

PLUNDERING A NATION: How Rampant Corruption Unleashed a Human Rights Crisis in South Sudan

South Sudan is again on the brink of catastrophe. The 2018 peace agreement has been undermined, an endemic economic crisis has worsened, and impunity for crimes has deepened. Worsening humanitarian and human rights crises are compounding the suffering of South Sudanese men, women and children. Systemic government corruption is a major driver of this devastating and unacceptable situation.

At independence in 2011, the country inherited a fragile and underdeveloped economy, alongside the legacies of decades of violent conflict and repression. Yet 14 years later, after over $25.2 billion in oil-related inflows, corruption remains the central factor behind the economic collapse and pervasive human rights violations.

Most South Sudanese lack access to sufficient food, health facilities, schools and other basic services. All parts of South Sudan remain visibly poor and neglected, and the country ranks near the bottom across all global development indicators. Violent competition over the country's wealth is a major driver of conflict, while corrupt diversions of government revenues deprive State institutions of the resources they need to serve the public. This leaves much of the population dependent on foreign donors, who spend more on essential services than the Government itself.

The deteriorating human rights situation in South Sudan is an outcome of a political economy of greed and theft, violent competition over resources, and the deliberate neglect of the rights and wellbeing of current and future generations. The Government's failure to fund core services is a betrayal of the aspirations and hopes of South Sudanese, and a manifest violation of its obligations under international human rights law. To liberate South Sudan from cycles of conflict and widespread immiseration, political leaders must act immediately to end systemic corruption and impunity.

The Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan has examined corruption and its impacts, and recommended measures for the Government to better serve the people and fulfil its international human rights law obligations. This document summarizes the detailed report, available HERE ; (low file size here)

ABOUT THE COMMISSION

The Commission is an independent body, established by the United Nations Human Rights Council to investigate and report on the facts and circumstances of human rights violations in South Sudan. Its three experts are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are supported by a Secretariat in Juba, South Sudan. The Commission applies international standards of fact-finding, including by applying a 'reasonable grounds to believe' standard of proof. Find more about the Commission HERE.

THE REPORT

To assess corruption's relationship with human rights in South Sudan, and to identify measures required to address human rights violation, the 101-page report examines three key areas:

1. Government revenues
2. Government spending
3. Human rights impacts of the corruption in revenue and spending patterns

The Commission's findings are grounded in South Sudan's obligations under international human rights law, including United Nations and African Union treaties. A central instrument is the UN Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which obliges States to allocate the "maximum available resources" to guarantee rights indispensable to the dignity, wellbeing and survival of the population, particularly the right to food, health, and education. These rights also align with South Sudan's commitments under the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The Government is obligated to prioritize food security, hospitals, schools and other core services but has consistently failed to meet these obligations. Rather than prioritizing these rights, the substantial revenues accrued since independence have largely been siphoned off by political elites or squandered through gross mismanagement.

Perpetrators enjoy impunity and are often rewarded with senior government positions. These patterns of systematic theft and privatization of the nation's wealth constitute both economic crimes and human rights violations, incompatible with sustainable development. Tackling corruption is therefore not simply a governance challenge but is an essential prerequisite for advancing human rights in South Sudan.

UNDERDEVELOPMENT

192 of 192

countries in the UN Human Development Index

Despite receiving

OIL INFLOWS

$25.2 Billion

including oil revenues & oil-backed loans borrowed since 2011

Because of

CORRUPTION

180 of 180

countries in the Transparancy International Corruption Perception Index

WORSENING OF AN ENDEMIC ECONOMIC CRISIS

South Sudan's endemic economic crisis since independence deepened in 2024, when entrenched corruption intersected with a partial shutdown of oil exports in February 2024. Over 14 months, the damage to one of two export pipelines through Sudan cost the Government approximately $1.1 billion (excluding repair and restart costs).

This loss is significant, but hardly any oil revenue goes toward improving the lives of South Sudanese. While the Government authorities blamed the 2024 crisis on lost oil revenue, long-term corruption and mismanagement were the true drivers of the crisis.

The Government was already struggling to meet its financial obligations in 2023 (see timeline), despite high oil revenues as growing portions of national income were being diverted to political and military elites.

Even after oil revenues declined from February 2024, the authorities made no attempt to either alleviate or mitigate the crisis and did nothing to re-orient spending to stabilize the economy. By the end of the 2023-24 fiscal year (mid-2024), government spending exceeded the previous year, with two-thirds of all spending directed towards elite patronage networks, specifically the Oil for Roads Programme, the Ministry of Finance, and the Ministry of Presidential Affairs.

EXTREME MEASURES

2023

JULY

AUGUST — *Government suspends long-term debt repayments*

OCTOBER — *Government suspends public sector salaries*

DECEMBER — *Government resumes monetary financing, triggering immediate inflation*

