



A CITY EXPOSED

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CLEAN WATER RUNS DRY IN JUBA, SOUTH SUDAN

An ailing economic situation in South Sudan characterized by skyrocketing prices of essentials such as water has played a key role in the recent cholera outbreak in the capital, Juba. At the time of this writing, 33 people have died in Juba alone including seven children under five, with 700 more people infected with the deadly and contagious disease. Thousands of people remain at risk.¹

The cholera outbreak comes as no surprise. **Countrywide, only 55% of people have access to safe drinking water.**² But because of increased costs of production, water providers in Juba are producing less and charging more, squeezing people's access to safe water even further.

People living in urban areas, particularly in poorer neighbourhoods, have been hardest hit. They can no longer afford to buy enough safe water. Those who still can afford it, now spend twice as much as they did just a few months ago.

For most of the urban poor, the only remaining option is untreated water sources, such as boreholes and the river Nile. Oxfam is deeply concerned that this water shortage could worsen and propel further the spread of disease, should the economic crisis remain unresolved.

South Sudan's economic crisis is a direct result of the war. Government revenue has significantly decreased due to disrupted oil production. Coupled with increased military spending, national budgets continue to have serious deficits. As a result, inflation, fuel prices and manufacturing costs have shot up, increasing market prices for basic items.

610,000 people living in South Sudan's urban areas are now struggling with the cost of living that has increased by nearly 30% in the first half of 2015.³ Putting food on the table becomes the priority. Buying safe water, often and quite understandably takes second place. Topping this is immense suffering for the people of South Sudan, with a 19-month civil war causing a humanitarian crisis. Families have been forced to flee their homes with almost nothing.

Ultimately, ending the war is the starting point to solving this crisis. Oxfam appeals to South Sudanese leaders to work towards building lasting peace and re-committing to providing essential services for their people.

45%

People in South Sudan with
no access to safe drinking water.



OXFAM

15%

Percentage of income
spent on water for
daily use.



PAYING MORE FOR LESS

Runaway inflation of over 39% and expensive fuel have hiked the cost of items such as food and water in local markets.⁴ As prices have gone up, people's incomes have not. Wage rates for casual labourers have either stagnated or declined, meaning people's incomes can buy a lot less.⁵

The South Sudanese Pound (SSP) has been depreciating rapidly. In January 2015, one US dollar was worth six SSP on the informal market. By May, that rate had shot up to 10 Pounds to the dollar.⁶ In May 2015, Oxfam undertook research on the effect of the economic crisis on people's access to clean safe water in Juba.⁷

Families that Oxfam spoke with said they simply cannot afford to buy enough water for their use, as prices have more than doubled. Some are spending 15% of their income to buy about 30 litres of water for one person's daily use.⁸

Others have cut their water consumption to only five litres per person per day, far below international requirements and just a third of the minimum recommended even in emergencies.⁹ Others are considering returning to their villages if only to get sufficient water.¹⁰

Currently, the majority of water delivered in Juba is untreated and its quality is not adequately monitored. The government can no longer afford to provide water-treating chlorine. Expensive fuel used by water producers for pumps at filling stations as well as for water trucks and bottling factories has increased the cost of water for sale.

The poorest and those farther away from water filling stations in the city are hardest hit. Because of fuel prices, trucks are opting to deliver closer to the filling stations, limiting supply for people on the outskirts of Juba.¹¹ Some trucks do not deliver there at all. The limited water people get is used for drinking and cooking, with little left for their personal hygiene. In such conditions, diseases like cholera can spread far and fast.

"We buy water from the blue water trucks every three days. They used to come regularly, but don't anymore. When we ask what's wrong, they say that we live too far and fuel is expensive or not available."

Emmanuel, a resident of Gudele located on the outskirts of Juba.

SYSTEM IN STRIFE

South Sudan's public water system is in a dire situation.

There has been little government investment that would increase availability and quantity of water to people. A governmental water agency, South Sudan Urban Water Corporation, has acknowledged that the system has deteriorated in the last five years.

This could explain why only an estimated 13% of Juba residents can access municipal water supply, mostly through a small piped network, boreholes (half of which are dysfunctional) and a single public water filling station on the river bank.¹²

The public system is complemented by a patchwork of small private water suppliers, which end up delivering relatively expensive and low quality water. There are about 300 registered trucks supplying water throughout the city. However, delivery has decreased by 30% as fuel has become expensive.¹³

