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By Naureen Hossain - IPS UN Bureau / Globetrotter

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Global News Dispatches: 4 Stories

Biodigesters Light Up Clean Energy Stoves in Rural El Salvador

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Note to Editors: This is a selection of news wire reports that have been edited to be relevant for audiences for the next two weeks. You are welcome to select and publish individual items or the whole stack.

Headlines in This News Package:

- **A Shot in the Arm Can Prevent Cervical Cancer**
- **Biodigesters Light Up Clean Energy Stoves in Rural El Salvador**
- **Is the Philippines a Beneficiary of U.S.-Chinese Confrontation?**
- **Education Is a ‘Life-Saving Intervention’ in Emergencies, Says South Sudan’s Education Minister**

[NEWS ITEM TEXT]

A Shot in the Arm Can Prevent Cervical Cancer

[1,863 words]

“Listen to your body, and if there is anything strange happening, do not ignore it,” is the advice of 57-year-old Afshan Bhurgri, a cancer survivor.

Eight years ago, she was diagnosed with cervical cancer at a time when she was “in a good place” in life. Her kids were grown up, and she had more time to herself. A fitness freak, the schoolteacher’s daily routine included going to the gym daily. “I joined a creative writing class as I loved penning my thoughts!” she reminisced.

But then everything changed when she found out she had cancer.

Cancer of the cervix uteri is the fourth most common cancer among women worldwide, with an estimated 604,127 new cases and 341,831 deaths in 2020.

In Pakistan, an estimated [73.8 million](#) women over the age of 15 are at risk of developing cervical cancer caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV).

In the absence of complete data, it is estimated that of the 5,000 women diagnosed with this cancer in Pakistan, some 3,000 lose their lives every year due to lack of access to prevention, screening, and treatment, thus making it the [third](#)-leading cause of cancer-related deaths in women of the reproductive age group in the country, after breast and ovarian cancers. Up to 88 percent of cervical cancer cases are due to HPV serotypes 16 and 18, as [reported](#) by the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

“We are short on authentic data on the prevalence of the disease burden,” said Dr. Arshad Chandio, who works at Jhpiego Pakistan as an immunization lead. His organization, which has supported HPV vaccine introduction in seven countries with the support of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, is partnering with the federal and provincial governments, along with WHO, UNICEF, and USAID, to implement a roadmap for cervical cancer prevention and introduction of HPV vaccine in Pakistan. Cervical cancer is the only cancer that is preventable by a vaccine.

“Without authentic data, our plan to eradicate this disease will not be watertight,” admitted Dr. Irshad Memon, the director general of the Expanded Program on Immunization in Sindh.

Dr. Shahid Pervez, a senior consultant histopathologist at the Aga Khan University Hospital (AKUH), co-chair of the country’s newly established National Cancer Registry, recommends legislation to make reporting of cancer mandatory. “This will be one way of collecting basic data, at one place, which is expected by international agencies to roll out an effective cancer control program in Pakistan,” he added.

Although Bhurgri had knowledge about cancer of the cervix and went for regular health checkups and screenings, her doctors did not carry out full examinations, which led to the infection turning cancerous. It all started in 2009, five years prior to being diagnosed with cancer when she started noticing a “foul smell emanating from my vagina” after her period became “heavier” than usual.

“Let alone screening and testing for the cancer, many health care professionals do not even know of the disease, or how women get infected,” pointed out Chandio.

“I am an educated person, I could afford to get the best medical help, and I went to three of the city’s top gynecologists, got pap smears done on their requests over the years, and I

was only sent for HPV test when it was too late,” rued Bhurgri. In 2014, a doctor suggested an ultrasound which gave a true picture. A biopsy confirmed she had cervical cancer.

After her biopsy, Bhurgri started reading up on cervical cancer, and one of the indications was the foul vaginal smell.

“It could have been nipped in the bud if only the doctors had carried out a thorough examination,” said gynecologist and obstetrician Dr. Azra Ahsan, president of the [Association for Mothers and Newborns](#), blaming “sheer negligence” on the part of her fraternity.

