



Save the Children

Sweden

Assessment Report

on

Sudanese Refugee Children settled in Sherkole Camp and transit centers at Kurumuk and Gizen



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1. Introduction

The Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Sudanese Peoples Liberation Movement-North (SPLM-N) force began fighting in Blue Nile state from the beginning of Sept 2011. The fighting of both forces resulted in displacement of many people crossing the border to Ethiopia. These displaced people are temporarily settled at Kumuruk, Gizen, Bamza and Teibe reception centers at Benishangul Gumuz Regional State. According to ARRA and UNHCR report, the total number of population that fled to Ethiopia and settled in those sites reached 20, 000 in the month of September 2011. Of the total displaced people until this report was compiled, some 3863 refugees have been voluntarily moved to Sherkole Camp that was established in 1997.

Although a number of refugees have expressed their interest to be relocated to the camp, there are still some who prefer to stay at the border hoping that the situation may allow them to return back home. Particularly those settled at Gizen reception center have preferred to stay at the site integrated to the hosting community. According to the information obtained during the discussions and interview with their representatives and tribal leaders, they said that they left their belongings behind and want to collect their harvest if situation allows them.

From the total population relocated to the camp and those who are at the transit sites, about 85% are children and women. Among these new influx, Uduks, Maban and Fungi happened to be refugees for the second time. At the transit centers and in the camp, UNHCR and ARRA are coordinating the registration, provision of some basic services, protection and monitoring of the situation of refugees. UNHCR has been transferring the new arrivals that are willing to be relocated to the camp. According to the recent arrivals, there has no any significant change in the situation back at home and large numbers of refugees are coming in each day.

2. Objective of the assessment:

The main objective of the rapid assessment is to provide information for Save the Children Sweden to gain better understanding on the situation of displaced community in general and children in particular and identify protection gaps to design possible intervention strategies.

3. Methodology

The assessment was conducted at Sherkole Refugee Camp, Kumuruk and Gizen transit centers. Both primary and secondary data collection tools have been employed for the assessment. The primary data includes focus group discussion (FGD), in depth interview and observation. Semi structured questionnaires were used for the FGD. Refugee Central Committee(RCC), Women association, community workers, youth groups, UAMs and separated children(SC) were involved in the FGD. Refugee community elders, representatives from ARRA and UNHCR were included in the in-depth interview.

4. Demographic Characteristics and Situation Analysis

As stated above, about 20, 000 people who have been displaced because of the Blue Nile crises crossed the Ethiopian border. Of this population, till the end of September 2011, 3,863 asylum seekers voluntarily relocated to Sherkole refugee camp. According to ARRA Sherkole, between 200 and 300 people are being relocated to camp each day from Kumuruk reception center. As of September 29, 2011, the old and the new case load at the camp reached 7689(3086 Female). The remaining displaced people are still at the reception centers located at Kumuruk, Gizen, Teibe and Bamza. From the information on the ground, about 85% of population at the transit sites is also children and women.

From the total population at the camp, the new arrivals covers about 50% and more new arrivals are expected to join the camp from the transit centers each day. As cited above the fighting in Blue Nile Region of Sudan is continuing, so more is expected to cross the border.

Among these new arrivals at the camp, 392 are Un Accompanied Minors (UAMs) and Separated Children(SC). Thus, the new and the old case of UAMs and SC in the camp reached 664.

The settlement of large population at the transit centers created pressure on the host communities by sharing the meager resources.

According to the informants, those who settled at the reception centers hesitated to be relocated waiting for the coming of their families left behind and still others are hoping changes in the present situation back at home. The situation at Gizen is quite different from Kumuruk that the

team visited. This is because; the displaced people and the hosting community have close ties in many ways. Both speak the same language; have the same religion and similar ways of life. Thus they prefer to stay at the transit center being integrated themselves with the host community. However, from the discussion made with their respective representatives the hosting community resources are gradually depleting. This has created a fear on the future destiny of both groups. Ultimately, this is also will have an impact on the survival of children in general and children with special needs in particular.