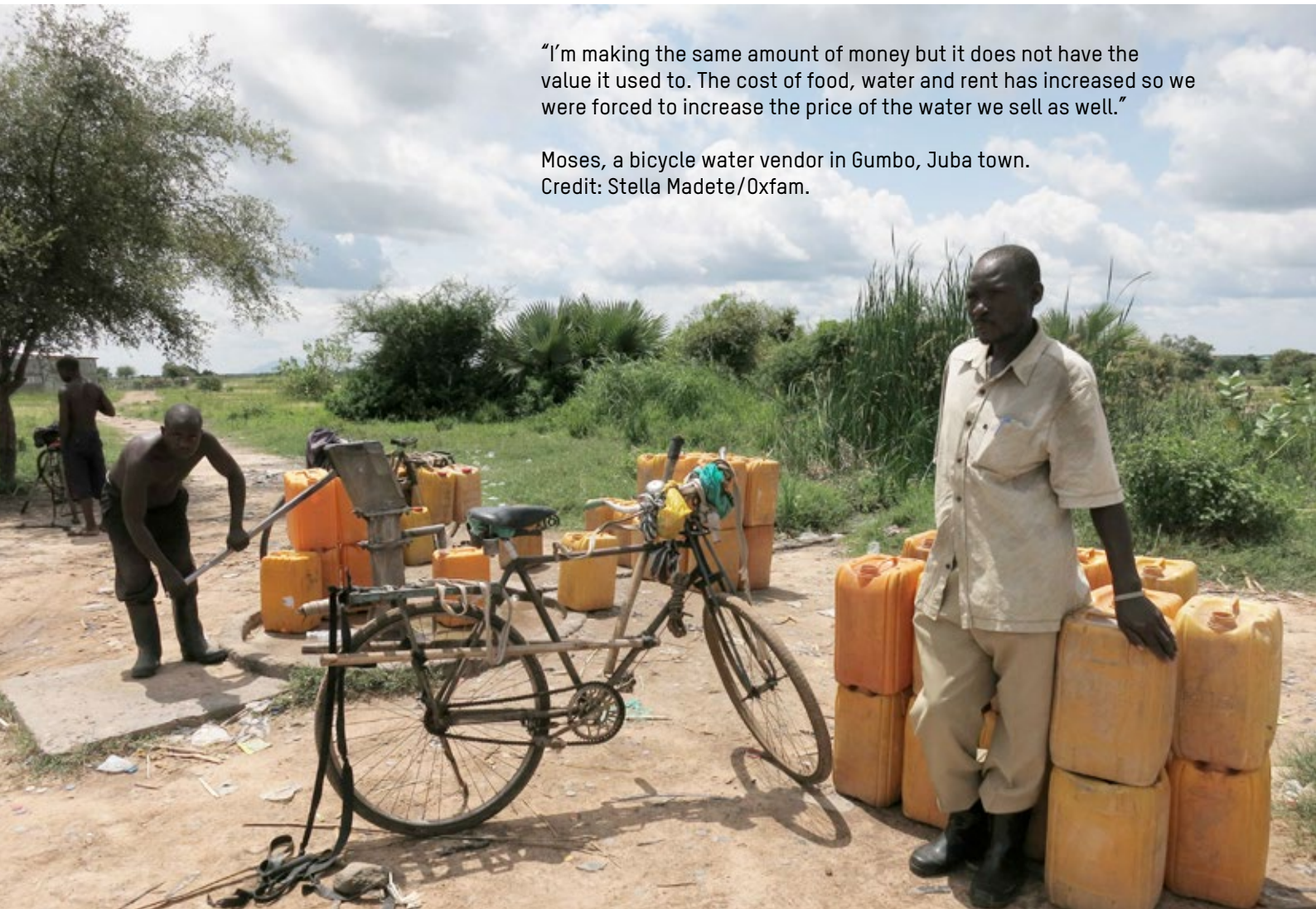
At least 11 private filling stations pump water from the Nile which is then distributed by water trucks and bicycle vendors. Water is also produced by bottling water factories. But as fuel costs have increased, operation overheads have also gone up by around 35%. For some bottling companies, production has dropped to just 10% of their total capacity. Others have closed shop altogether. As shelf prices increase, bottled water vendors are selling less than half the quantity they used to.¹⁴

The government regulates the water market including pricing. There is a plan to increase the cost of pumped river water in the public filling station by 33% awaiting cabinet approval. As prices increase, the already shrunk profit margins for a bicycle vendor in Juba earning a daily average of 25 SSP (approximately USD 2.5) will be squeezed even further.¹⁵

13%
Residents in Juba with
access to municipal
water supply.

"I'm making the same amount of money but it does not have the value it used to. The cost of food, water and rent has increased so we were forced to increase the price of the water we sell as well."

Moses, a bicycle water vendor in Gumbo, Juba town.
Credit: Stella Madete/Oxfam.



Bicycle vendors and water truck operators collecting water from the Nile in Juba. Credit: Katrice King/Oxfam.



WAKE-UP CALL

If the economic crisis worsens, many private filling station owners have told Oxfam they would have to stop operating. Bottled water factories and bicycle vendors would continue to shut down. As a result, more treated and untreated water will be sold illegally and at higher prices.

