

# THE F-WORD WE *shouldn't* USE

It's unarguably a humanitarian crisis – South Sudan has been gripped by a conflict-driven hunger emergency that could leave thousands of children and adults facing death. But how to talk about it to the public has been challenging.

The F-word on all our lips – is famine. For months, we've been expecting it to be declared. Violent clashes in South Sudan have so far forced 1.7 million people to flee their homes, leaving behind crops, food supplies and entire livelihoods.

Thirteen-year-old Chuol\* recalls leaving his family's land, where his father and siblings were shot. "We just ran. We were running through crossfire with bullets flying all around. We had to leave without any belongings, without our cattle... they even took our cattle."

Others, like Nyandong\* have stories of survival that would be traumatic for any mother. "We were all in Bor when the fighting started. Innocent people were killed ... we crouched and hid behind a fence ... I could see the scared faces of my children, and armed men walking the streets looking for people to kill," she says.

"When the sun set, we left. We took nothing and it took us 30 days to walk here. We ate the leaves off the trees and thought we would die of thirst."

Enduring perilous journeys to safety, many have survived the fighting only to now face starvation in camps and border villages where food is scarce and crops have not been planted. Children eat grass and leaves to stave off the ongoing hunger which, if not

addressed immediately, could see the death of 50,000 malnourished children by Christmas and escalate into full-blown famine.

Only, because it's not famine right now the world has not taken notice, preoccupied with more attention-grabbing crises like Gaza/Israel, Iraq and Ukraine.

Davina Jeffery, a Save the Children Food Security and Livelihoods Advisor, travelled to South Sudan where she says famine is still a few months off, but that more people will die before famine is formally declared.

"What is happening is not a new problem and was documented following the Horn of Africa famine in 2011," says Davina.

"A study on the crisis found more deaths occurred during the period before the large humanitarian scale-up, before famine was declared" – which meant that more people died in the "emergency" phase than during the famine phase.

Davina is also acutely aware that not using the F-word now, means little media attention and even less funding, which causes other problems.

"Late funding leads to late delivery of seeds to affected areas ... if full funding for seed delivery is not received before October, famine is likely to hit South Sudan in the first half of 2015," explains Davina.



Call it what you will – children and adults in South Sudan are extremely and distressingly hungry. We launched a "hunger" appeal and called on Save the Children supporters to help.

Already many have given generously and helped reach more than 180,000 children and adults in desperate need.

This includes reaching as many dangerously malnourished children as possible with highly nutritious food and emergency healthcare. And it includes giving seeds and tools to families so they can plant much-needed crops immediately.

We don't know how this will unfold. It's still estimated that by the end of the year 7 million people – half the South Sudanese population – will be in need of humanitarian aid. Let's hope the world responds before the dreaded F-word becomes a reality. ■

**Give now and help stop famine being declared at [savethechildren.org.au/southsudan](https://savethechildren.org.au/southsudan)**

\*Names have been changed to protect identities.