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# Ethiopia



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## “They are dying quietly”

As you enter Leitchuor, the newly established camp of over 46 000 refugees, your senses become overwhelmed. By the scorching hot sun, that sends people seeking refuge in the shades of the few trees around. By the millions of flies that flock on the waste and around the eyes of the children too weak to swat them away. The wind blows red earth in your face. Vultures circle the bushes filled with trash. The stench of human excreta, littering the grounds around tents and pathways. Breathe through your mouth, and you'll end up swallowing those millions of flies.

And the women. These tens of thousands of women wearing their torn and dusty night gowns, the only clothing they have with them, embodying the rushed escape from war. They have made their way to Ethiopia through ordeals unimaginable to us who have not been exposed to the brutal reality of an armed conflict. Or civil war, or ethnic clash –the label attached to the on-going violence in South Sudan to those who have lost their loved ones and homes must seem irrelevant. What matters most is survival.

What often seems forgotten within the humanitarian assistance narrative is the core idea of humanity, that there is an actual, flesh and blood person within every refugee. It is understandable that at the height of an emergency, the humanitarian community has to focus on efficiency and operations on a large scale. With the unending challenges and overwhelmed by the crisis, it is easier to talk about mortality rates than to ask who died. Individuality gets engulfed by the gravity of the emergency. We talk about case loads, influx and standards, and it becomes a discussion about a faceless mass in need of services and structures. But underneath that caseload you will find people, individuals, women and children with stories of their own. This is the story of 25-year old Nyagola Chuoli.

*“The fighting broke in the dark of the night in late January.*

*We had experienced war before, prior to the peace treaty with Sudan. So I knew to get my 5 children and run. There was no time to gather belongings, so my children and I ran half-naked to the bush. My night gown is the only thing I have with me. I was petrified, they were killing everybody, women, children and old people.”* The recent violence has



*Refugee women collect and sell firewood to the host community ©LWF/Heidi Lehto*

reduced Malakal, home town of Nyagola's family, to

charred ruins. United Nations Mission in South Sudan has reported that the markets, homes and work places have been looted and destroyed to rubbles. Apart from the horrors of the conflict, Nyagola's livelihoods have been shattered. *"At home we had a big garden for vegetables; tomato, okra and onion. I want to find a place to grow crop, to provide for my children. Now, the only means of getting money is to collect firewood in the bush. It takes 6 hours in a day, while the children wait idle at the camp. Now the host community tells us to not come on their land. And I am scared of the lions, leopards and baboons in the forest. If I get attacked, who will look after my children?"*, she asks. The refugee camp is in close proximity with the National Park of Gambella, a known hunting ground for wild animals like lions and wild dogs. What Nyagola does not mention is the risk of sexual assault. Other women tell me that they have started to collect grass instead, after witnessing a rape while collecting firewood. Grass can be found closer, with less risks.

When I ask Nyagola, when she thinks it might be safe to return home, she shrugs her shoulders. *"The Dinkas and the Nuers are killing each other. My brothers, parents and my husband stayed behind, I do not know if they are alive. I am a Nuer, and if the government troops win this war, I have no home to go back to."* While she squats and cooks a green mush from wild leaves in a blackened pot, her children lay listless in the relentless heat of the plastic sheet make-shift shelter. The youngest ones especially are severely malnourished and weakened by diarrhoea. This is harsh environment, even for the strong ones. I fear next time I come to Nyagola's tent, there will be one less child to greet. Particularly the under 5-year olds are in grave danger. *"They are dying quietly"*, confirms the doctor in the MSF camp clinic. Every statistic represents a life, currently filled with loss and trauma. These women embody resilience. But then again, what choice do they have?

**Around 115 000 South Sudanese refugees have crossed into Ethiopia since the flare-up of the conflict in December 2013. The planning figure for the country has been revised to 350 000.**



*Refugee mothers participating in needs assessment interviews*  
©LWF/Heidi Lehto

### South Sudanese asylum seekers in Ethiopia

Ethiopia is seeing a sharp increase in refugees fleeing South Sudan's conflict, after the government forces recently captured the rebel stronghold of Nasir, some 30 km from the border. The escalating violence targeting civilians particularly in the strategic towns in South Sudan has increased the number of people fleeing the massacres and seeking refuge in Gambella region.

Over 11,000 people crossed into the small Ethiopian border town of Burbiey in just few days after the government forces pushed the opposition towards Ethiopia. UNHCR and ARRA are establishing a registration facility in Burbiey to assist the surge of asylum seekers – some of them critically injured – and to improve the crowded conditions.

The vast majority of the new arrivals (95%) remain women and children who report that males stay in South Sudan. There are also reports that armed groups are preventing young men from leaving and pressuring them to stay and fight. The arriving refugees, all ethnic Nuers, report that thousands more people are on their way, with many amassed on the border area waiting for a chance to cross over to Ethiopia.

## The Leitchuor refugee camp site extended

With well over 100 000 refugees in the region, the humanitarian community in Ethiopia is struggling to meet the basic demands in the refugee camps, entry points and transit centres. With over 46 000 refugees overstressing the capacity of Leitchuor, which was originally designed for 20 000, new extension site is under construction. However, with a capacity to cater for 25 000 and the old Leitchuor prone to flooding, the extension camp cannot solve the issues of overcrowding.

There are concerns about the alarmingly high level of malnutrition, indicative of the continuing poor nutrition status of the arriving refugees and the main reason of the deaths of children in the Leitchuor camp. The seeking of medical help has been too late, and especially under 5-year olds are in danger. As poor sanitary conditions, open defecation and malnutrition are factors contributing for the increment of mortality, an integrated approach to reach the community has been developed and implemented.

## LWF Ethiopia working in Leitchuor

LWF Ethiopia has undertaken community outreach work activities with several other partners, who have a harmonized implementation approach, delivering tent-to-tent messages about WASH, health and nutrition. In addition, the pool strategy of outreach workers includes mass sensitization, clean ups of environments and data gathering. With the waste pit excavations and distribution



*LWF Hygiene and sanitation promoters conducting a daily team briefing  
©LWF/Johanna Leppanen*

of half barrels at the camp, LWF field staff is responding to the need of waste management according to the waste disposal plan.

Being the lead agency in WASH, LWF Ethiopia has increased the staff at the camp level to speed up the development of the permanent water supply system, while emergency water is trucked from the boreholes that were constructed in March.

## ACT Appeal and Funding

Through the joint ACT Appeal that was launched in February, LWF has received a total of 375 000 USD, contributed by Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Church of Sweden and German National Committee.

With the 1,2 million USD allocated for WASH by UNHCR, LWF is currently funding the permanent water supply, hygiene & sanitation and waste management activities. UNHCR launched an interagency appeal for \$ 370 million, on behalf of 24 agencies including LWF. The funding so far covers only 20 % of the requirements.

There is a need for more funding to scale up the response in this rapidly escalating humanitarian crisis that has not received the attention and support it requires from the international community.

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