“A gynecological consultation must not only be limited to a conversation across the table,” said Ahsan, but should include an “examination on the couch including a proper internal examination, ideally a pap smear and visual inspection,” especially if, like Bhurgri, a patient was complaining of heavy bleeding and a foul smell.

Bhurgri’s journey toward wellness was tough. A radical hysterectomy was recommended, and her cervix, her uterus, and her ovaries were removed. Twenty-eight radiations and five chemos later, over a five-month period, she was given a clean chit by her oncologist. The cost of treatment, back in 2014 at a private hospital, was a whopping Rs 30,000,000 (\$104,671).

Screening Can Save Lives

Although Bhurgri’s cancer may have remained under the radar despite regular screening via pap smears, doctors say HPV and pap smear tests are the best way to screen a woman for cervical cancer. They can identify patients who are at high risk of developing pre-cancerous changes on the cervix as well as pick up those who have already developed these changes.

These precancerous lesions can be treated before they turn into cancer. Sadly, in Pakistan, the uptake of pap smears is negligible and estimated to be as low as 2 percent.

According to Dr. Uzma Chishti, assistant professor and consultant gynecologic oncologist, Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology, AKUH, Pakistan’s health system is so financially stretched that it cannot afford to provide screening of women by these expensive tests. Instead, she recommends WHO’s recommendations of performing a visual inspection of the cervix by acetic acid (VIA) to screen women to help reduce the incidence of cervical cancer. “VIA is an alternative screening test for low- and middle-income countries like ours,” she said.

Vaccinations the Best Option

The WHO triple intervention recommendation to eliminate cervical cancer in countries like Pakistan includes scaling up HPV vaccination to 90 percent for girls aged between 9 to 14, twice-lifetime cervical screening to 70 percent, and treatment of pre-invasive lesions and invasive cancer to 90 percent by 2030. “All three are essential if we want to eliminate cervical cancer completely,” emphasized said Ahsan.

HPV vaccinations to prevent cervical cancer are the way forward as they provide primary prevention, said Chishti, in the absence of VIA, screenings, and pap smear tests. Almost 60 percent of cervical cancer cases occur in countries that have not yet introduced HPV vaccination. Pakistan is one of them.

Once up and about, the first thing Bhurgri did was get her 14-year-old daughter vaccinated against HPV. “My older daughter remains unvaccinated as she was 21 then and studying abroad. She needed three shots and could not make it to that timeline,” she said.

In Pakistan, two globally licensed HPV vaccines—Cervarix (protective against HPV serotypes 16 and 18) and Gardasil (against 6, 11, 16, and 18) were available until a few years ago, but very few doctors, even in the private sector, were prescribing them.

“We made it available in our clinic and counseled any and everyone, but it mostly fell on deaf ears, and very few people actually got vaccinated. As a result, huge amounts of vaccines expired in the warehouses, and the pharmaceutical firms decided to not make it available in Pakistan,” explained Ahsan.

In 2021, medical students at the AKUH interviewed 384 women attending outpatient clinics between the ages of 15 to 50 to find out their knowledge about cervical cancer. They found that of the 61.2 percent of women who had heard about cervical cancer, 47.0 percent knew about pap smear tests, and among them, 73 percent had gotten a pap test. A total of 25.5 percent of women, out of the 61.2 percent, knew that a vaccine existed for prevention, but only 9.8 percent had been vaccinated against human papillomavirus. The study concluded that a majority of the women interviewed for the study belonged to a higher socioeconomic class and were mostly educated, yet their knowledge regarding the prevention and screening of cervical cancer was poor. “This reflects that the knowledge levels as a whole would be considerably lower in the city’s general population,” the study concluded.

But this may change if Pakistan introduces the HPV vaccine at a national level, utilizing routine effective and established immunization delivery strategies. According to Dr. Uzma Shamsi, a cancer epidemiologist at the AKUH, implementing the HPV vaccine at a national level in Pakistan could save hundreds of thousands of lives annually.