5. Child Protection

Since the establishment of the camp in 1997 to 2006, SCS was responsible to support the protection of children in general and UAMs, SC, CWD and Girls in particular. When SCS pulled out in 2006 following the comprehensive peace agreement and the likely hood of refugees to be repatriated, the program activities were handed over to implementing partners with the involvement of UNHCR and ARRA. On the process of repatriation of refugees, implementing partners gradually pulled out and the responsibility of taking care of children specially UAMs and SC has been in the hands of UNHCR till to date.

Due to the new influx of refugees, SCS held discussions with ARRA and UNHCR. Following the discussions agreement was reached to conduct this rapid assessment to understand the situation of children and identify gaps in child protection issues and potential roles that SCS can have in its area of expertise.

During the discussions at the sites, the assessment team deeply discussed protection issues with refugee community representatives, women association, Refugee Central committee, youth group and UAMs/SC. From the discussions the team has identified the following child protection concerns and care and support systems.

5.1 Violence Related Issues

- The group discussion and interview with refugee reveals that girls face risks of child labor, domestic violence and sexual abuse including early and forced marriage. In addition there are reported cases of attempted rape and adultery against girls and women.

5.2 Issues related to the protection and care of separated children

- In case of separated children in Sherkole camp, children are placed in their own communities or tribes and have clan protection. From the discussion the team learnt that there is, however, child labor, neglect and domestic violence and there are also children who do not get appropriate care and support from fostering families. The systematic follow up by the social workers seems to be lacking because of skill and knowledge on basic social work. The RCC and women group participants also underlined needs for particular attention of SC from all concerned. However, UNHCR community service sector understood the challenges and started upgrading the skill of the social workers to enable them discharge satisfactory services for children.
- In emergencies context, interim care is one of the best options that must be provided for children separated from their families until they are reunited with their parents or relatives in the absence of biological parents. So there is always a need to intervene from the inception of registration to arrange foster care mechanisms for new arrival separated children.

5.3 Issues related to the protection and care of unaccompanied minors

- As opposed to separated children, unaccompanied minors are placed in group care. This arrangement is usually spontaneous either by own or by the community in which they live. The distinction between the UAM and SC is that SC might be under the care of adults other than parents (those responsible for their care) while UAMs do not receive any form of adult care and supervision after being separated from their parents and care givers. Since IPs pulled out UNHCR is providing all assistances for UAMs in the camp of Sherkole.

As verified by this assessment the minors claim that they lack social and emotional support and have in adequate basic necessities and social services available in the refugee camp. The interview conducted with old case UAMs, there seems to have been gaps in conducting regular visits, following up of their education and involving children in structured activities. Moreover, from our observation, some unaccompanied children had shown signs of frustration and social adjustment problem to the environment.

- With the incoming of the new influx, assessment team did not come up with a different child protection concern. However, there are different needs of children that call for particular attention to ensure the care arrangement, psychosocial support, proper guidance and follow up.
- From the discussions with elders and community groups, although there is willingness and understanding of the community to support UAMs and SC, the actual support system in practice is minimal. The support system of the community need to be further strengthened.
- The community also described that there are shortage /gaps in addressing the basic needs of all children in the camp
- The discussion conducted with UNHCR, we learnt that there is a gap in terms of manpower and technical expertise to deliver equal service to the group of UAMs and SC.

5.4 Issues related to family tracing and reunification

- It is always necessary to identify, register and document both unaccompanied minors and separated children as quickly as possible upon their arrival. This process will promote the protection and assistance of children and tracing of their families. In this case for separated children and minors the issue of Family Tracing and Reunification (FTR) in Sherkole is not yet adequately addressed. There is a need to conduct Best interest assessment, determination and individual case management for proper follow up and eventual tracing and reunification.

5.5 Child friendly space

- The team learnt that there is one child friendly space that children from different age groups benefit from the services. During the discussion held with the youth group, the CFS need to be more equipped with recreational and learning materials. CFS provides children with protected environment in which children participate in structured activities. As it is a means to ensure protection of children from violence and contribute for resilience of children affected by emergency crisis, the CFS need to be strengthened and replicated in the camp.

5.6 Youth recreation and support activities

- The youth recreational activities were initiated with the objective of assisting the youth in refugee communities to coping with the psychosocial effects of war and displacement, and to bring about normalization of their daily lives. It is also a means to create healthy relations among children and youth who are from different social background. Apart from recreation the youth centre serves as a mechanism to empower children on their rights and obligations. The assessment team discussed with youth centre focal persons responsible coordinating youth activities being provided by the youth center in the camp. From the discussion we learnt that the center is providing indoor and outdoor services to all children. It was, however, cited that the participation of female children is also very minimal because of traditions and fear of harassment by their male counterpart. On top of this, it lacks essential materials to address the growing need to make use of the service.

5.7 Mainstreaming and integration of children with disabilities

- Children with disability (CWDs) are another group of children who are more vulnerable to the effects of war and displacement. The protection and inclusion of CWDs is always ignored. At present RaDO is working to respond to the needs of persons with disability mainly focusing on provision of appliances. Although children with disabilities gain benefits from the services being provided by RaDO, there seems to have a gap to address the awareness, inclusion and psychosocial support CWDs.

5.8 Women Association

- The discussion held with the women association group reveals that women are participating in conflict resolution with in the community, follow-up and support children with special needs, support widows and report violence to the RCC and concerned agencies. They also monitor food distribution and support new arrivals currently.
- Regarding their challenges they stated that they have limited space and opportunities in camp activities. Their representation in the RCC is nominal, their role is not well defined and their voice is not heard. They also mentioned that there are women in the camp facing domestic violence and male dominance (masculinity) because of cultural practices and lack of awareness on gender equality.

6. Education

As stated in the international human and child right conventions, education is the right of every child without any discrimination whether children at home, displaced, refugee or asylum seekers. Education in emergency is thought to provide physical, psychological and cognitive protection

which can be both lifesaving and life sustaining. It also mitigates the psychosocial impact of conflict and disaster by giving a sense of normalcy, stability and hope for future. Furthermore it contributes in the protection of children against exploitation, abduction, recruitment of children into armed groups and sexual and gender based violence.

- For this purpose UNHCR and the government of Ethiopia and its allies have availed education services to refugee children settled in Sherkole camp from its inception up to now. Currently in the camp there is one primary school run by ARRA and five preprimary schools supported by UNHCR. For those who are out of school children and adults UNHCR is also running accelerated learning and non-formal education program.
- Following the repatriation process that started in **2007** onwards the education service, however, was basically focused on maintaining the service. From the discussion with UNHCR and ARRA, there are gaps in terms of qualified teachers, provision of educational materials and equipping class rooms and libraries.
- At present, the preschool population is estimated to be over 482 for the old case but with the arrival of new cases similar figure are expected to be registered for the service. This definitely will require additional teachers, class rooms, furniture and teaching- learning materials.
- Regarding the primary education, before the repatriation was started it has been accommodating all primary school age children. Since the repatriation began, the primary school activities tend to be deteriorating due to the expected repatriation of refugees. Because of this, teaching learning materials were not supplied adequately and those available materials were not maintained properly. These greatly have an impact to provide efficient services at present. Besides to the old case, as the new arrivals are constitute large number of school age boys and girls, there is a need to strengthen school facilities to address the growing need of children seeking basic education. In line with this the question of considering relevant curriculum that suits the background of children should also be taken in to account. This calls for a joint effort to improve access to quality basic education that responds to the felt needs of children.
- From the discussion conducted with UAMs and SC, the issue of secondary education has been raised as one of the priority needs. Although there are some children sponsored by

UNHCR, still significant number of boys and girls are attending their secondary education by their own in government school at Khomesha located about 8 km away from the camp. However, children have a concern of protection risks particularly for girls while going and coming back from school. Besides to this, children raised their fear on the continuity of secondary education.

- It is important to take note that ensuring the provision of basic education for refugee children is a vehicle for child protection and gender issues, rebuild the lives of refugee children and address development issues for durable solutions.

7. Health/Nutrition and Shelter

Discussions were held with refugee community and ARRA Health Satellite clinic staff at reception center to obtain basic health information. The team did not find any serious health problem except risks related to malaria, respiratory tract infection and diarrhea disease children are facing. Nutrient food items are also inadequately supplied which eventually will lead to health problems.

With regards to shelter, many children living congested in one tent and in school rooms. At times when there is rain harsh weather children are exposed to different health problems. The cumulative effect of inadequate shelter, lack of nutritious food supply, sanitation problems /contamination will have an impact in the life of hosting and refugee communities in general and children in particular.

