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Ethiopia



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South Sudan continues to face a humanitarian crisis of major proportions. The total number of refugees who have entered Ethiopia since the outbreak of the conflict in mid-December 2013 is now over 193,649 individuals. With the number continuing to increase daily, the arrivals in the Gambella Regional State cite fighting and food insecurity as the main reasons for their flight. Although the number of daily arrivals have dropped since the rainy season commenced, dramatic increase is anticipated as the passage ways to Ethiopia become yet again accessible. With the renewed fighting in South Sudan resulting in further displacement, atrocity crimes and famine, more people will be forced to seek asylum in western Ethiopia.

In August, heavy rains caused havoc by flooding Gambella, inundating Leitchuor camp and destroying the infrastructure. Further destruction followed a month later when the Baro river burst its banks. With roads engulfed by water, the essential delivery of life saving services has been severely affected. Since the camp became cut off from the rest of the region, the area has been accessible only by UN-run helicopter and cargo boats sailing –and occasionally sinking– on the Baro river.



An aerial view of the Leitchuor refugee camp, which at the height of the flooding resembles a lake dotted with islands. The refugees have self-evacuated to higher grounds, such as the roads. ©LWF/Heidi Lehto

Refugees have started salvaging materials from the collapsed tukuls, while they take shelter on the elevated roads and among host communities in nearby villages and churches.

Their resilience in the midst of flooding is being tested in terms of constant displacement, insecurities, deplorable living conditions and diseases. Due to recent incidents claiming several lives, the refugee mothers live in constant fear that their children will drown in the flood puddles.

While the end of the rainy season may relieve the situation in Leitchuor and NipNip camps, it might also lead to an increase in new arrivals as fighting reignites

across the border. The warring parties in South Sudan's civil war have used this time to organize their troops again and are preparing for major offensives as the heavy downpours ease.

The anticipated influx will further stretch the capacity of all agencies striving to provide basic services in this 'emergency within an emergency'. The new arrivals and those stranded in the flooded Leitchuor are facing an uncertain future, adding to the distress of the war survivors.



In the camp and surrounding areas, women wade through waist-high water carrying their few belongings while children splash around in the stagnant mud pools.

©LWF/Johanna Leppänen

While the authorities continue their search for additional land in view of the flooding and continued influx, LWF Ethiopia remains in Leitchuor to support the 48 000 refugees waiting for relocation. With nearly 83 000 asylum seekers sitting out the war at borders, transit sites and areas deemed unsuitable, the relocations will be an extremely long process. Thus LWF will be required to provide services to the refugees in Leitchuor, while simultaneously positioning itself to contribute to the establishment of a new camp.

Despite the numerous obstacles that have hampered the refugee operations in Leitchuor, LWF staff remain committed to improving the living conditions of the refugees with lifesaving activities such as sanitation and hygiene promotion, waste management and distribution of WASH items.

Hygience and sanitation promotion is a crucial part of LWF's current activities, designed to combat the recent outbreak of hepatitis E and the increasing number of malaria cases, which are the main cause of morbidity. Malaria prevention and control activities, including environmental management and community awareness raising, are mobilized through the Community Outreach Agents (COA).



78 pairs of shoes were also distributed in a school to unaccompanied and separated children ©LWF

The key achievements include the distribution of non-food items (NFIs) undertaken with the support from Christian Aid (CA) and DanChurchAid (DCA) and in collaboration with HelpAge, Save the Children and ARRA. In total, LWF is distributing 10 000 soaps, 8000 jerry cans (donated by DCA), 1300 wash basins and 7900 buckets (donated by CA) to vulnerable elderly, and unaccompanied and separated children to ease their burden of water collection and storage.

65 000 sachets of water purification chemicals, received from UNHCR, were also distributed with COAs providing information on water handling and purification to ensure safe utilization of the materials provided.



WASH NFI's were distributed to the most vulnerable children ©LWF

With the support from the Finnish Evangelical Lutheran Mission (FELM), LWF will distribute dignity kits to women at the Leitchuor camp in December. With the FELM funding, latrine attendants and solid waste collectors have also been recruited from the refugee community, and equipped with the necessary materials to ensure that the camp facilities and environment are maintained, thus contributing to improved sanitary conditions and hygiene and sanitation awareness of South Sudanese refugees and host communities in Leitchuor camp area.



LWF Ethiopia is determined to continue the efforts to provide emergency assistance and to stand by the South Sudanese refugees, where ever they take shelter. Despite the uncertainties of the humanitarian operations and locations, it is anticipated that refugees will remain in and near Leitchuor area for the foreseeable future.

Being required to shift from constructing permanent structures to providing immediate lifesaving services, LWF revised the joint ACT Appeal in October. With the ACT funding, LWF Ethiopia plans to provide water supply, hygiene and sanitation, livelihoods and psychosocial support for the South Sudanese refugees in the Gambella operation.

The Revised Appeal ETH 141 can be found on the ACT website:

http://www.actalliance.org/resources/appeals/ETH141_revision_1_Ethiopia_refugees_from_South_Sudan.pdf/view

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ACT Alliance members visiting LWF Ethiopia Gambella programme; Rev. Toll and ms Kalisky /Church of Sweden with LWF and DICAC staff and refugee assistants at Leitchuor camp office. ©LWF/Johanna Leppänen