FEBRUARY — *Damage to one of two oil export pipelines*

MARCH

APRIL — *Government commits 100% of remaining oil revenue to Oil for Roads*

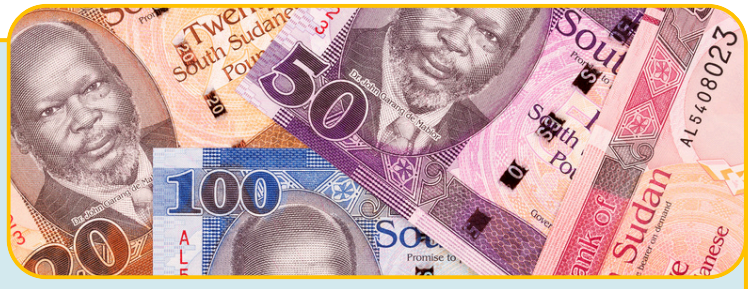
MAY

JUNE

2024

IMPACTS ON CITIZENRY: CURRENCY DEPRECIATION

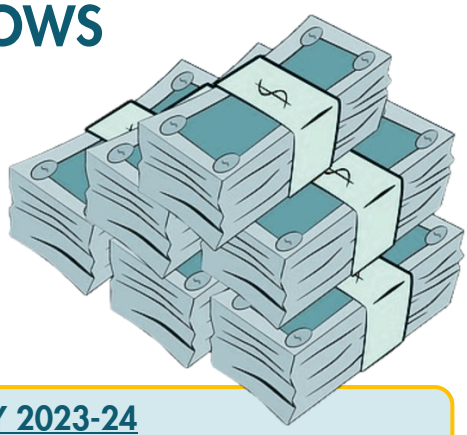
The greatest burden falls on ordinary South Sudanese through currency depreciation. Between January and December 2024, the South Sudan Pound lost a significant share of its value, driving up the cost of food and other basic goods, which were already out of reach for many.



International Monetary Fund (IMF) analysis shows that the depreciation is directly tied to monetary financing; printing money through central bank borrowing.

The Government resumed this practice in December 2023, months before the February 2024 pipeline damage, continuing its destructive multi-year trend.

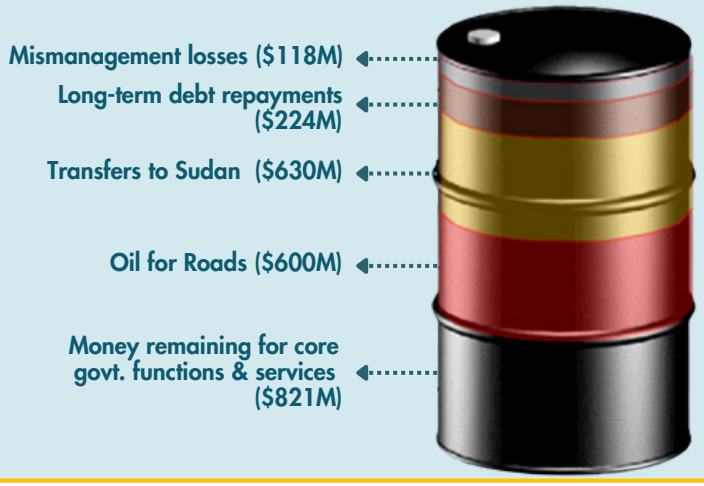
THE NATIONAL FINANCES: INFLOWS



Government corruption and associated gross mismanagement undermine every aspect of South Sudan's public financial management, severely damaging the Government's ability to raise revenues. Since 2011, national revenues have been squandered, leaving the country burdened with debt and little to show for its vast resources.

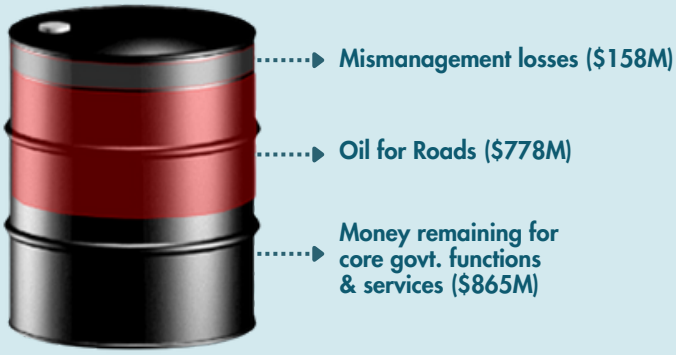
Oil entitlements account for most of the Government's income, yet less than half reaches the national budget for core services (see chart below).

FY 2022-23

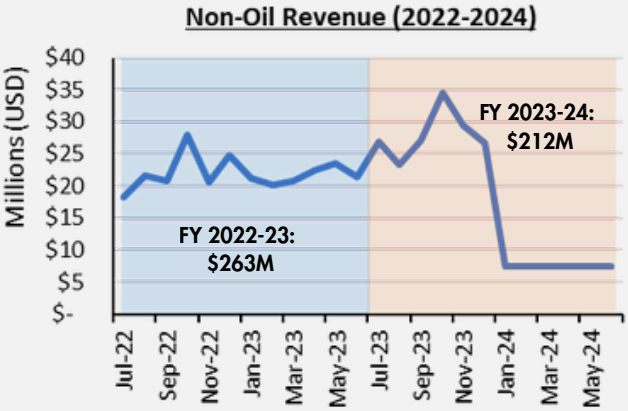


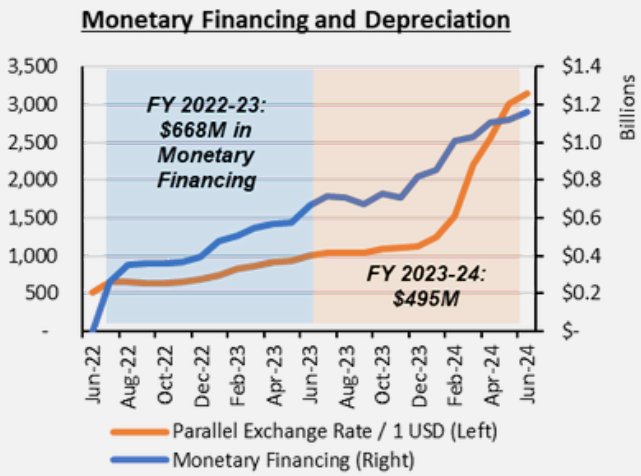
FY 2023-24

Dynamics of the Sudan conflict impacted the Sudanese government's inland lifting of South Sudanese oil as payment in-kind for transportation. While the government's budget reflects no expenses to this effect in 2023-2024, cash payments continued, but the end-of-year total of these payments is unknown.