Shamsi highlighted the challenges of discussing HPV in a conservative society where sexual health topics are hardly discussed due to the embarrassment and taboo associated with sexually transmitted infections (STIs). This communication conundrum has resulted in a general lack of information about the disease. “There is a total lack of information about HPV, cervical cancer, and its prevention among the masses,” she said.

But the benefits are enormous, and hundreds of thousands of lives could be saved each year, she emphasized.

Pakistan is in talks with Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, to support the country in including the single-dose HPV (two covers four strains) vaccine in its routine immunization program. “It will probably take another two years and \$16 million before we can roll out the vaccine, but when it happens, it will be a country-wide campaign,” confirmed Memon. Shamsi predicted some tribulation because the primary target group for vaccination is pre-adolescent girls. “A new vaccine for a new target age group comes with its own set of challenges in a society where conspiracy theories about vaccination [programs], stigma, and misinformation about cancer and sexual health persist,” she said. And so before the actual rollout, Shamsi emphasized, it was important to increase awareness about the HPV virus, cervical cancer causes, and vaccine’s safety and usage among the general public, patients, and health care professionals while actively dispelling misinformation.

Memon agreed that “conversation around the vaccine must begin.” For its part, the Sindh government set aside Rs 100 million (\$365,884) for advocacy of HPV vaccine uptake in its current budget. “We will initiate a dissemination campaign once we know when the HPV vaccination program is to begin,” he said. The Sindh province was also the first to initiate the typhoid conjugate virus vaccine after an extensively drug-resistant virus was found in the province. He was hopeful there would be less resistance to the HPV vaccine after the successful administration of measles and rubella and the pediatric COVID-19 vaccines earlier.

However, said Memon, “We will need more women vaccinators this time as young girls are shy of rolling their shirt sleeves up for male vaccinators.” With up to 125,000 female health workers across Pakistan, who were earlier trained by Gavi for MR immunization, which is a much more difficult vaccine to administer (being subcutaneous) as opposed to the HPV one (which is muscular), he said, this workforce can be engaged to get trained for this vaccination campaign too.

In the end, however, according to Chandio, “without a strong political will and leadership, a national HPV vaccination program cannot become a reality in Pakistan to eliminate this

largely preventable cancer among women.”

Fighting her cancer has changed Bhurgri in more ways than one. Her message to women is to “not put yourself aside; make yourself a priority.” While she continues to lead a healthy life—going to the gym, eating healthy, resting—she said, “You cannot go on and pick up where you left off.”

Note: This feature was supported by the Sabin Vaccine Institute.

By Zofeen Ebrahim - IPS UN Bureau / Globetrotter

Biodigesters Light Up Clean Energy Stoves in Rural El Salvador

[1,315 words]

A new technology that has arrived in rural villages in El Salvador makes it possible for small farming families to generate biogas with their feces and use it for cooking—something that at first sounded to them like science fiction and also a bit smelly.

In the countryside, composting latrines, which separate urine from feces to produce organic fertilizer, are very popular. But can they really produce gas for cooking?

“It seemed incredible to me,” Marisol Menjívar told IPS as she explained how her biodigester, which is part of a system that includes a toilet and a stove, was installed in the backyard of her house in the village of El Corozal, near Suchitoto, a municipality in the central Salvadoran department of Cuscatlán.

“When the first ones were installed here, I was excited to see that they had stoves hooked up, and I asked if I could have one too,” added Marisol, 48. Hers was installed in March.

El Corozal, population 200, is one of eight rural settlements that make up the Laura López Rural Water and Sanitation Association (Arall), a community organization responsible for providing water to 465 local families.

The families in the small villages, who are dedicated to the cultivation of corn and beans, had to flee the region during the country’s 1980-1992 civil war, due to the fighting.

After the armed conflict, they returned to rebuild their lives and work collectively to provide basic services, especially drinking water, as have many other community organizations, in the absence of government coverage.

In this Central American country of 6.7 million inhabitants, 78.4 percent of rural households have access to piped water, while 10.8 percent are supplied by wells and 10.7 percent by other means.

