

# PROTECTION SECTOR UPDATE



Bakhita leads a widows' support group at a USAID/OFDA-supported protection of civilians (PoC) site in South Sudan's town of Bentiu. Photo by South Sudan Disaster Assistance Response Team/USAID

## Strengthening Child Protection in Mali

Violence and insecurity that began in 2012 has prompted hundreds of thousands of people in northern Mali to flee their homes. Children are among the most vulnerable due to continued exposure to violence and exploitation, including abuse, trafficking in persons, and recruitment into armed groups. The conflict in Mali has separated many children from their families, resulting in high numbers of children on the move, particularly in Timbuktu Region. In response, USAID/OFDA partner Terre des Hommes provided personalized and group support to strengthen the psychosocial and livelihood resources of affected children in Timbuktu, and rehabilitated and expanded networks that would normally protect them. By engaging multi-level stakeholders—civil society, communities, and policymakers—Terre des Hommes bolstered collaboration between formal and informal stakeholders and enhanced community responses to address the unique needs of children. Terre des Hommes also conducted child protection awareness-raising campaigns to influence state-level decision making processes to improve the protective environment for children on the move.

## Delivering Critical Assistance to GBV Survivors in Syria

GBV has been a persistent feature of the more than five-year conflict in Syria, where ongoing clashes between the Syrian Arab Republic Government and non-state armed forces have resulted in the internal displacement of an estimated 6.5 million people. Women and girls, in particular, are at continued risk of experiencing physical or sexual violence, forced marriage, or trafficking. At-risk populations face a lack of basic structural and societal protections and limited access to GBV prevention and treatment services. In response, a USAID/OFDA partner is working to mitigate and prevent the risks of GBV, while also providing

## Sector Overview

Natural disasters and conflict often exacerbate the vulnerability of individuals; people must cope with threats such as sexual violence, violence in the home, separation of families, exploitative labor, and exclusion from life-saving humanitarian assistance. USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) is at the forefront of the humanitarian community's efforts to protect conflict- and disaster-affected communities and mitigate these potential threats. While working to minimize and respond to specific risks, USAID/OFDA requires partners to demonstrate their commitment to ensuring the safety of those receiving emergency relief across all sectors of a response and in all humanitarian assistance programs.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2016, USAID/OFDA provided nearly \$86.2 million to support protection programs, including nearly \$10.2 million to a total of 18 partners for global and regional protection initiatives and approximately \$76 million to 28 partners for protection activities in 23 countries. Worldwide, these programs have supported millions of people, providing services for child protection, psychosocial support, prevention of and response to gender-based violence (GBV), and coordination of and advocacy for protection activities.



Internally displaced family outside their camp shelter in Dohuk Governorate, Iraq, where USAID/OFDA supports protection activities and other programming for vulnerable households. Photo by Elizabeth Pender/USAID

critical GBV services to survivors among populations that have been displaced as a result of the fighting and among host communities. Amid a challenging operating environment, including limited mobility and severely compromised access in besieged and hard-to-reach areas and high levels of sectarian violence, the USAID/OFDA partner is taking proactive measures to address these pervasive GBV risks. The non-governmental organization (NGO) has designed safe spaces for women and girls, ensuring that sufficient female staff are available to provide community-based psychosocial support and case management and safety planning for GBV survivors. In addition, these safe spaces increase awareness of and access to health facilities staffed with trained clinicians who are able to safely and appropriately provide medical care to GBV survivors; clinicians also provide referrals to patients requiring more targeted and specialized mental health interventions as needed. Partner staff also work to provide women with access to livelihood opportunities and reduce the potential for abuse and exploitation—often amplified in the face of compromised income and livelihoods. The NGO supports a women’s center in Dar’a Governorate, which offers educational and vocational activities for women and girls, as well as a cadre of trained social workers to provide additional follow-up counseling as needed. In FY 2016, USAID/OFDA has supported UN agencies and NGOs with approximately \$14.4 million to provide critical GBV support services to people affected by the Syrian conflict.

## Providing Community-Based Psychosocial Support to IDPs in South Sudan

Clashes between Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GoRSS) forces and opposition groups that began December 15, 2013, and continued violent conflict have displaced and adversely affected millions of people across South Sudan. Violence has prompted the internal displacement of approximately 1.6 million people since December 2013, including an estimated 195,000 people sheltering at UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) protection of civilians (PoC) sites. Conflict and subsequent displacement continue to generate psychosocial problems for populations in South Sudan. USAID/OFDA partner the International Organization for Migration (IOM) developed community-centered mechanisms to address psychosocial needs of conflict-affected South Sudanese. IOM has established psychosocial mobile teams inside PoC sites, comprised of male and female community members, to provide basic counseling and referrals, facilitate community discussion groups, and strengthen family and community support mechanisms through recreational and social activities. IOM also provided basic emotional support to individuals, families, and communities focusing on youth and vulnerable adults such as widows. Through a community-centered approach, IOM fostered social cohesion and strengthened and promoted positive coping mechanisms for internally displaced persons (IDPs) sheltering in PoC sites. Community-based psychosocial support is one essential element of USAID/OFDA’s efforts to scale up a response to acute protection needs since the beginning of the conflict that also include care and service referrals for gender-based violence survivors, family reunification, and safe spaces for women and children.

## Promoting People-Centered Approaches to Humanitarian Action

Although it is a critical element of humanitarian action and effective programming, ensuring accountability to program beneficiaries through consistent and systematic participation and feedback in program design and delivery is often not prioritized by humanitarian actors. In response, USAID/OFDA is supporting a two-year project to integrate people-centered approaches to humanitarian programming via global and country-level coordination mechanisms, including cluster systems—the coordinating bodies for humanitarian activities, comprising UN agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders. Clusters are key platforms for humanitarian actors to collectively share information, develop common strategies, and assess and monitor how well relief organizations are addressing humanitarian needs within their given sector. They play a critical role in consolidating and sharing best practices of humanitarian responses. The USAID/OFDA-funded project is reinforcing quality assurance of humanitarian actions and accountability to affected populations in clusters led and co-led by the UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF). Launched in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Jordan, the project is identifying factors that impede people-centered approaches to humanitarian action; developing, testing, and applying strategies to address constraints to systematically and consistently integrating beneficiaries into program design and delivery; and sharing lessons learned to influence policies and practices in other clusters and throughout the protection sector.