Non-oil revenues are systematically diverted, often through privatized collection schemes or manipulated reporting. Between January and June 2024, non-oil revenue collections dropped inexplicably despite a stable tax base, suggesting diversions of up to $120 million over the six months (see chart).





Monetary financing creates new currency through central bank overdrafts. These funds, which worsen depreciation and inflation, often fail to appear in official budget records, further highlights pervasive opacity.

THE NATIONAL FINANCES: OUTLFOWS

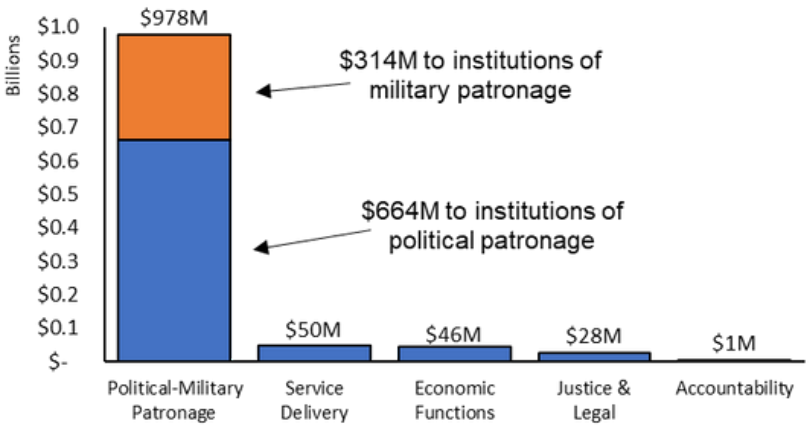
Over the four fiscal years from 2020-2024, less than half (48%) of total revenues and oil entitlements went to the regular national government budget. During this period, the Ministry of Presidential Affairs spent 19 times more than the Ministry of Health. Most revenue was channelled to political-military power bases and patronage systems, starving essential services of funding.

The fiscal data* reveal major inconsistencies:

2022-2023: from $1.65B in oil revenue, $263M in non-oil revenues, and $668M in monetary financing, there was $874M in national government budget spending.

2023-2024: from $1.64B in oil revenue, $212M in non-oil revenues, and $495M in monetary financing, there was $1.1B in national government budget spending.

2023-24 Budget Outturns by functions



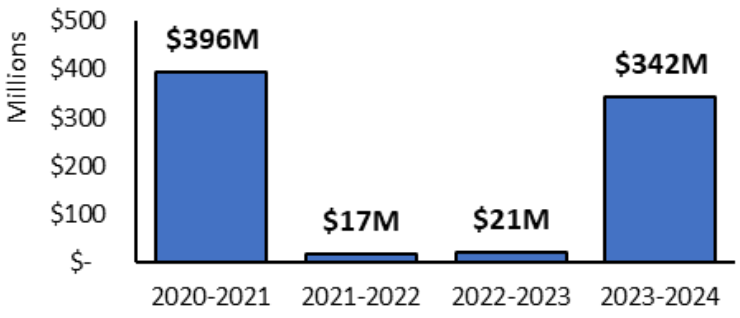
The Government has not preserved oil revenue for the future: this robs future generations and leaves the country more vulnerable to economic shocks. Legal obligations to allocate 25% of oil revenue to the Oil Revenue Stabilization Account and the Future Generation Fund have been flouted. Unless addressed, South Sudan's oil reserves will be exhausted with nothing preserved for future generations, who will inherit only debt and vulnerability.

Reintroduction of the parallel rate gap

The Government also re-introduced the gap between official and parallel (market) exchange rates in late 2024, enabling elites to profit while hollowing out national finances. The gap also results in humanitarian funding — meant to support the population's survival — being redirected toward elite political patronage networks.

The gap created significant losses for humanitarian groups required to use the official rate. During 2024, humanitarians using these conversions stood to lose up to 64.5% of the aid money they spent in South Sudanese Pounds. The gap in 2024 peaked at the end of July, when $1 million of donor funds to be spent in Pounds would have the equivalent purchasing power of just $355,000. At that time, the remaining $645,000 could have been diverted to elites with privileged access to both exchange rates (as money lost to the gap does not disappear). Eliminating this gap would immediately improve resources available to the population.

Government Budget Losses to Parallel Gap



*These figures exclude additional loans and pre-sold oil cargoes, undertaken during these periods.

NON-OIL REVENUE

The Government's corruption and poor management also damage the country's non-oil income, delaying South Sudan's necessary diversification away from oil dependence. Beyond widespread poverty, the Government has entrenched the predatory and exploitative extractive business environment in place since before independence. This hampers any efforts to develop the economy and reduce reliance on oil, aid, and imports.



The result is a small private sector tax base, made up almost entirely by the employees of staff of NGOs and international organizations, particularly in the humanitarian sector. The revenue potential from non-oil extractive resources is largely unrealized, as most mining and logging activity is informal or illicit, and payments to corrupt officials are kept off government budgets.

South Sudan's corruption has therefore created difficulties mobilizing taxation from the already small private sector tax base, and the widely-known misdeeds of the South Sudan Revenue Authority – both in collection and use of funds – dis-incentivizes tax contributions.

