

UNICEF

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Livelihoods & Vulnerabilities Study

Gambella Region of Ethiopia

SECTION I: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

UNICEF operations in the Gambella People's National Regional State of Ethiopia (Gambella Region) have been impeded in the effective implementation of programs since the UNICEF base opened there in January of 2005. Repeated attempts to improve the lives of women and children in Gambella were failing, and strategies that worked elsewhere were not working in Gambella. This UNICEF document, *Livelihoods & Vulnerabilities Study: Gambella Region of Ethiopia*, follows from an innovative UNICEF initiative launched to comprehensively assess the immediate livelihoods and vulnerabilities issues, predominantly of women and children, in the diverse and unique Gambella region of southwest Ethiopia. This assessment is based on a sevenweek field study conducted at the close of the rainy season (October and November 2005) in five of Gambella's seven Woredas (administrative zones). Information on the recent and more historical background of the Gambella Region is given in Section II: *Historical Background and Context*.

1. Summary of Introduction and Methods

The Youth Sports Culture and Labour and Social Affairs Office of Gambella had requested that UNICEF support them in the piloting of an initial one-year program for "Addressing

Vulnerabilities in the Gambella Region.” As part of that aim, this study set out to: [1] investigate the most effective ways of planning, implementing and supporting sustainable interventions in the region; [2] identify the most vulnerable groups and areas of the region where the above should be targeted; [3] assess the impact of ongoing conflicts in Gambella on livelihoods and how assistance might be affected by these conflicts; [4] verify expressed concerns that above normal breaches of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) were occurring in Gambella, and that there were heightened levels of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). Pursuit of this livelihoods and vulnerabilities assessment revolved around the premise that protection issues are a core part of UNICEF’s mandate, and that they contribute to other basic vulnerabilities of women and children. In the initial phase of this project a survey questionnaire was developed that could be used as a basic tool for the collection of data regarding livelihoods and vulnerabilities of Gambella’s women and children. The rationale and methodology for this study are described in Section III: *Rationale and Methodology for this Study*.

Field research was completed in parts of the Gambella region’s Alwero-Peno, Gilo, and Dimma Woredas, and in Gambella Woreda; these woredas are all seeing major human catastrophes in the making. The livelihoods and vulnerabilities section of the questionnaire was complemented by a section dedicated to the collection of data and personal testimonies that would enable a solid what, where, when and how protection problems arose, and to record pieces of the personal stories of the people in need.

Section IV: *Unique Challenges of Conducting Research in the Gambella Region*—explores the dynamics involved in understanding and negotiating the many layers of complexity in logistics; communications; information collection, management and protection; security; personal health (physical and psychological); natural environment; and the many spaces of social, political,

cultural, and psychological uniqueness that differ between the UNICEF team and the populations UNICEF is serving. All these factors combine with insurgency and low-intensity conflict to make the Gambella zone a volatile and complex research context.

More than 120 interviews were conducted under the most difficult circumstances and in some of the most inaccessible territory in sub-Saharan Africa. Interviews involved interpreters (Nuer, Anuak, Highlander) and interpreter trainings, and they averaged from one to three hours each. Issues of security for staff and protection of the interviewee were constant concerns.

Interviews were completed with women and men of the Nuer, Anuak, Majenger and Highlander ethnic groups. These interviews included impoverished and vulnerable populations in remote villages, gold miners, police, local Kebele leaders, midwives, teachers, nurses, elders, regional Woreda officials, health experts, western NGO expatriates, Ethiopian security officials, Gambella Regional administrators, and members of rebel groups.

Section V: Raw demographic information, including vulnerabilities and protection data, was collected for this study; it is hoped that this data will in future be available for statistical analyses.

2. Summary of Findings

The women and children in Gambella Region are extremely vulnerable. With UNICEF asking questions about access to basic resources necessary for daily survival—potable water, sufficient firewood, movement to and from markets, sustainable incomes, access to education and medical care—the population uniformly responded that all aspects of their lives are directly and profoundly impacted by *problems of security and protection*.

Tangible assets (resources and stores) and intangible assets (claims and access) have been universally denied, repeatedly and devastatingly seized from women and children of all but one

region (Godere) assessed. Civilians of all ethnic groups surveyed are living in fear; their ability to withstand shocks has been taxed or completely compromised.