8. Conclusion

When refugees fled from their home country seeking asylum, the first thing come forefront is that whether they got basic necessities like food and shelter and that they live in a relatively secure environment. The issues of child protection, psychosocial support and engaging children in semi structure activities are either neglected or given less attention. Thus Child protection concerns often need to be an integral part of any intervention to provide psychosocial care and support to the affected children who are forced to flee to neighboring countries as refugees. Among the affected children unaccompanied minors and separated children are in need of

special attention as displacement has a profound physical, emotional and developmental impact and increases their vulnerability.

9. Recommendation

- The assessment revealed potential risks that include physical and sexual abuse and neglect that children are facing. In addition there are reported cases of attempted rape and adultery against girls and women. To abolish violence against female children and women, prevention systems and mechanism must be in place and community structures need to be strengthened. RCC, Women Association/Group, children themselves and other relevant social structures should be capacitated to contribute to the prevention of gender based violence.
- SCS is one of the few child-serving organizations working across the range of rights (protection, survival, development, participation) and has substantial experiences in working with Sudanese refugees. The involvement of SCS in addressing gaps of protection of children, provision of psychosocial support to children at risk and emergency education at this turning point is proper to involve itself in assisting refugees from Blue Nile.
- From prior experiences SCS has effectively utilized the community-based approach to ensure protection and support for minors and separated children. Because community based approach is an efficient mechanism to ensure sustainable child protection. The community-based approach encourages children to stay in their communities, reaches all at-risk children, maximizes local resources, and is sustainable and cost effective on the longer term. Therefore, strengthening and support community structures enable to address the needs and rights of children at risk.
- In order to promote positive socialization and address psychosocial needs of most vulnerable refugee children the existing child friendly space need to be strengthened and replicated as needed to serve more children.
- To ensure active and meaningful child participation in decision making on issues that affect their lives, the capacity of boys and girls should be enhanced in areas of leadership,

communication, negotiation, representation and problem solving and engaging in cultural and social issues.

- From in depth interview and discussions the team learnt that all separated children (old case) are under foster care and being provided with basic subsistence, although few children interviewed claim that the assistance did not adequately meet their basic needs. There seems also to have a gap in systematic follow up and provision of psychosocial support. Therefore these have to be addressed through regular monitoring and close follow up.
- The existing preschools in the camp provide service for 400 children. However, from the assessment, the team learnt that there is a gap in management, participation of community, skill of teachers and provision of necessary playing materials. With the incoming of additional preschool population, these schools also cannot accommodate all children. Therefore, to address the needs of preschool population, it requires re-planning and additional resources to be allocated.
- It is important to take note that ensuring the provision of basic education for refugee children is a vehicle for child protection and gender issues, rebuild the lives of refugee children and address development issues for durable solutions. This being true, following the repatriation, the quality of education at primary school seems to have been affected and its capacity to accommodate the incoming child population seeking basic education may be in question. Therefore, this area should be a thoroughly considered by the concerned agencies.
- From the discussion with women Group/association, the participation of refugee women was cited as nominal and their voice is not heard at all level. Therefore, strengthening their capacity and involving them in decision making and in addressing gender and child protection issues should be given particular attention.

10. Annex

Sherkole Camp Population at the end of August 2011			
Age	Female	Male	Total
0-4 Years	381	441	822
5-11Years	538	629	1,167
12-17 Years	403	757	1,160
18-59 Years	452	745	1,197
60+ Years	15	13	28
Total	1,789	2,585	4,374

Sherkole Camp Current Population Figure as of 29 September 2011			
Age	Female	Male	Total
0-4 Years	699	770	1,469
5-11Years	774	799	1,573
12-17 Years	397	646	1,043
18-59 Years	1180	2338	3,518
60+ Years	36	50	86
Total	3,086	4,603	7,689

Statistical Data on New arrivals with specific needs (as of 29 September 2011)

<i>Specific need category</i>	<i>female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Total</i>
Un accompanied or separated child	118	274	392
Older persons at risk	12	23	35
Women at risk	317	0	317
Serious medical condition	31	46	77
Mental disability	1	3	4
Physical disability	9	35	44
Hearing impairment	4	5	9
Visual impairment	11	11	22
Single parent	352	26	378
Total	855	423	1278

Source: UNHCR Sherkole