People will likely turn to desperate, unsafe solutions, putting them at further risk of disease. Potential conflicts among consumers could flare up at water points as people have to wait long hours for water. There could also be conflicts between vendors and consumers who have to pay prices they cannot afford for such a basic need.

On top of that, war continues to ravage the country. Two million people have been displaced, including over 600,000 living in neighbouring countries.¹⁶ 400,000 children have been forced out of school because of the fighting.

By the end of July, 40% of the population will be severely hungry.¹⁷ Communicable diseases such as cholera could claim more lives if people cannot access safe water.

The government of South Sudan must tackle this worsening cycle of misery. Like the citizens of any other country, the people of South Sudan deserve protection and delivery of basic services such as clean, safe and affordable water, provided by the government.

"The closest water point is too far for me to collect water. When I have no other options, I get water from a nearby river, it's not clean, but it's something."

Sura, a resident of Gudele 2, located on the outskirts of Juba.

AID IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Throughout Juba, Oxfam is fixing boreholes, supporting effective chlorination of water delivered by water trucks and increasing water treatment infrastructure for bicycle vendors to increase supply of safe water.

In one Protection of Civilian (PoC) site within a UN base in Juba where over 28,000 people live in crowded conditions, Oxfam is promoting good cleanliness practices, such as hand washing and the cleaning of water storage facilities.

Oxfam is also installing hand washing facilities at strategic locations within the site and working with restaurant owners to raise awareness about the importance of using clean treated water for cooking and selling food.

However, concerted action from the government of South Sudan as well as increased funding from international donors is needed to ensure people get enough clean water.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Government of South Sudan must prioritize investment in South Sudan's water and health infrastructure. The official declaration of the outbreak has boosted public hygiene promotion. But saving lives will need more than quick fixes. Public service provision, not military spending, must top the budgetary agenda. Immediate measures such as paying for water treatment chemicals and fuel subsidies can drive up production and reduce water prices for poorer families.

International donors should urgently fund water projects in South Sudan's urban areas to prevent future outbreaks. Funding is needed now so that humanitarian agencies like Oxfam can help South Sudanese access clean and sufficient water through cost-effective ways, such as water truck chlorination, solar-powered water pumps and water storage facilities in vulnerable areas.

South Sudanese leaders should bring an immediate end to the fighting and focus on service delivery for their citizens. A real and lasting peace must represent the interests of the people and communities of South Sudan. Without peace, the economy will continue to deteriorate and essential services such as access to adequate safe water will remain a dream for many.

End notes

1. World Health Organization and Republic of South Sudan, Situation report #17 on Cholera in South Sudan, 8 July 2015. In addition to the number mentioned above for Juba county, there have also been 59 cases including one death in Bor and its vicinity.
2. Government of the Republic of South Sudan (2011) South Sudan Development Plan 2011–2013, cited in Victor Vuni Joseph, "Water and Sanitation Hygiene in South Sudan," South Sudan Medical Journal, May 2014.
3. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the Republic of South Sudan, May 2015 Food Security and Nutrition Analysis, Key Messages, p. 1; and FAO, "Sky-rocketing Food Prices in South Sudan are Deepening Food Insecurity," 2 July 2015, <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/fao-in-action/stories/stories-detail/en/c/296963/>
4. The Inflation rate from May 2014 to May 2015 was +39.5%. WFP, South Sudan Market Price Monitoring Bulletin, May 2015.
5. WFP, South Sudan Market Price Monitoring Bulletin, April 2015.
6. WFP, South Sudan Market Price Monitoring Bulletin, May 2015.
7. Oxfam, The Economic Crisis and its Effect on Safe Water Supply in Juba, South Sudan, June 2015.
8. Ibid, p. 17.
9. Some Families in Gambele, on the outskirts of Juba, have told Oxfam they have reduced their consumption to 5 litres per person per day. 15 litres per person per day is the SPHERE standard for humanitarian provision in emergencies. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. The most recent available figure is from 2009, indicating that only 13% of Juba residents accessed the public network. With the growth of the population of Juba, there is reason to believe that this figure is even lower now. JICA, Juba Urban Water Supply and Capacity Development Study in the Southern Sudan, 2009.
13. Oxfam, The Economic Crisis and its Effect on Water, June 2015, p. 11.
14. Ibid, p. 13.
15. Ibid, p. 10 and p. 14.
16. UNHCR, "South Sudan: More than 2.25 million now displaced," 8 July 2015. <http://www.unrefugees.org.au/news-and-media/news-headlines/south-sudan-more-than-225-million-now-displaced-in-south-sudan-and-across-its-borders>
17. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the Republic of South Sudan, May 2015 Food Security and Nutrition Analysis, Key Messages, p. 1.