Section VI: *Livelihoods and Vulnerabilities of Gambella's Women and Children*—discusses key finding on vulnerabilities and livelihoods which demonstrates that the deteriorating vulnerability situation in Gambella in the last two years is primarily due to the protection problems. These protection problems have been caused by the heavy ENDF presence and their actions to target the civilian population often—but not always—in collaboration with Regional authorities, as well as the targeting of civilians by paramilitary rebel groups.

The organizations charged with responsibility for protecting, representing and improving the lives of their citizens are unfortunately doing just the opposite: their actions have devastated the population. The particular circumstances surrounding events and realities in the villages visited in this study are included in sections about the livelihoods and vulnerabilities of women and children in each village.

Section VII: *Overall Impact of the Security Situation on Vulnerability of the Population of Gambella Region*—offers a thorough analysis of findings revealing the nature and scale of protection and security issues in the areas visited. Interviews and testimonies by eyewitnesses, survivors and officials documented incontrovertible evidence that innocent women, children and men have been the victims of attacks by military forces and rebel forces. People have been targeted for extra-judicial killings, beatings and torture, sexual and gender-based violence, looting and burning of civilian property, and threats to commit any of these. The region is plagued by a comprehensive atmosphere of terror; civilians remain either because they have no choice or because the alternative is a life in exile and displacement, separated from their family and their community—reportedly no better in any case.

There are two detailed case studies in the latter part of the report focusing on particular areas of Gambella. They are meant as examples of the kinds of reports UNICEF received in the course of this study.

The Appendices (I-III) offer a more detailed discussion or assessment of the traditional Anuak and Nuer culture, cosmologies, belief systems and history. Included is further in-depth discussion of inter-ethnic and intra-tribal conflict, and a look at the critical environmental issues related to the Gambella region and the ongoing conflict.

3. Summary of Conclusions

It is impossible to separate the problems of livelihood and vulnerability of Gambella's women and children from their problems of security. Protection problems have *caused* them to be exceedingly vulnerable. Any attempt by any organisation to address vulnerabilities that does not address the protection problems in Gambella will fail at best; at worst, such efforts may serve to entrench and enrich the duty bearers while further devastating the civilian women and children. The agendas of armed factions in Gambella region are irrelevant when civilians are being continually victimised. Regardless of the political aims behind violence that has occurred—and continues to occur—in the Gambella region, where civilians are the primary targets, these attacks are in violation of Ethiopian and international law.

This assessment has constructed a basic picture of conditions of life and death in the unknown Dimma Region of Gambella: this information—on the scale or nature of the threats to life and livelihood faced by women and children in the region, and about how these issues differ from other areas of Gambella—was not previously available.

Many of the people interviewed for this assessment are living and dying under a permanent and intense state of anxiety and fear—very real—that ENDF soldiers or armed rebels will return at

any moment and again terrorize them. Peoples' capacity to feed, cloth, educate and care for themselves, and to move around freely in search of ways to do this, have been grossly interfered with and diminished and, in many cases, eliminated all together.

What is necessary is a comprehensive response by the international community, civil society, and local and Federal government to engage in broad reaching and inclusive strategies towards conflict resolution, peace-building, capacity-building, monitoring and reporting of ongoing violations, and access to effective justice and an end to impunity for the duty bearers.

Failing urgent action in Gambella region, UNICEF fears a further downward spiralling of violence and suffering heaped on the shoulders of the women and children of Gambella. Absent some comprehensive and decisive response, UNICEF programs and the programs of other humanitarian agencies will serve only as band-aids on the otherwise festering wounds of the region.

The deracination of indigenous people that is evident in rural areas of Gambella is extreme. It is very likely that Anuak (and possibly other indigenous minorities) culture will completely disappear in the not-so-distant future. Cultural survival, autonomy, rights of self-determination and self-governance are all legitimate issues for these indigenous groups, and these are all enshrined by international covenants and United Nations bodies—but all are meaningless in Gambella today.

The body of evidence documenting the detrimental effects of unregulated, profit-driven petroleum operations under circumstances in other African nations similar to those that exist in Gambella region is voluminous. It should be noted that the rise of a parallel economy—driven by the petroleum sector—alongside the total deracination of local populations in the Gambella region, as is occurring today, would further institutionalize existing inequalities.

This report about suffering, violence, hunger, hopelessness and other miseries, is not about the past, it is about the present: ENDF military have recently redeployed in large numbers throughout Gambella. UNICEF needs to immediately focus resources and attention to institute the necessary emergency livelihoods intervention strategies needed to enable immediate survival of populations and to halt the ongoing disaster.

For full text of report, see <http://www.anuakjustice.org>