



World Health
Organization
South Sudan

20 PRSEAH 24 Annual Report

Preventing Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

South Sudan became the world's newest country on 9 July 2011. Despite this milestone, the nation continues to grapple with substantial challenges. Over 80% of its population resides in rural areas with limited social and economic opportunities. Weak infrastructure, ongoing conflicts, and economic constraints hinder human development.

South Sudan faces serious humanitarian challenges, including multiple and protracted internal conflicts, food insecurity and seasonal floodings. All these have resulted to massive displacement in most parts of the country resulting in increasing cases of gender-based violence. The escalating crisis in neighboring Sudan has further strained the country's fragile humanitarian situation.

Gender-based violence remains a major concern globally and South Sudan has been ranked among the high-risk countries due to its humanitarian challenges, posing significant challenges in preventing sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH).

Considering that South Sudan is a high-risk country for SEAH, there is a full-time PRSEAH coordinator in place ensuring the establishment and oversight of the Prevention and Response to Sexual Exploitation, Abuse and Harassment (PRSEAH) actions in the WHO South Sudan programmes and operations, providing PRSEAH strategic support to WHO implementing partners and contributing to the strategic and operations work of the Country's PSEA taskforce.

In response to the high prevalence of gender-based violence, WHO has deployed a full-time PRSEAH coordinator in its country office, tasked with implementing effective strategies to combat sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment (SEAH). Key responsibilities include establishment and oversight on PRSEAH actions, integrating these efforts across all its programs and operations, as well as providing PRSEAH strategic and policy support to WHO implementing partners and contributing to the day to day strategic and operations work of the Country's PSEA taskforce.



The World Health Organization (WHO) country office in South Sudan is leading efforts to cultivate a culture of zero tolerance for SEAH. To achieve this goal, the office has developed robust mechanisms for preventing and responding to sexual misconduct, integrating these efforts across all its programs and operations throughout the country.

WHO office in South Sudan comprises a workforce of 500 personnel and operates ten field offices, each located in one of the country's ten states. Recently, WHO expanded its presence by opening an additional office in Renk, a move prompted by the ongoing crisis in Sudan.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

In a span of two years (2023-2024), WHO has undertaken several key initiatives to foster a culture of zero tolerance for SEAH in its offices and in the communities.

These efforts include creating policies and strategies to prevent and respond to sexual misconduct, training the workforce, and collaborating with a range of stakeholders, including UN agencies, international NGOs, and national NGOs.



Training of workforce

As part of the onboarding process, the country office ensures that all personnel and staff complete mandatory PRSEAH e-learning training. WHO further provides an in-person PRSEAH newcomer briefing during the induction process.

In addition, WHO personnel receive in-person training sessions and refresher courses on PRSEAH.

Personnel are reminded of the zero-tolerance policy, on the main principles of PRSEAH, their obligation to report any allegations of sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment misconduct, and are informed of the reporting channels.

The zero-tolerance policy on SEAH is also communicated to them. The sessions also provided clarity on appropriate behavior in the office environment. All these efforts have created a conducive working environment among the workforces.



*Truth is that tension was high in the office among both male and female colleagues, it was frustrating how we would cope with elements of the PRSEAH policies and what it meant for the workplace environment, but with the arrival of the WCO PRSEAH coordinator who implemented several awareness activities we have seen this myth demystified, a more improved working relations shaped by the culture of mutual respect for everybody. For me, PRSEAH means **demystifying the myth, making work fun and respectful at the same time, improving humanitarian operations, and protecting the vulnerable people.***

Benson Okabo, WCO South Sudan.



*I can say that PRSEAH has had a positive impact on staff relations. First, it was unclear and felt impossible to implement given the culture and the hardship environment we live in. Information was too much and too frequent with mandatory meetings and certifications. Over time, I can say that PRSEAH has been widely accepted in the office, not only as the organization's way forward, but as a way of life. **PRSEAH is now part of us, and a practice to be passed to generations.***

WCO South Sudan personnel.



Establishment of Focal Point Network

WHO South Sudan established a network of 27 trained and dedicated part-time focal points spread across our country and field offices and locations. The focal points are well trained on PRSEAH, undergone Training of the Trainers and refresher sessions held by the coordinator, and 5 of the focal points also participated in an Arabic Training of the Trainer (ToT) organized by the WHO Africa Regional Office. The focal points are actively engaging with the PRSEAH programming, ensuring that PRSEAH is embedded into the cluster and field activities.

Jok Mayom Jil, PRSEAH Focal Point and EPI Officer in Bor, Jonglei State, echoed these sentiments.