Simple Green Technology

The biodigester program in rural areas is being promoted by the [Salvadoran Water](#)

[Authority \(Asa\).](#)

Since November 2022, the government agency has installed around 500 of these systems free of charge in several villages around the country.

The aim is to enable small farmers to produce sustainable energy, biogas at no cost, which boosts their income and living standards, while at the same time improving the environment.

The program provides each family with a kit that includes a biodigester, a biotoilet, and a small one-burner stove.

In El Corozal, five of these kits were installed by Asa in November 2022, to see if people would accept them or not. To date, 21 have been delivered, and there is a waiting list for more.

“With the first ones... set up, the idea was for people to see how they worked, because there was a lot of ignorance and even fear,” Arall’s president, Enrique Menjívar, told IPS.

In El Corozal, there are many families with the surname Menjívar, because of the tradition of close relatives putting down roots in the same place.

“Here we’re almost all related,” Enrique added.

The biodigester is a hermetically sealed polyethylene bag, 2.10 meters long, 1.15 meters wide, and 1.30 meters high, inside which bacteria decompose feces or other organic materials.

This process generates biogas, clean energy that is used to fuel the stoves.

The toilets are mounted on a 1-meter-high cement slab in latrines in the backyard. They are made of porcelain and have a handle on one side that opens and closes the stool inlet hole.

They also have a small hand pump, similar to the ones used to inflate bicycle tires, and when the handle is pushed, water is pumped from a bucket to flush the waste down the pipe.

The underground pipe carries the biomass by gravity to the biodigester, located about five meters away.

The system can also be fed with organic waste, by means of a tube with a hole at one end, which must be opened and closed.

Once it has been produced, the biogas is piped through a metal tube to the small stove mounted inside the house.

“I don’t even use matches, I just turn the knob and it lights up,” said Marisol, a homemaker and caregiver. Her husband Manuel Menjívar is a subsistence farmer, and

they have a young daughter.

In El Corozal, biodigesters have been installed for families of four or five members, and the equipment generates 300 liters of biogas during the night, enough to use for two hours a day, according to the technical specifications of [Coenergy](#), the company that imports and markets the devices.

But there are also kits that are used by two related families who live next to each other and share the equipment, which includes, in addition to the toilet, a larger biodigester and a two-burner stove.

With more sophisticated equipment, electricity could be generated from biogas produced from landfill waste or farm manure, although this is not yet being done in El Salvador.

Saving Money While Caring for the Environment

The families of El Corozal who have the new latrines and stoves are happy with the results.

What they value the most is saving money by cooking with gas produced by themselves, at no cost.

They used to cook on wood-burning stoves, in the case of food that took longer to make, or on liquefied gas stoves, at a cost of \$13 per gas cylinder.

Marleni Menjívar, for example, used two cylinders a month, mainly because of the high level of consumption demanded by the family business of making artisanal cheeses, including a very popular local kind of cottage cheese.

Every day she has to cook 23 liters of whey, the liquid left after milk has been curdled. This consumes the biogas produced overnight.

For meals during the day Marleni still uses the liquefied gas stove, but now she only buys one cylinder a month instead of two, a savings of about \$13 per month.

“These savings are important for families here in the countryside,” said Marleni, 28, the mother of a four-year-old girl. The rest of her family is made up of her brother and grandfather.

“We also save water,” she added.

The biotoilet requires only 1.2 liters of water per flush, less than conventional toilets.

In addition, the soils are protected from contamination by septic tank latrines, which are widely used in rural areas but are leaky and unhygienic.

The new technology avoids these problems.

The liquids resulting from the decomposition process flow through an underground pipe into a pit that functions as a filter, with several layers of gravel and sand. This prevents

pollution of the soil and aquifers.

Also, as a by-product of the decomposition process, organic liquid fertilizer is produced for use on crops.

Checking on Site: Zero Stench

Due to a lack of information, people were initially concerned that if the biogas used in the stoves came from the decomposition of the family's feces, it would probably stink.

And, worst of all, perhaps the food would also smell.

But little by little these doubts and fears faded away as families saw how the first devices worked.

