In South Sudan, 7 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and 5 million people need access to health services, including HIV prevention and treatment services. In this context, AIDS does not stand in isolation; rather, it is an entry point for social transformation. This was the message of Michel Sidibé, UNAIDS Executive Director, during his recent visit to the country.

“We all know the challenges that South Sudan is facing. But during this visit I have been humbled and impressed. I have seen that, despite challenges, when people on the ground are committed, anything is possible,” said Mr Sidibé.

While in South Sudan, Mr Sidibé signed a memorandum of understanding on the right to health in the education sector with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education and Instruction and the South Sudan AIDS Commission. The agreement commits all parties to develop and implement a strategy in line with the UNAIDS Fast-Track approach and the Ministerial Commitment on Comprehensive Sexuality Education and Sexual and Reproductive Health Services for Adolescents and Young People in Eastern and Southern African, of which South Sudan is a signatory.

In 2016, an estimated 200 000 people were living with HIV in South Sudan. In addition, only 10% of people living with HIV were accessing life-saving HIV treatment. Children are particularly vulnerable, with fewer than 1000 children living with HIV between the ages of 0 and 14 years on HIV treatment—5% of those in need.

To accelerate results in the AIDS response, James Wani Igga, the Vice-President of South Sudan, in the presence of Mr Sidibé, launched the 2018–2022 South Sudan National Strategic Plan on HIV and AIDS, which will provide a solid monitoring and evaluation framework for the implementation of the national AIDS response.

“Stigma often leads to discrimination and other violations of human rights that affect the well-being of people living with HIV. HIV-related stigma is compounded for those individuals who identify with already stigmatized groups, including sex workers and men who have sex with men,” said Mr Igga.

Mr Sidibé also discussed with Mr Igga how more can be done together to address HIV in South Sudan, with a particular focus on HIV among uniformed personnel as a key entry point. They discussed how the AIDS response can build resilience, protect rights and promote freedom from violence, peace and stability in South Sudan.

USG for Humanitarian Affairs urges warring parties to stop fighting, protect civilians and aid workers in South Sudan

The Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian affairs has urged warring parties in South Sudan to stop the fighting and protect aid workers who are risking their own lives to save others in the war-torn country.

During a visit to South Sudan, Mark Lowcock, who is also the Emergency Relief Coordinator, met with government representatives, opposition leaders, humanitarian agencies, and those most affected by the conflict—many of whom have fled their homes and are relying on aid for survival. He said the suffering of ordinary people was “unimaginable”.

“The peace process so far has produced nothing. The cessation of hostilities is a fiction. The economy has collapsed. Belligerents use scorched-earth tactics, murder and rape as weapons of war,” said Mark Lowcock. “All these are all gross violations of international law.”

Mark Lowcock, also visited a UN protection site. A third of the South Sudanese population are displaced – 1.8 million internally while another 2.5 million have crossed borders to neighbouring countries. The humanitarian situation is dire. Without sustained assistance, more than 7.1 million people could become severely food insecure in the coming months while 1.7 million are on the brink of catastrophe.

Mr. Lowcock also discussed the surge in violence in Unity with the Head of the UN Mission in South Sudan, David Shearer.

“Our peacekeepers have been out as much as they can to instill calm and confidence, but what we are seeing on the ground is still truly horrific,” said David Shearer. “There are huts being burned, women are being raped, children are being killed. People are so scared that they flee to the swamps for safety or they come to our base in Leer. About 2,000 people are sitting beside our base because it’s the only place they feel safe.”
The security situation for humanitarian workers is deteriorating. In the last two months, four aid workers have been killed, taking the total killed since the conflict began in 2013 to more than 100.

“The aid agencies are subject to harassment, extortion, looting, kidnappings, killings, predatory fees and levies and other blockages all over the country. Those things have a direct effect, reducing our ability to help people who need humanitarian assistance,” said the USG. “South Sudan is one of the world’s most dangerous places to be an aid worker and I want to pay tribute to their bravery. They take huge risks every day to deliver assistance.”

Despite the challenges, humanitarians are saving lives. Last year, agencies reached 5.4 million South Sudanese in need. However, the USG says that, without peace, the immense suffering will continue.

South Sudan launches an Ebola sensitization and awareness campaign to enhance preparedness in the country

Following the Ebola outbreak that has been declared in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a high level mission comprised of Ministry of Health (MOH) in the Republic of South Sudan and WHO visited Yambio, former Western Equatoria State on a sensitization campaign.

The sensitization campaign against Ebola followed an earlier press conference held in Juba to enhance efforts to prevent Ebola virus disease (EVD) in the country.