The Authority has consistently increased the percentage of collection it withholds for its own operations (at 14.5% in 2024-2025), even though all withholding was supposed to have ceased by 2023 and never to have exceeded 2%. The use of this withholding is also corrupted; the Commission has on file evidence of irregular withdrawals from the Authority's retention account, as recently as January 2025.

Further undermining trust, the Government has privatized non-oil revenue collections to a politically connected company, Crawford Capital Ltd. The Authority has been complicit in allowing representatives of Crawford to collect and hold revenues in company bank accounts, diverting further income from government budgets.

Non-oil revenue collectors also benefit from the parallel exchange rate gap. As most non-oil revenue is collected in US dollars but reported in South Sudan Pounds, the conversion creates the opportunity for privileged individuals involved in the collection process to profit off the difference.



> *Non-oil revenue collection is no better at the state level, with governors treating state personal income tax as their private funds*

CORRUPTION IN FOCUS:
CRAWFORD CAPITAL LTD.

Crawford Capital Ltd. is a politically-connected private company, used to divert tax income from government budgets and services. Under a 2019 contract arrangement with the Ministry of Information, Communication, Technology (ICT) & Postal Services, Crawford was awarded a 75% profit share of revenue collections purportedly made for the Government. The other 25% goes to the Ministry, headed by Minister Michael Makuei.

> *It is vital that our limited funds are spent on saving lives and not bureaucratic impediments.*
>
> UN Humanitarian Coordinator for South Sudan in April 2024—after a Crawford/Government tax illegally applied to humanitarians led to suspensions in food aid, in violation of international human rights law.

The Government is responsible for these corrupt activities. At least 12 government ministries and entities have enabled Crawford's corrupt activities, and the company is owned and run by family members of national political elites. The 'on-paper' corporate ownership structure of Crawford is documented in the Commission's full report.

The chart below shows Government offices which have supported or worked with Crawford:

CRAWFORD CORRUPTION

2019
Engaged for 'e-Government Services' by the Ministry of ICT and Postal Services, in a corrupt procurement endorsed by the National Security Service and key ministries.

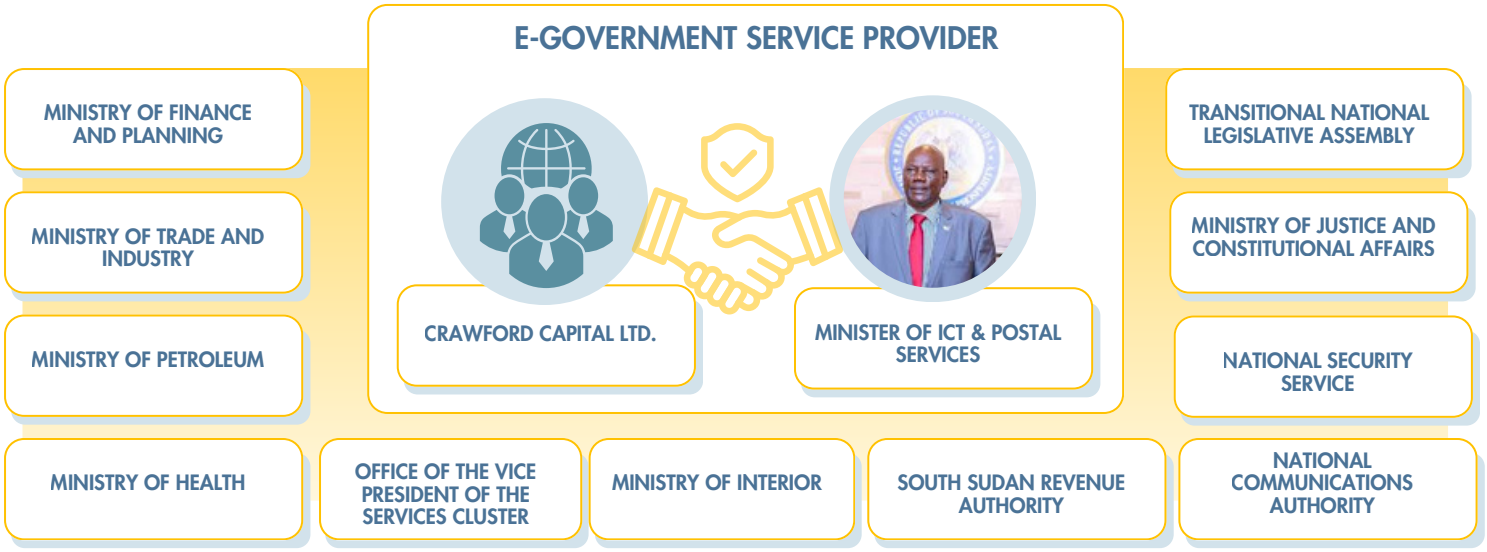
2020
Starts taking more than 75% of government visa fees paid via a new 'e-Visa' portal.