“That was the first thing they asked, if the gas smelled bad, or if what we were cooking smelled bad,” said Marleni, remembering how the neighbors came to her house to check for themselves when she got the latrine and stove installed in December 2022.

“That was because of the little information that was available, but then we found that this was not the case, our doubts were cleared up and we saw there were no odors,” she added. She said that, like almost everyone in the village, her family used to have a dry composting toilet, but it stank and generated cockroaches and flies.

“All that has been eliminated, the bathrooms are completely hygienic and clean, and we even had them tiled to make them look nicer,” Marleni said.

She remarked that hygiene is important to her, as her little girl can now go to the bathroom by herself, without worrying about cockroaches and flies.

By Edgardo Ayala - IPS / Globetrotter

Is the Philippines a Beneficiary of U.S.-Chinese Confrontation?

[1,280 words]

When President Ferdinand Marcos was running an authoritarian regime in the Philippines (1965-1986), he was once asked about rumors of rigged elections in his country.

“I promised I will give you the right to vote,” he said, according to a joke circulating at that time, “But I did not say anything about counting those votes.”

The Marcos regime—and the rise and fall of Ferdinand Marcos and First Lady Imelda—is now being portrayed as a glittering musical titled “Here Lies Love” on Broadway: the showcase for some of the biggest hits in New York’s famed theatre district.

The New York Times ran a review under the headline “[Disco and a Dictatorship: Brewing a Combustible Mix.](#)”

The U.S., which was a close political and military ally of the Marcos dictatorship, took a

backseat after his fall from power—and never exerted the same influence under successive post-Marcos governments.

But the U.S. has now resurrected its relationship and has made a strong comeback under Marcos's son, Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who took over as president in June 2022, and whose country is now going to be one of the biggest single beneficiaries of the growing political—and possibly military—confrontation between the U.S. and China.

The positive fallout is on the Philippines as the U.S. bolsters its military relations with Manila with millions of dollars in U.S. arms and security assistance.

The U.S. has also designated the Philippines a Major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA), strengthening security ties between the two nations.

The Philippines joins the privileged group of 19 MNNAs, including Israel, Australia, Egypt, South Korea, Jordan, and New Zealand, among others.

They are all “close American allies that have strategic working relationships with U.S. armed forces” but are not members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The strong new relationship has also contributed to the development of significant opportunities for U.S. defense and security equipment manufacturers and service providers to enhance the Philippines' self-defense capabilities, according to the U.S. Commercial Service (USCS), the trade promotion arm of the U.S. Department of Commerce's International Trade Administration.

The U.S. provides an average of about \$120 million per year in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) to the Philippines. In 2023, it will be in excess of \$200 million.

The U.S. Government has expressed its intent to make available to the Philippines \$100 million in additional Foreign Military Financing to be used by the Philippine Department of National Defense (DND) to fund its armed forces modernization programs.

According to the USCS, the Philippines' defense market is contingent with the 15-year modernization program (2013-2028) currently underway.

“With the current challenges faced by the Philippines, including maritime disputes with China in the West Philippine Sea,” the Department of National Defense reiterated that air power is a critical component in its joint forces, especially in territorial defense.

The Philippine DND is a key player in the Indo-Pacific region as it continues to bolster its defense capabilities and maintain regional stability.

Under Horizon 3, the desired capabilities are focused on enhancements to C4ISTAR, air defense systems, air and surface interdiction systems, anti-tank systems, and ground rocket systems, all pending approval by the Department of National Defense.

During a briefing in April 2022, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said: “Our security alliance is an enduring source of strength for both of our nations. Today, we focused on ways to continue our close partnership under the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement so that our forces can work even more closely together, including to provide humanitarian assistance and respond to disasters.”

“We also discussed deepening our robust economic ties, including through the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity. We’re working closely with other IPEF partners to build out this framework to help our economies grow faster and fairer so that all our people can reach their full potential, lead on issues shaping the 21st-century economy, and do it in a way that is sustainable for our planet.”

At the April briefing, U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III said the two countries had just celebrated the start of their 38th annual Exercise Balikatan.