The mission led by Honorable Dr Riek Gai Kok, the Minister of Health updated the governor of the state, cabinets, members of the parliament, UN agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community based organizations (CBOs) and the general public on the basics of the disease, how it is transmitted and the preventive measures that can be taken such as sensitizing the community through mobile messaging and ongoing TV, radio and print mass traditional and non-traditional communication campaigns. The team also visited health facilities to acquaint themselves with preparedness for case management.

“The Ministry of Health is increasingly concerned about the situation in DRC and is working in Gbudue, Tambura, Maridi and Yei River states alongside their respective state health ministries, both to train medical staff on preventive measures and supply medical equipment for hospitals”, said Dr Riek Gai Kok, the Minister of Health in South Sudan. Key to our response is training community health workers to recognize the symptoms of the virus and refer potential cases for immediate medical care, Dr Kok highlighted.

South Sudan’s history of previous EVD outbreaks, global travel of people and the former Western Equatoria’s proximity to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), which have reported Ebola constitute risk factors for the country.

“Although no cases of EVD have been reported in South Sudan, the outbreak in DRC is of concern as it places the country at greater risk,” said Dr Argata Guracha Guyo, Emergency Coordinator for WHO South Sudan.

Speaking at the press conference to update the media on Ebola and the sensitization campaign in Yambio, both Dr Guracha and Dr Kok outlined a raft of measures taken with support from WHO to prevent the entry and spread of the EVD into South Sudan.

EVD is a deadly disease currently affecting DRC. As of 16 May 2018, a total of 45 new cases of EVD and 25 deaths (case fatality rate = 56%) have been reported from three health zones in Equateur Province.

Building the capacity of communities to safeguard South Sudan intangible cultural heritage

UNESCO in collaboration with the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports held a 10 day workshop, from 3-12 May 2018 in Juba on community- based inventory, aimed at strengthening national capacities to implement the convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage of the Republic of South Sudan.

This followed the ratification of the 2003 convention for the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage in 2016 by the Republic of South Sudan.

During the workshop, participants were introduced and trained on documenting the diverse intangible cultural heritage of the country.
The workshop also created awareness about the 2003 convention among stakeholders and the public. It highlighted the techniques and methods to document all the domains of Intangible Cultural Heritage such as oral traditions and expressions; performing arts, social practices, rituals and festivals; knowledge, practices concerning nature, universe, and traditional craftsmanship.

The intangible cultural heritage of South Sudan constitutes major contribution to education and resources management, it provides direct access to the memory of people and a living source where answers can be found to the challenges. It also has a central role in the construction of peace through intercultural dialogue, appreciation of common belonging and national identity among society and as well as for sustainable development.

**Increasing mothers' access to antenatal care and malaria prevention**

Malaria is a leading cause of illness and death in South Sudan. In 2017, the disease accounted for 61 per cent of all illnesses reported in health facilities, with over 1,000 deaths reported, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

25-year old Mary (name changed), a pregnant mother with two children, lives in Malakal town. Mary has recently returned to Malakal after fleeing following the outbreak of the war in 2013.

Aware of the importance of prenatal care, Mary used to walk at least one hour each way to reach the closest clinics in Malakal. Most health facilities in Malakal are damaged or non-operational, except for those run with support from aid organizations.

In February 2018, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) began operating the small Assosa primary healthcare clinic in Malakal town. The clinic operates out of a sparse building, where clinicians see over 240 patients a week, most suffering from respiratory infections, malaria and acute watery diarrhea. The clinic is closer to Mary’s home, easing her access to the necessary care.

For pregnant women, malaria infection can lead to higher risks of both maternal and perinatal sickness or even death. Pregnant women have a reduced immune response, meaning that their immune system is less effective at fighting a malaria infection. Pregnant women are three times more likely to develop severe malaria than non-pregnant women acquiring infections from the same area. Malaria infection during pregnancy can lead to miscarriage, premature delivery, low birth weight, congenital infection, and/or perinatal death.

During Mary’s first visit to the clinic, an IOM midwife provided her routine antenatal care, which included medicine to prevent malaria, crucial for mothers who will be pregnant into the rainy season. The midwife also gave her a mosquito net and advised her to sleep under a net every night (together with any of her children under five years), clear bushes and stagnant water close to her house and take the malaria prophylaxis medicine on a monthly basis.

Across the country, IOM has dispatched health teams to reach the most vulnerable, including those in remote areas, cut-off by insecurity. As the rainy season nears, malaria cases will quickly grow. IOM is preparing for the peak season by scaling up services at clinics across South Sudan, including extending clinic operation hours and weekend coverage, pre-positioning essential medicine and malaria test kits and continuing active health promotion and education about malaria prevention.

**UNEP conducts inception workshop for the project preparation grant of the Global Environment Facility Project**

Over sixty-seven (67) participants from different line ministries, departments, the National Legislative Assembly, development partners, academia and local NGOs attended a workshop on the Project Preparation Grant (PPG) phase of the Global Environment Facility (GEF) funded project, “Systemic, institutional and individual capacity for the implementation of the Rio Conventions in the Republic of South Sudan”.

The objectives of the workshop were to consult with key stakeholders on the project design and to discuss relevant ongoing initiatives, potential project partners, stakeholders and co-financing. The workshop was opened by Mr. Arshad Khan, UN Environment Country Manager, South Sudan, and Mr. Joseph Africano Bartel, Undersecretary, Ministry of Environment and...
The renovations to the other schools included improvements such as the installation of ramps for students with disabilities, new roofs and floors, extra openings for ventilation in classrooms, painting, and construction of new classroom blocks to increase space. Some schools had new boreholes drilled and water towers installed for rainwater harvesting. All renovations were made while preserving the original look of the schools.

The schools now provide a safer and healthier learning environment for students, with better classrooms, fencing, and access to running water and latrines. In Giada, before the new borehole was drilled, students had no access to running water during the whole school day. Teacher John Tutu has noticed an increase in students’ motivation: “they are more active and participating in class”, he said, adding that the fresh buildings also attract new students to the schools.

But challenges to education remain rife. Head Teacher Grace Misaka, though enthusiastic about the renovation, said teachers have been working for months without pay, textbooks are missing and some classrooms still lack adequate desks and chairs to accommodate all students. For girls, lack of access to sanitary pads is another hurdle to an education. The students are also eager for balls and other sports equipment to pass the time during recess in their schoolyard, which thanks to the new fence is now protected.

Giada Primary School had been looking for a way to fund a renovation for five years – the change is welcome and provides hope for a better future: “It’s like when you don’t have food and someone comes with nice food and gives it to you,” said Chairperson Daniel Malony Alier.

UNOPS has delivered a total of 22 projects in South Sudan under RAPID since 2011 in a broad range of sectors to support economic growth and development. In 2017, the programme was extended to 2020 with funding for an additional 190 kilometres of road. Construction on an additional four schools under the same programme is ongoing and will be completed by the end of 2018.
A Virtual Summit (#SawaSouthSudan) was organized by the Women Coalition of South Sudan in partnership with Crisis Action, UN Women, UNMISS, UNFPA and OXFAM, to bring together women from across the world, in solidarity with the women of South Sudan in finding durable and credible solutions to the current violent conflict in South Sudan.

The Virtual Summit was anchored in Nairobi, Kenya, with women from around the world, including in all areas of South Sudan, in the capital, Juba, in Protection of Civilian sites (PoCs), and in refugee camps, tuning in to participate.

May 25 was specifically chosen as it commemorates ‘Africa Day’, and an opportune time to renew pressure on the African Union, its Assembly of Heads of States and IGAD to continue to devise gender sensitive solutions to the areas of contention in the current High-Level Revitalization Forum, put in place to re-energize the 2015 Peace Agreement.

“We must see women and girls not as victims, but as leaders who have a key role to play in addressing conflict”, said the Undersecretary of the United Nations and Executive Director of UN Women, Phumzile Mlambo, in a video message to the Virtual Summit.

The Virtual Summit was intended to ensure women’s voices essential to the resolution of the conflict in South Sudan are heard, and African leaders’ understanding is deepened of how women’s lives in South Sudan and the region bear the cost of the conflict, as well as to promote new energy and action in resolving the conflict.

One of the participants in Juba, Hon. Ann Lino Abyei, from the Transitional National Legislative Assembly TNLA encouraged the young women to get engaged in finding solutions to resolving the impasse and the conflict, and to work in their communities, especially among young women, to strengthen social cohesion, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Participants of the Virtual Summit in Juba brainstormed on ways and roles of women in guaranteeing peace, they said there is need for a strong women’s movement that will consolidate all the efforts of women in South Sudan, with the aim of bringing a sustainable peace and make the leaders realize the need to bring peace now is what we the young women generation is seeking for.

The conflict in South Sudan is now in its fifth year, the suffering of the citizens especially women and children is on peak, a coalition of South Sudanese women continue to work hard in the peace process to see that peace prevails and the political leaders accept peace to end the suffering of the people of South Sudan.