2021
Starts receiving a highly inflated proportion of taxes paid via a new 'e-Tax' portal.

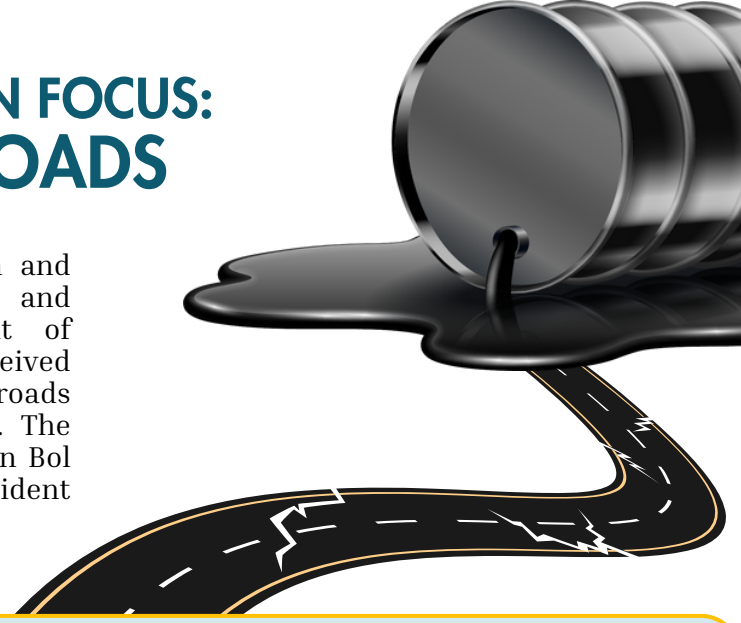
2022
A $10 million advance is agreed for Ebola preparedness (equal to 80% of the Health Ministry's spending in 2022-2023), despite Crawford's failures on a COVID-19 project.

2023
After ICT & Postal Services Minister Michael Makuei proposes a new fee for buyers of oil exports, Crawford takes a 75% cut for its implementation (25% goes to the Ministry).

2024
Implements a new fuel import levy proposed by Minister Michael Makuei, again taking 75% of profits. This fee is illegally applied to tax-exempt organizations, leading to fuel shortages and suspensions of critical food aid by the World Food Programme.



CORRUPTION IN FOCUS:
OIL FOR ROADS



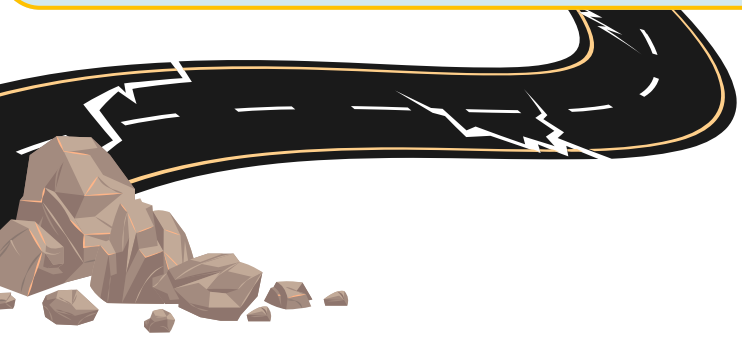
'Oil for Roads' is an organized scheme of corruption and political patronage, and entrenched corruption, and represents South Sudan's single largest recipient of government revenue. From 2021-2024, 'Oil for Roads' received at least $2.2 billion of government oil revenue. Yet few roads were built, with most of the funds unaccounted for. The construction companies involved are linked to Benjamin Bol Mel, who in February 2025 was appointed as a Vice President of South Sudan.

BENJAMIN BOL MEL-LINKED COMPANIES RECEIVED:

5X
more than what they earned through road construction

40%
of total government expenditure

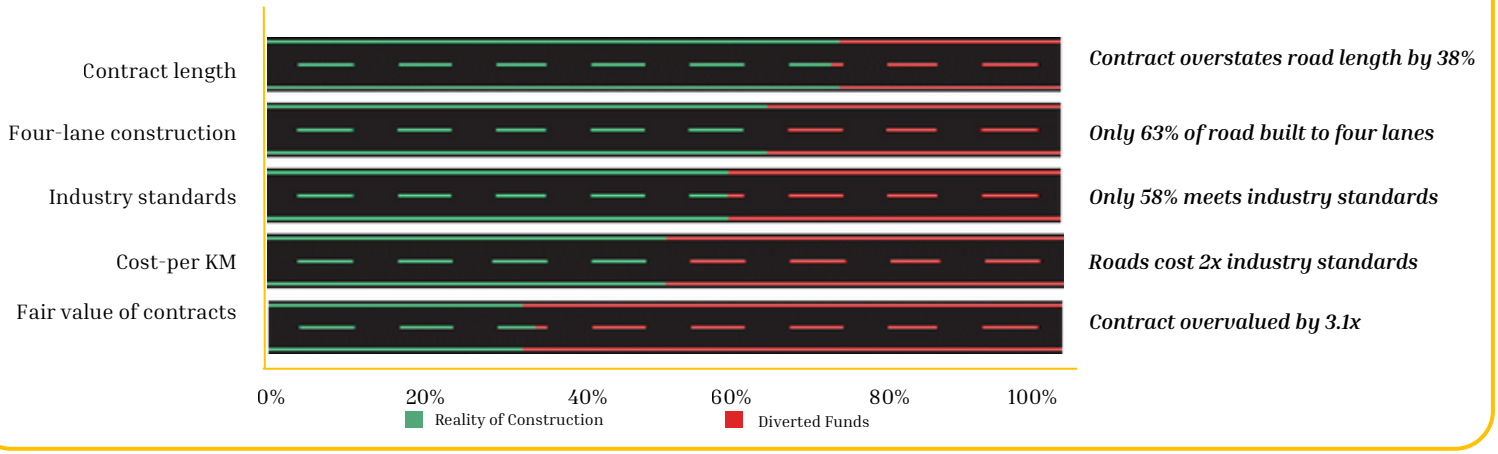
$1.5B – $1.7B
with no reasonable explanation, given failure to construct roads



At the contract-level, the scheme began with a corrupt single-source procurement process. The Commission's review of satellite imagery analysis and contract documentation identified multiple irregularities, including: cost-per-kilometre roughly double the regional industry standard; total road lengths under-contract exceeding the distances between towns; two-lane roads built where four-lanes were specified; and construction failing to meet industry standards. Additional concerns include reports that Bol Mel-affiliated companies failing to pay staff and subcontractors.

JUBA-BOR ROAD IN FOCUS

To date, the road constructed between Juba and Bor is the sole example of a Bol Mel-affiliated Oil for Roads-funded road being constructed between two points as envisaged. However, it encapsulates all the above-described problems.



Corruption is killing South Sudanese

Despite vast oil revenues, the Government fails to fund basic public services. Instead, these resources are diverted to enrich political and military elites and sustain patronage networks. The diversion of funds from essential services is a major driver of South Sudan's globally high rates of death from preventable causes.

Competition for control of the nation's wealth fuels armed violence and recurring conflict. Corruption and mismanagement drive cyclical instability, as State capture incentivizes rent-seeking armed groups to fight over resources.

At the same time, the systematic diversion of funds away from peace implementation severely undermines prospects for peace. Although more than $8 billion in oil revenue has been generated since the 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement, only a fraction has supported peacebuilding, justice or democratization.

A telling example came in June 2024 when $10 million earmarked for critical provisions of the Agreement and a human rights initiative was illegally redirected to opaque 'special projects' under the Presidency.

Impunity for corruption and grave human rights violations remain entrenched. The judiciary, the Anti-Corruption Commission, and other rule of law institutions are deliberately starved of resources, preventing them from functioning. In the 2023-2024 fiscal year, funding to the judiciary dropped to less than 0.1% of the regular national budget. South Sudan's political leaders, by systematically diverting public revenues, bear responsibility for the country's mass suffering and ongoing violence.

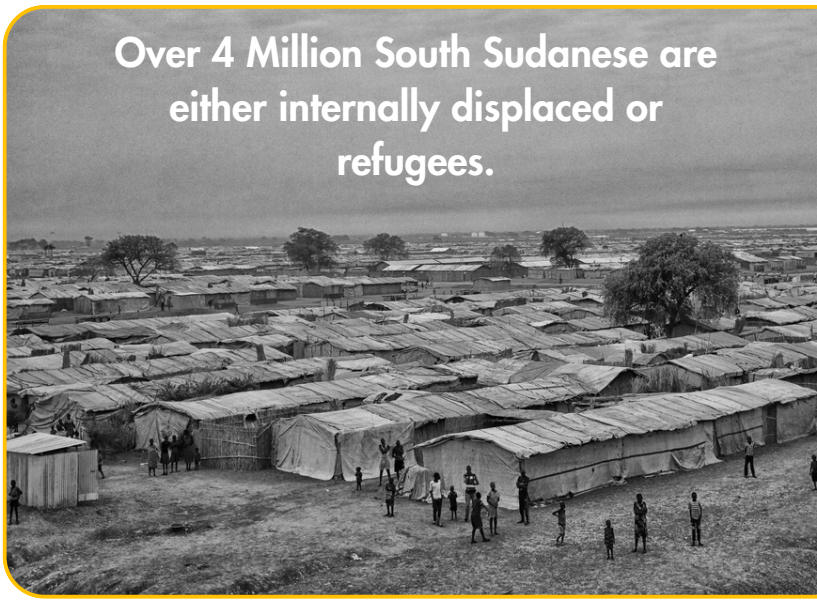


HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACTS OF CORRUPTION

HUMANITARIAN CRISIS

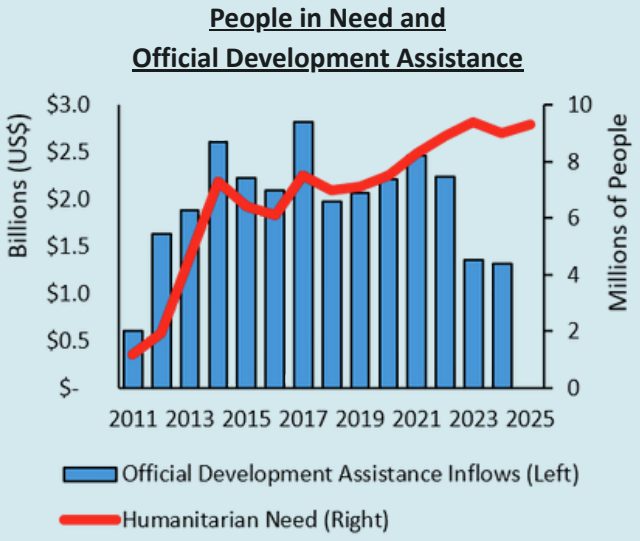
Aid dependency and conditions of life in South Sudan have deteriorated drastically since independence.