He said more than 17,000 troops are participating in 2023. “It is the largest and most complex iteration in the exercise’s history.”

“Now the commitments that we made today will further integrate our strong bilateral ties into multilateral networks, including with Japan and Australia, and we discussed plans to conduct combined maritime activities with like-minded partners in the South China Sea later this year as we work to enhance our collective deterrence.”

“Our alliance is ultimately guided by our deep and enduring commitment to freedom. So, we’re not just allies, we’re democratic allies, and the United States and the Philippines are bound by a common vision for the future—a vision that’s anchored in the rule of law and freedom of the seas and respect for the territorial integrity of sovereign states.”

Mao Ning, a spokeswoman for China’s foreign ministry, was quoted as saying: “Out of self-interest, the United States continues to strengthen its military deployment in the region with a zero-sum mentality, which is exacerbating tension in the region and endangering regional peace and stability.”

She said, “Countries in the region should remain vigilant against this and avoid being coerced and used by the United States.”

In February 2023, the Biden administration announced a new conventional arms transfer policy. One of the objectives is to “Prevent arms transfers that risk facilitating or otherwise contributing to violations of human rights or international humanitarian law...”

After a meeting with Philippine President Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr. at the White House in May 2023, the Biden administration issued a [statement](#) that said in part, “The United States and the Philippines’ shared democratic values strengthen our alliance

immeasurably.”

Promoting respect for human rights and the rule of law, and ensuring civil society leaders and members of marginalized communities are safe from violence, are key priorities for the U.S.-Philippines relationship.

Natalie J. Goldring, a Visiting Professor of the Practice at the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University, told IPS, “The Biden administration’s new conventional arms transfer policy is a welcome development. But the policy needs to be fully implemented to be effective.”

“The U.S. security relationship with the Philippines is an important test of whether the policy rhetoric will become reality. So far, the signs are not encouraging.”

[Reporting](#) by Human Rights Watch* indicates that human rights violations continue to occur regularly under the Marcos administration. They report that “Marcos has done little to address the pending human rights issues.”

Police and their agents continue their ‘drug war’ killings, though at a lower rate than during the Duterte administration. “The authorities remain responsible for extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and arbitrary arrests of activists and outspoken critics.”

“It’s time to stop rewarding countries that systematically abuse the human rights of their citizens. At a minimum, U.S. arms and security assistance to the Philippines should be paused until the Marcos administration demonstrates significant improvement in its human rights record,” said Goldring, who also represents the Acronym Institute at the United Nations on conventional weapons and arms trade issues.

“Continuing to provide U.S. military assistance and arms transfers sends exactly the wrong message. Business as usual is likely to perpetuate the human rights abuses the Biden administration claims to oppose,” she declared.

***HRW statement:**

“[Philippines: Marcos Failing on Rights: A Year On, Course Correction Needed.](#)” Human Rights Watch, June 28, 2023, <https://www.hrw.org/node/385256/printable/print>.

[White House Statement on Marcos’s Visit:](#)

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/01/fact-sheet-investing-in-the-special-friendship-and-alliance-between-the-united-states-and-the-philippines/#:~:text=The%20Philippines%20is%20the%20United,the%20broader%20Indo%2DPacific%20region>.

By Thalif Deen - IPS UN Bureau / Globetrotter

Education Is a ‘Life-Saving Intervention’ in Emergencies, Says South Sudan’s Education Minister

[952 words]

In times of crisis, education is an essential component of humanitarian intervention packages, South Sudan’s Minister of General Education and Instruction Awut Deng Acuil told IPS in an exclusive interview.

She was speaking to IPS during the UN’s ECOSOC High-Level Political Forum, during which she participated in the side event, “[Ensuring Education Continuity: The Roles of Education in Emergencies, Protracted Crises and Building Peace.](#)”

Years of conflict in South Sudan and the region, combined with recurring disasters, massive population displacement, and the impact of COVID-19, have adversely impacted the government’s efforts in delivering quality education to all. Yet, their interest and commitment to invest in inclusive education remains.

“Every time there is a crisis, there is a rush for humanitarian assistance as a life-saving intervention. But I think education (should be part) of this as well. When people run away from conflict or natural disasters, they are mostly women and children,” Acuil said.

“These children arrive exhausted and traumatized, and what is crucial is that the (humanitarian) intervention is integrated. We must also work at the same time to create a safe environment where these children can continue to go to school. This helps them psychologically to be engaged in learning (rather) than thinking of what they have gone through,” she continued.

“Education is life-saving. They will play, they will get lessons, they will get counseling from those teachers who are well-trained in [trauma] counseling... All these interventions provide them with a crucial sense of normalcy.”

Interestingly, she said, the first thing children in crisis ask is: “Can we go to school?”

According to UNHCR, close to [200,000 people](#)—a majority of whom are children and women—have crossed to South Sudan since April to flee the conflict in Sudan. International humanitarian partners work with the government to ensure the new arrivals receive health, nutrition, and schooling.

“South Sudan has an open-door policy. As soon as they are settled, children have to go to school. [We are] building temporary shelters for them to go to school. Supporting teachers, who will be helping these children, is key.”

Acuil said Education Cannot Wait has been at the forefront of assisting with setting up quality, holistic education opportunities for incoming children. She also stressed the

importance of integrating refugees into the national system, citing South Sudan's inclusion policy as a best practice in the region.

“We have refugee teachers who are head teachers in our public schools. We have refugees in our boarding schools and public schools in South Sudan.”

ECW recently extended its [Multi-Year Resilience Programme](#) in the country with a new \$40 million catalytic grant. GPE provided an additional \$10 million for the program.

The three-year program will be delivered by [Save the Children](#), the [Norwegian Refugee Council](#), and [Finn Church Aid](#), in close coordination with the Ministry of General Education and Instruction and other partners. The investment will reach at least 135,000 crisis-affected children and youth—including refugees, returnees, and host-community children—with holistic education supports that improve access to school, ensure quality learning, enhance inclusivity for girls and children with disabilities, and build resilience to future shocks.

Total ECW funding in South Sudan now tops \$72 million. ECW is calling on five donors to step up with \$5 million each to provide an additional \$25 million in funding to the education in emergency response in South Sudan.

The needs are pressing for the world's youngest nation. South Sudan continues to receive refugees fleeing the conflict in Sudan and requires additional support to address the converging challenges of conflict, climate change, forced displacement, and other protracted crises.

“The multi-year program that was launched last month will help a lot in terms of access, infrastructure, and teacher training. We have ‘hard-to-reach areas’ that have never seen a school, never seen a classroom. These are the places we have prioritized and targeted with this \$40 million grant. Along with girls' education, and children with disabilities, and also materials for education, especially printing more books.”

Acuil highlighted the importance of girls' education, in a context where cultural norms and practices, including child marriage, hinder their access to school. She said the country is tackling the issue through a vast campaign championed by the president that targets traditional leaders, civil society, members of parliament, executives, educators, teachers, and students themselves.

“Our president has taken the lead in campaigning for girls' education. This year he declared free and compulsory education for all to ensure South Sudan makes up for the two lost generations due to conflict in the country. He is encouraging us to [open] boarding schools for girls, especially. In primary school, the disparity is so close, and in

some states, we have more girls than boys. But when they transition to the secondary level, only 18 percent complete their 12-years education.”

Acuil called on UN member states to support education in emergencies and invest more resources.

“Education Cannot Wait has shown and demonstrated that when there are crises, they have a prompt response to help children. Whether during disasters or man-made wars, ECW has been able to do that. We need to focus on that, prioritizing education and also investing in education.”

“If you invest in children today, they will be the leaders of tomorrow. We must help facilitate their education and empower them to help their countries and communities. That is why humanitarian assistance and education should go hand-in-hand.”

“I would like to end this with something I heard from a local girl who said: ‘Education cannot wait, but marriage can wait.’ Our humanity’s strength lies in education, and we must continue to remind those who keep forgetting, and ensure to awaken those who have not yet woken up to be part and parcel of education.”