



Sila Mohammed Kon, Wulu Gedim Community Chief, participating in a facilitators' selection meeting to assist the community in leading their own development and achieve food security. (UNV, 2016)

## Supporting local communities to achieve food security in South Sudan

On February 2017, the United Nations formally declared famine in parts of South Sudan, warning that “war and a collapsing economy have left 100,000 people facing starvation there and a further one million people are classified as being on the brink of famine.”

International UN Volunteer [Solomon Bekele](#) (Ethiopia) has been serving with the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in South Sudan since April 2016 as the Pastoralist Literacy and Education Specialist for the project: Enhanced Knowledge and Education for Resilient Pastoral Livelihoods in South Sudan.

The project, delivering an integrated intervention targeting livelihoods and education, is providing production resources, literacy, numeracy, and life skills to pastoralist communities living in eleven cattle camps. The overall objective of the project is to contribute to improved food security and nutrition in five counties of South Sudan: Rumbek Central, Wulu, Yirol East, Yirol West and Awerial—all within Former Lake State.

The project targets communities in an area which suffers from recurring conflict sparked by food insecurity, youth unemployment and cattle-raiding. Access to education is yet another obstacle these communities must face. These elements, combined to the threat of famine in the region, make food security an urgent concern.

“Serving UNESCO, I have been responsible to contribute to the literacy, numeracy and life skills component of the project in the field locations,” says Solomon. “The project aims at integrating the livelihoods and education component, supporting the communities to lead their own development and achieve food security.”

One of the activities of this initiative is the establishment of community committees in all project sites. Local committee members work voluntarily and are responsible for running and the management of literacy, numeracy and life skills training in each of the eleven cattle camps.

“After providing them with some orientation, it became clear among many people that they could use their voluntary efforts to advance their own local development.

“At the beginning of my assignment, I thought I would teach community members how to volunteer for development, but found they were already practicing volunteerism in their own way,” adds Solomon. “I discovered there are local chiefs and youth leaders who voluntarily serve their localities in different aspects. The people I met didn’t call themselves volunteers, but they were actively helping each other.”

The responsibilities of management committees established by the project include ensuring the attendance of teachers and community facilitators; the establishment of learning spaces; advocating for the education of children and youth; participating in adult field schools; selecting animal health workers; and planning and implementation of community disaster risk reduction strategies. All these activities aim to increase food security within this region of South Sudan.

“This tradition of volunteering is also commonly practiced in my home country, Ethiopia, where there is a volunteer community committee called ‘Ilder leaders’, whose members are democratically elected by the local communities and serve voluntarily until the end of their terms,” concludes Solomon.

This ongoing project is jointly implemented by UNESCO and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO) with funding from the European Union in partnership with the Ministry of General Education and Instruction, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, and the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries of South Sudan.

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