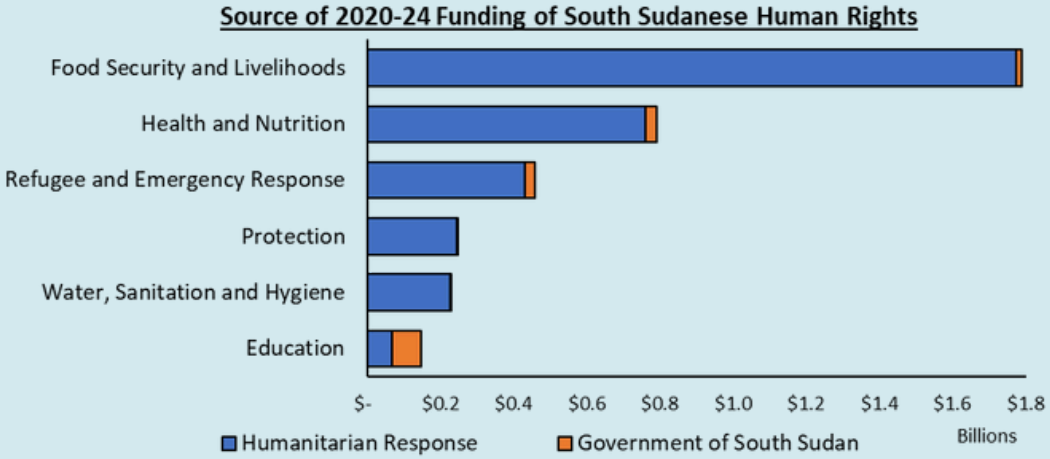
The dramatic increase in humanitarian needs since 2011 reflects systemic corruption, and total neglect by the political leadership. Today, more than 4 million South Sudanese are either internally displaced or are refugees in neighbouring countries. Yet the Government has refused to fund its 2018 commitment to establish a special fund to support return and reintegration.



The Government has effectively abandoned its core governance responsibilities, offloading them onto foreign donors. Since 2011, donors have provided more than $27.5 billion in official development – an amount that dwarfs government spending. But humanitarian needs keep rising even as international assistance declines. This starkly demonstrates not only government failings, but also the urgency for political leaders to reorient priorities.

The Commission's review of government spending on food, healthcare and education shows a direct link between corruption, the diversion of resources and appalling human rights outcomes. These patterns extend across all rights, including justice: the more leaders steal, the more ordinary South Sudanese are denied the basic rights they are entitled to.





HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACTS OF CORRUPTION

RIGHT TO FOOD

Most South Sudanese cannot access sufficient food: in 2025, over half the population face crisis levels of food insecurity (7.7 million), with 2.3 million children acutely malnourished.

South Sudan possesses fertile land and rich fisheries, and numerous plans and strategies have been developed to increase food production. But these remain empty promises.

From 2020-2024, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries together received less than 0.4% of total national spending. This meagre allocation is a key reason why agricultural productivity remains stunted, dependence on costly food imports grows, and hunger deepens, alongside conflict. The Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, also responsible for addressing hunger, is equally neglected: across four budgets, it received less than half the value of a single oil cargo.

This deliberate Government inaction fuels widespread hunger. By starving agriculture, livestock and fisheries of funds, and failing to support peacebuilding, recovery and resettlement, the government ensures food insecurity persists. Government choices also actively worsen the crisis. In 2024, fiscal policies drove food inflation, and illegal taxes imposed on humanitarian agencies forced suspensions of critical food aid. These reckless actions directly deprived millions of South Sudanese of their right to food.



7.7 Million

people are acutely food insecure in South Sudan

Percentage of the population facing high acute food insecurity



Government inaction intensifies and increases widespread hunger: the absence of investments in agriculture, livestock and fisheries is a major source of the country's food crisis. Associated measures to build peace and to recover from conflict and displacement also lack funds. Government actions can also intensify hunger, through policies that drive food inflation and impede the delivery of food aid.

HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACTS OF CORRUPTION



Photo: Dogs resting on surgery beds at the abandoned Malakal Teaching Hospital (2022) - as circulated on social media. Damaged by conflict, the hospital was still yet to be rehabilitated, years after the peace agreement of 2018.

RIGHT TO HEALTH

The public health crisis in South Sudan is extreme, driven largely by the Government's refusal to invest in public health. Life expectancy is amongst the lowest in the world, and women and girls are more likely to die in pregnancy and childbirth here than anywhere else.

In a country ravaged by conflict and sexual violence, giving birth remains one of the most life-threatening experiences for females. Most women and girls cannot access trained health workers, and those who are available lack reliable salaries, access to medicines, and basic supplies.

Since independence, government funding for public health has steadily declined. From 2020-2024, the entire health sector received less than 0.9% of the regular national budget.

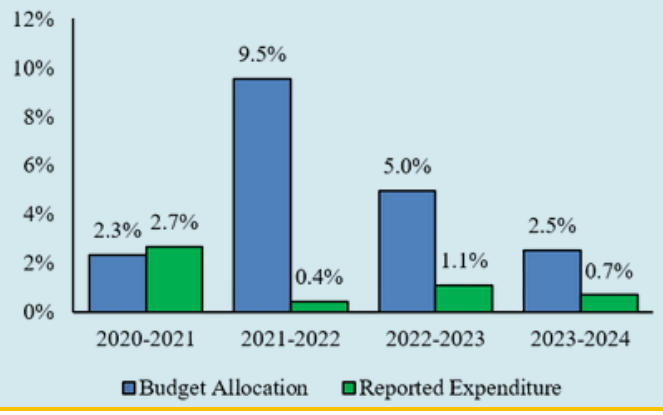
- **Government data reveals the scale of misplaced priorities: in 2022–2023, the national parliament's medical expenses were more than triple the spend on the Ministry of Health's entire budget.**

- **Similarly, more money was spent on the Presidential Medical Unit than on all community, public, secondary, and tertiary healthcare combined.**

Even these meagre funds are undermined by corruption: contracts awarded by the Ministry of Health to Crawford Capital Ltd. point to complicity in corrupt practices.

Government decisions to systematically deprioritize public health funding explain the collapse of the health system, and why South Sudanese struggle to access even basic health care. Once again, it's the international community that still disproportionately bears the burden of life-saving health interventions. The crisis is further compounded by the absence of investment in electrification and sanitation, without which even well-trained health workers cannot save lives.

