



During an emergency return operation in South Sudan in 2012, Wanna More, from Myanmar, (centre) a UNV Associate Reintegration and Livelihoods Officer, deployed to UNHCR through UNMISS, helped coordinate the airlift of 12,000 returnees from Kosti, White Nile to Juba, in 27 days. Photo: UNV, 2012.

Coordinating the emergency return of thousands to South Sudan

Two UN Volunteers assigned to UNHCR in Juba played key roles in the two part operation that successfully returned 12,000 and reintegrated, on an emergency basis, 1,600 returnees to South Sudan from May to December 2012.

From May to December 2012, UN Volunteers in Juba deployed to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) through the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) were active in an Emergency Return and Reintegration Operation of South Sudanese Returnees. The two part operation successfully achieved the emergency return of 12,000 returnees and the emergency reintegration of 1,600 returnees to South Sudan.

The multi-cluster emergency response mechanism was led by the Government of South Sudan, the Resident Representative of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and carried out by 30

partners specializing in food and security, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), health, protection, shelter, emergency response coordination and support. These included WFP, Across, UNICEF, CAFOD, IRW, MEDAIR, SSDO, THESO, ZOA/SLDA) WHO, UNICEF, Ministry of Health Central Equatoria State, IMC, SS Red Cross, UNFPA, the Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Development in Central Equatoria State, NRC, Non Violence Peace Force, Caritas, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), UN-Mine Action Group, UNMISS among others.

Two UN Volunteers assigned to UNHCR in Juba played key roles. Wanna More, from Myanmar, a UNV Associate Reintegration and Livelihoods Officer, was the project coordinator, supported by Naofumi Ikeda, from Japan, a UNV Associate Protection Officer assigned to protection.

The emergency return operation involved the airlift of over 12,200 returnees stranded in Kosti, White Nile to Juba on 82 flights over 27 days in May. In addition, some 1,700 people were evacuated by barge from Renk and brought to Juba. When the way station in Juba reached capacity, the returnees were brought to an alternate transit site at the National Teacher Training Institute (NTTI) in Kapuri.

While most returnees continued to their final destinations in South Sudan's various states, over 1,600 people at the transit site claimed they had no place to go. After successful negotiations between UNHCR, the RRC and CES Government and local authorities, including Boma Chiefs, and with agreement of all parties involved, the allocation of one square kilometer of land at Kuda in Terekeka County was selected as the final destination for the stranded returnees.

UNHCR, IOM, UNICEF and ZOA provided temporary housing and services on the land to accommodate the returnees while they awaited land demarcation and allocation by the GoSS. UNHCR constructed three semi-permanent structures and UNICEF contributed six emergency school tents so that the Kuda village's existing primary school, with 70 students and two teachers, could accommodate the influx of the 600 returnee children.

By early December, every stranded returnee family had moved to the new Kuda settlement. Addressing the returnees upon their arrival, Wanna said, "You have been moving from place to place, camp to camp your whole life. Today is the day you have finally reached your Home, the promised land called Kuda."

After the months of hard work, challenges and uncertainties, the UN Volunteers and their many colleagues also celebrated the return of the formerly displaced people they had been serving to a place they could call home in the new nation of South Sudan.

• South Sudan • UNMISS • UNHCR • reintegration • returnees

Sustainable Development Goal: