

“Appalling” rate of child deaths in South Sudan camps – MSF
By: Katy Migiro, AlterNet
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NAIROBI (AlertNet) – Child death rates have soared past emergency levels in a second refugee camp in South Sudan, medical charity Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF) warned on Thursday.

An average of five children are dying each day in Yida camp in Unity State, mostly from diarrhoea and severe infections – double the emergency threshold for children under five of two deaths per 10,000 children per day.

In July, MSF said almost nine children were dying every day in an Upper Nile camp, known as Jammam.

“The number of children dying in Yida camp is appalling,” André Heller-Pérache, MSF’s head of mission in South Sudan said in a statement.

“Our medical teams are working round the clock in desperate conditions trying to save lives.”

The camp is home to more than 55,000 refugees fleeing conflict over the border in Sudan’s South Kordofan state where government forces have been fighting rebels for the last year.

The adult mortality rate in Yida is also double the emergency threshold for adults, with two deaths per 10,000 people per day.

WEAKENED BY DIARRHOEA

In addition, MSF found that a third of children in the recently established Batil camp in South Sudan’s Upper Nile state are malnourished.

Some 18 percent of children under two are suffering from the most serious type of malnutrition, known as severe acute malnutrition (SAM), which leads to death without medical intervention. The emergency threshold for SAM is 2 percent.

The 34,000 refugees in Batil camp are fleeing another conflict between the Sudanese government and rebels, this time in Blue Nile state.

“The majority of our patients in both camps are malnourished children who are further weakened when they contract diarrhoea, malaria or respiratory infections,” said Heller-Pérache.

There are food shortages in both South Kordofan and Blue Nile as people have been unable to plant or harvest due to bombing and displacement. In addition, the Sudanese government has severely restricted aid to rebel-held areas, fearing it will be used to feed the rebels.

The rebel SPLM-N says dozens are dying from hunger every day in the two regions. Sudan’s charge that South Sudan is supporting the SPLM-N has bogged down talks aimed at normalising relations between the two states.

The refugees often walk for weeks to cross the border and arrive in South Sudan in an extremely weak condition.

Aid agencies have been working to move refugees from Jammam camp in Upper Nile state - which has been flooded by heavy rains - to Batil. The relocation has not improved their living conditions though, which MSF described as “appalling”.

NIGHTMARE PLACES

“The rainy season has turned these camps into nightmare places to be a refugee,” said Bart Janssens, MSF’s operations director in South Sudan.

“The access roads are disintegrating and the humanitarian response is struggling to provide conditions where people can live.”

The charity, which has over 500 staff in the Upper Nile and Unity refugee camps, is sending reinforcements. It appealed for other agencies to boost their efforts as well, particularly in providing water, sanitation and food.

“The situation requires all organisations to work in full emergency mode now,” it said.

The World Food Programme plans to airdrop food to the camps in Upper Nile and Unity states later this month in response to a rapid influx of refugees, it said in a statement on Thursday. Rains have made the roads impassable, and the price of flying in aid has pushed the cost of the operation to \$6.5 million.

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