*PRSEAH not only shaped my understanding but also helped me to support the partners and colleagues whom we work with, so that they can better understand it and how to be a role player in every activity we do. **I am an advocate of PRSEAH, and I am committed sharing the knowledge with all.***



Sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment have been hidden because of ignorance, stigma, poverty, and cultural norms.** It led to serious consequences within the communities. Thanks to the PRSEAH Coordinator, and the WHO South Sudan Country Office for incorporating PRSEAH into our projects and for entrusting us, as PRSEAH Focal Points, to support this important agenda in the states. During the PRSEAH awareness raising sessions that I am conducting as Focal Point, I always receive appreciation by the partners. Some of them hear about PRSEAH for the first time, but they are **dedicated to join us in the fight against SEAH.



Dominic Franco Otilo Oye, PRSEAH Focal Point and Field Coordinator, Torit, EEQ state, South Sudan.



*Following the SEA scandal reported by Al-Jazeera in September 2022 in the UN Protection of Civilian Camp in Malakal, Upper Nile state, the location became a central focus of the international community and donors. (...) I was extremely sensitive to the matter, and last year was able to **champion mass awareness raising campaigns and led advocacy sessions that brought together stakeholders and authorities** to increase awareness on the matter. I have seen a **tangible change in communities' perspective and attitude towards open discussion on SEA related issues.** I remain extremely thoughtful during my communications with communities so that we can **better understand their point of view,** and my commitment to prevent and respond to SEA continues where I believe we can achieve only in a collaborative manner, willing to learn more innovative and **local context driven suggestions to mitigate sexual misconduct.***



Timothy Emmanuel Onak Thwol, PRSEAH Focal Point and Field Coordinator, Malakal, Upper Nile, South Sudan.

2023-2024: Trainings / Briefings / Capacity building / Training of the Trainers

// KEY FACTS

20

FIELD MISSIONS

were conducted to high-risk areas within the country by the PRSEAH Coordinator and the national PRSEAH EPR officer to address PRSEAH concerns in health emergency situations.

214

IN-PERSON PRSEAH ACTIVITIES

were implemented nationwide, comprising awareness-raising and training sessions.

7,195

GOVERNMENT PERSONNEL & HEALTH WORKERS

received awareness raising and / or training by WCO South Sudan.

2,864

COMMUNITY MEMBERS

were reached directly, through the ongoing community engagement and education sessions to enhance awareness and strengthen SEA reporting mechanisms within the communities.

12,469

STAKEHOLDERS REACHED

reached directly through the 214 in-person session, including personnel from WHO, the Ministry of Health, NGOs, and community members. Over half of these sessions were facilitated by part-time focal points based in the states.

1,183

PARTNER PERSONNEL

were reached by PRSEAH messages, and 6,000+ No Excuse cards were distributed to partner personnel in South Sudan.

TRAINING OF THE TRAINER (TOT)

sessions were conducted to WCO South Sudan 28 part-time Focal Points, and 1 ToT in Arabic to 5 focal points.

A 3-DAY CAPACITY BUILDING TRAINING

was conducted by WCO South Sudan to all the local NGOs under the Health Cluster in South Sudan.

Partnership with Ministry of Health

WHO has established a strong collaborative relationship with the Ministry of Health at both national and state levels. WHO actively engages with State Health Ministers and Director Generals to emphasize the importance and opportunities of cooperation on PRSEAH. In 2024, WHO successfully trained over 3,000 government personnel on PRSEAH, further solidifying its commitment to addressing these critical issues. By the end of 2024, the Ministry of Health formally nominated 28 focal points from the national Ministry and each of the 10 states and 3 administrative areas. This initiative marks the MoH's strong commitment and engages the state-level Ministries, which is an important step forward. In January 2025, a 3-days Orientation Workshop was convened by WHO in Juba together with the 27 WHO and 28 MoH Focal Points to facilitate their work and orient them on their roles and how to address the PSEA challenges in the states.



*I learnt so much during this training. I now understand the different types of sexual misconduct and their drivers. **This training changed the way I think about my interactions in my private life with women. I will start already today. I leave today from this training as a different man than I was yesterday.***

State Ministry of Health personnel, South Sudan



2.2 Community engagement and awareness raising on PRSEAH

Community engagement and educational sessions are regularly conducted across the country to enhance awareness and reinforce communities reporting mechanism. Thanks to the efforts, now community members and beneficiaries are better equipped to identify misbehavior, understand where and how to report incidents, and know how to access support services, including medical, psychosocial, and legal assistance provided at the One Stop Centers located in various locations in the states.



