adherence to hand washing to the 800 most vulnerable beneficiaries as part of the contingency plan to prevent the spread of COVID 19. Other materials such as hand sanitizers and face masks will be made available to the community outreach workers as may be appropriate once they are procured from Juba since they are unavailable in Yambio.



Photo: Home visitors undergoing a socially distanced training on COVID 19 conducted by Red Cross and JRS.

JRS South Sudan is also contributing to Risk Communication work carried out through local radio. A weekly radio talk show on a local radio station will be aired for the next 2 months.



JRS Peace building Coordinator, Benjamin Matondo (in white), during a radio talk on show on COVID 19 at Radio Anisa in Yambio

Education

In both Yambio and Maban the Education team is in conversations with Education partners to consider remote education practices and creative engagement with teacher trainees including radio lessons and remote skype-based learning from the JRS compound with teachers. All plans are in the early stages of development to safely and appropriately support learners in the most critical subject areas. A more comprehensive update on adaptations to this area of our programming will be communicated.

Other

Construction sites and materials have been secured until works can continue. In Maban repair work on the ALC classrooms, made from local materials, continues by a single specialist (with proper social distancing) to prepare the teaching spaces for the wet season in the latter half of 2020.

Message to Partners/Donors

JRS South Sudan deeply appreciates the understanding of partners and donors and the expressions of support and solidarity at this time. We ask for your continued support and collaboration as we continue to adapt to this new environment. Our focus will remain on carefully discerning where JRS can best add value in this context and within our current strategic areas of focus. A report issued by Africa Centre for Strategic Studies on 03 April “Mapping Risk Factors for the Spread of COVID-19 in Africa” places South Sudan at the top of the list of African countries most at risk of COVID-19 looking at a range of variables. We count on your continued support in our efforts to accompany and respond to the needs of those we serve amidst this new reality.



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