Health Funding as a Percentage National Budget



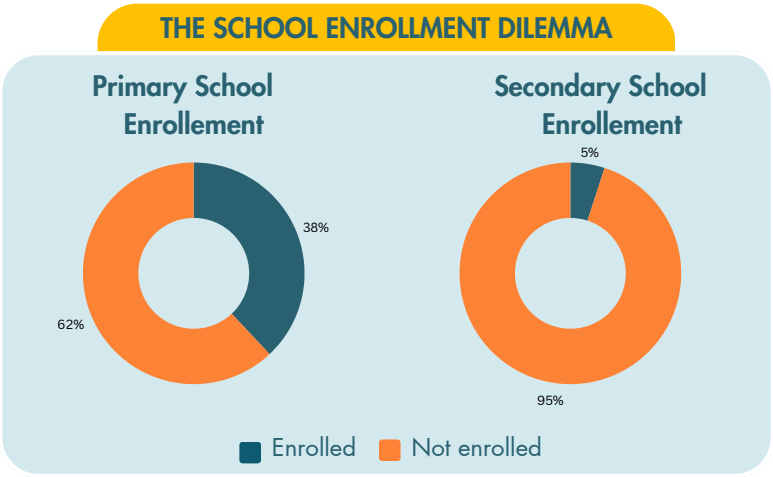
HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACTS OF CORRUPTION

Most South Sudanese children cannot access education, trapping generations in poverty and limiting their life potential and blocking national development.

RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Where schools do exist, they are starved of funds, and teachers often go unpaid. The result is devastating: the average South Sudanese citizen has just 2.5 years of education, adjusted for quality. Girls are especially excluded, and women have among the lowest literary rates in the world.

The Government's deliberate de-prioritization of schools and teachers in its budgets directly causes the low enrolment rates and appalling education outcomes. From 2020–2024, the Ministry of General Education received an average of just 2.3% of the total budget spending. This is a flagrant violation of the Education Act, which requires at least 10% of the total national budget, so that primary education can be free and compulsory. By contrast, the Ministry for Higher Education, accessible mainly to elites, received more than double this amount.



$2.57

What the Government spent, per school-aged child, on the Ministry of General Education in 2023-2024

GENDERED HUMAN RIGHTS IMPACTS OF CORRUPTION

Gender discrimination means corruption and budget neglect hit women and girls hardest. This is visible in catastrophic maternal health outcomes, in one-in-ten children dying before their fifth birthday, and in the denial of education to girls, when families cannot afford fees for them and prioritize expenses for boys over the girls. Corruption also fuels widespread sexual and gender-based violence, drives conflicts which expose women and girls to harm, and leaves justice institutions so underfunded that impunity for these serious crimes has become the norm.

The Ministry of Gender, Child and Social Welfare, tasked with protecting women and girls, is chronically marginalized. Most of its meagre budget goes to administrative overheads, leaving nothing for real programs or staff salaries. In 2023–2024, the Ministry received less than 0.1% of the regular national budget—about the same as the fee from a single oil cargo shared between Crawford and the Ministry of Information.



The Government's discriminatory budgets and corrupt diversions of available resources directly entrench the appalling health and life outcomes for women and girls. Their health, education and safety are systematically sacrificed, limiting their potential, and crippling South Sudan's future development.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Government institutions and civil servants on the frontlines of service delivery are systematically deprived of the resources needed to perform even basic duties. Instead, available resources are captured by political elites and siphoned off into corruption schemes. The deliberate under-resourcing of institutions responsible for food security and public health has directly contributed to South Sudan's worsening hunger and health crises. Illegal diversions of funding from schools deny South Sudanese children life opportunities and entrench the low status of women. This is not a neglect by accident, it is willful government betrayal producing shocking outcomes across every sector.

A core aspiration of South Sudan's peoples in achieving self-determination was to escape extreme violence, marginalization and poverty. Instead, they have been betrayed by political leaders. Government responsibilities are offloaded onto a humanitarian system funded by foreign donors, and where aid is both insufficient and declining. Meanwhile, national wealth is concentrated in the hands of a small group, reflecting the capture of the State by unaccountable elite networks. These systemic diversions of revenues from services are not simply poor governance - they are violations of South Sudan's binding international human rights obligations.

The Commission's report offers 54 urgent and detailed recommendations to the Government of South Sudan to confront corruption and fulfill its obligations under international human rights law.



The Commission's recommendations include reorienting budgets and public spending to meet the population's basic needs, establishing accountability for corruption, and dismantling revenue-diversion schemes. The report also calls on international partners and businesses operating in South Sudan to put anti-corruption and human rights at the center of their engagements.

Every passing day of South Sudan's status quo – defined by mass greed and theft – condemns millions of South Sudanese to lives of misery, hunger and unrealized potential: a betrayal of their hopes and expectations from a free country, and deprivation of their dignity.

What was meant to be a liberation has, fourteen years later, become a national plundering project by an entrenched and organized criminal enterprise, abusing power. This is costing lives, entrenching poverty and perpetuating the full spectrum of abuses detailed in this report.

The Government must now address corruption — meaningfully and urgently. This requires a fundamental shift in political will, ensuring decisive action to eradicate corruption, especially revenue diversions towards elite enrichment. Failure to act will leave the Government incapable of meeting the basic needs of the population, and violating its international human rights law obligations. It will also fuel new cycles of conflict and political crises, deepen human suffering, and imperil South Sudan's viability as a State.