// TESTIMONIES FROM COMMUNITIES



*I am a South Sudanese woman, indigenously from this very county, a mother of one child. I have witnessed sexual exploitation in my life. The difficulty is that when you are young and vulnerable, in most cases, **even your own family would favor the perpetrator over their own daughter, if he is willing to provide financial support for the family.** In most cases, the girls are left alone unprotected, without the husband and with the stigma within the community. After attending a series of awareness raising sessions and focus group discussions last year, I now understand that these materials should be handled differently. I am now supporting and **educating the young girls so that they can protect themselves from any form of exploitation and abuse and by raising complaint through the available reporting channels.***

Member of community, 35 years of age, Protection of Civilians Camp, Malakal, Upper Nile, South Sudan



*A lot of girls are subject to sexual exploitation, abuse and harassment **due to our poor economic situation.** I am selling tea in the PoC but some people believe that we are also selling sex for them. I pray that girls do not have to undergo such terrible experiences due to their vulnerable situation. **We are someone's sister, daughter and relative; and we deserve to be treated with respect.** Through the mass advocacy programmes on sexual exploitation and abuse, I am **now able to understand the negative impacts, and most importantly my rights** and the different methods for reporting such matters. I feel that **we are now empowered with enough knowledge to prevent and report such misbehavior in our community.***

Member of community, 26 years of age, Protection of Civilians Camp, Malakal, Upper Nile state, South Sudan



2.3 Integration of PRSEAH into emergency response operations

The WHO Country Office has started incorporating PRSEAH into its activities and programmes, which includes fundraising and programme planning. PRSEAH is also embedded into the Emergency Preparedness and Response programme, ensuring that the PRSEAH commitments in the emergency framework are implemented.

In cooperation with the Health Cluster, WHO conducted a 3-day capacity-building training for all 40 national NGO partners under the Health Cluster in Juba. In addition, WHO distributed over 6,000 No Excuse cards to implementing partners personnel which informs about the main principles and the available reporting channels.

There is a full time PRSEAH national officer embedded in the Emergency Preparedness and Response Cluster.

All personnel deployed for a grade 2 or above emergency is vetted prior to deployment, briefed on PRSEAH and sign the code of conduct. Rapid risk assessments carried out for all emergencies and mitigation actions implemented.



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2.4 Interagency coordination and collaboration

Under the leadership of Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General/Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator (DSRSG/RC/HC), a UN task force on PSEA was established.

At the task force, a diverse range of actors and agencies are represented, including the UN, NGOs, humanitarian organizations, development agencies, and peacekeeping forces. WHO is co-chairing the national inter-agency PSEA task force for two years, starting from March 2023.

In addition to the national taskforce, there are 15 state-level taskforces across the country. One of the key priorities has been to enhance collaboration with these state-level taskforces by providing both technical and financial support. WHO has been offering financial and technical assistance to several of these field taskforces, including those in Wau, Bentiu, Rumbek, Renk, Aweil, and Malakal.

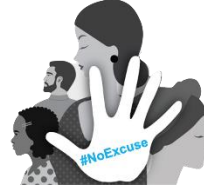
As part of inter-agency activities and in response to the Sudan crisis, a joint inter-agency mission was also conducted to Renk to establish a local PSEA taskforce and to train its members on PSEA and community-based complaint mechanisms (CBCM). Establishing CBCMs ensures that the beneficiaries have access to safe, confidential and accessible reporting channels.

WHO also met with Christian Saunders, the Under Secretary for PSEA during his visit to South Sudan in March 2023 and was part of Mr. Saunder's special delegation visiting Malakal as one of the high-risk locations for SEA.

During his visit to South Sudan in March 2023, WHO held discussion with Mr. Christian Saunders, the Under Secretary-General for Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA). WHO was part of Mr. Saunders' special delegation that visited Malakal, identified as a high-risk location for sexual exploitation and abuse.

2.5 Annual Country comprehensive risk assessment

A comprehensive PSEAH risk assessment is conducted annually at the Country Office, resulting in the development of an action plan to mitigate the risks.



2.6 No excuse cards, PRSEAH IEC and visibility materials produced and distributed.

PRSEAH communication materials (posters, educational leaflets, flyers, roll-up banners, T-shirts, bags, pens, wrist bands) have been produced and distributed in our efforts of delivering clear messages on PRSEAH, promoting awareness and reporting channels regarding SEA matters. Distribution has been done to is to personnel, partners and, communities. WHO distributed 2,868 T-shirts, 2,185 pens, 5,310 wrist bands, 6,000 No Excuse cards and in each states the WHO PRSEAH posters and leaflets are distributed and displayed.



3. SUCCESS STORIES

One of the key achievements in 2024 was the successful rollout of a series of PRSEAH training programs for all WHO South Sudan personnel, as well as implementing partner organizations. The training emphasized ethical behavior, definition of sexual misconduct through practical examples, and how to recognize and respond to incidents of sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment. Staff members reported a marked increase in their understanding of PRSEAH policies, and many expressed to feel more confident in knowing how to handle difficult situations which resulted in a healthier and happier work environment where everyone feels safe and respected.

WHO South Sudan built a strong network of 27 WHO Focal Points who are trained and actively implementing and integrating PRSEAH into all health-related activities within the states. The Ministry of Health also formally nominated 28 focal points from the national Ministry and each of the 10 states and 3 administrative areas. This initiative marks the MoH's strong commitment and engages the state-level Ministries, which is an important step forward. In total, there are now 55 focal Points from WHO and MoH who are actively engaged with the PRSEAH programme under the guidance of the WHO PRSEAH coordinator.

WHO South Sudan also conducted PRSEAH awareness outreach across all the 10 states, reaching directly over 12,000 community members, health workers, and humanitarian staff.



The outreach focused on educating individuals about their rights, the importance of reporting misconduct, and the available channels for report and victim support. This effort was particularly impactful in rural and conflict-affected areas where access to PRSEAH information was limited. As a result, community members gained greater confidence in the reporting systems, and individuals seeking support for cases of sexual exploitation and abuse. This initiative not only empowered local populations but also reinforced the commitment to safeguarding in South Sudan.

As part of the above effort, WHO South Sudan also engaged local leaders, including traditional elders, in community dialogues about PRSEAH. In 2023 and 2024, the country office organized a series of discussions with tribal chiefs and religious leaders, who play a significant role in shaping community norms and behaviors. These leaders were trained on PRSEAH principles and worked as key advocates for preventing sexual exploitation and abuse. Through their involvement, these leaders were able to influence social change, encouraging a shift in attitudes towards sexual exploitation and abuse in their communities.

4. CHALLENGES AND LESSONS LEARNED

- ✓ Presence of multiple health and humanitarian emergencies that require multiple actors to respond continue to pose challenges of SEAH,
- ✓ Engaging social and community leaders remains challenging due to cultural norms and traditions. There is also a reluctance of reporting due to cultural norms and fear of retaliation.
- ✓ Despite donor support in these areas, resources are limited based on the planned activities. WHO South Sudan has been working to integrate PRSEAH and be a core part of every programme planning.



5. PRIORITY AREAS FOR 2025

WHO South Sudan will:

- ✓ further strengthen collaboration with local, national, and international partners to ensure the broad and effective implementation of PSEAH initiatives. This includes enhancing PSEAH policies among implementing partners, building their capacity and sharing best practices. This will include strengthening the partnership with the MoH through the Focal Points at national and state level and conducting the capacity assessment of implementing partner NGOs.
- ✓ continue to integrate PSEAH principles into the design, implementation, and evaluation of all health programs and projects. This will include ensuring that PSEAH risk assessments are conducted for every new initiative, and that all activities are planned with safeguards in place to prevent exploitation and abuse.
- ✓ recognizing the unique challenges of South Sudan's conflict and humanitarian context, WHO South Sudan will adapt its PSEAH strategies to be contextually relevant. This includes engaging local communities, understanding cultural dynamics, and addressing the specific risks faced by vulnerable groups such as displaced populations, women, and children, while ensuring that solutions are grounded in the realities of the environment.
- ✓ broaden the focus beyond sexual misconduct to address other forms of abusive conduct in the workplace, given the progress made in addressing sexual misconduct.



6. Conclusion

The WHO South Sudan Country Office remains committed to upholding the highest standards of integrity and safeguarding within its office and operations. Over the past years, we have made significant strides in strengthening our PRSEAH framework, ensuring that all personnel and stakeholders adhere to the established protocols. Through comprehensive training programs, awareness campaigns, and proactive reporting mechanisms, we have fostered an environment of accountability and zero tolerance for misconduct.

While there have been notable improvements, we acknowledge that the complex and challenging environment in South Sudan requires continued vigilance and effort. Moving forward, we will prioritize the enhancement of our monitoring and reporting obligations, and deepen our collaboration with local communities, partners, and other humanitarian organizations to prevent and address any incidents of sexual misconduct.

The commitment to PRSEAH remains a central pillar of our work, and WHO South Sudan will continue to implement robust measures to protect the rights and dignity of all individuals we serve, particularly the most vulnerable populations. As we look ahead, we remain dedicated to fostering a culture of respect, safety, and inclusivity for all.





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