

Pibor (GPAA) - NGO Common Position

South Sudan | November 2021

1 Timeline of events

- On 04 October 2021, the humanitarian community in GPAA received a letter from the GPAA Youth Committee with the allegation of PSEA, recruitment malpractice, lack of transparency in the recruitment process, and failure by humanitarians to adhere to the 80/20 principle of employment, as well as demanding the immediate removal from GPAA of all South Sudanese staff originally not from GPAA).
In addition, the letter contained allegations of SEA incidences in Pibor. In response, On 05 October 2021, the humanitarian community evacuated 78 aid workers from GPAA.
- On 07 October 2021, the HC Acting suspended humanitarian operation in GPAA until the situation is normalized and the humanitarian community receives a non-conditionality letter from the GPAA youth.
- Since the partial suspension, the government of Jonglei and GPAA have been engaging with the GPAA Youth Committee to address the grievances in order to reach an amicable resolution. At the same time, the GPAA Youth Committee issued multiple letters to further clarify their initial demands. Between 29-30 October 2021, OCHA sent a representative to GPAA (Pibor) to analyze the situation on the ground, address ongoing grievances, and agree to a way forward.
- Following the meeting, the GPAA Youth Committee issued another letter on 01 November 2021, articulating the way forward based on the recommendations from the joint OCHA-Youth meetings including the formation of an Accountability Committee with a 1-month mandate to investigate recruitment practices. In the letter, the GPAA Youth Committee remained adamant that named individuals who were evacuated could not return until further investigation is conducted on the hiring processes.

1.1 Community Engagement Strategy

- The NGO and UN agencies in GPAA to engage with the community, GPAA Youth and Government to explain the minimum of 80% of national staff and a maximum of 20% international staff of humanitarian workforce under the Labour Act 2017. The NGO community to engage with the State Ministry of Labour Director-General and Director to ensure government is at the forefront of these discussions and issues.
- The NGO community to address internal tensions concerning job satisfaction and promotional expectations to manage potential conflicts and prevent further escalation.
- The NGO and UN agencies in GPAA to engage with GPAA Youth, the wider community, and government officials on the ethnicization and politicization of humanitarian space, particularly around jobs and job opportunities within the humanitarian-development sector. NGOs and the UN to articulate key points and agree on common messaging on all the key issues that relate to jobs or job opportunities within NGOs.
- Where feasible, the NGO community to look into potential opportunities to engage the GPAA youth with internships and vocational opportunities to address the immediate and underlying issues. NGO Forum to support as appropriate.
- NGOs recruitment will always endeavor to support the diversity of the South Sudan workforce as part of their efforts to contribute to nation-building.
- NGOs to continue to adhere to the NGO Recruitment Guidelines and ensure a summary brief is submitted to the RRC and Ministry of Labour for information and coordination purposes.

1.2 Common Position on the events in GPAA

- The NGO community in Pibor is appreciative of the ongoing discussions between the GPAA Youth Committee and the wider community. The NGO community is acknowledging the difficult conditions the youth face.
- The NGOs remain committed to working with the GPAA Youth, community, and authorities to resume all activities in GPAA and Pibor. To do so, however, there must be an unhindered space where safety and security for all staff are guaranteed. Furthermore, the NGOs require technical staff and managerial staff of requisite experience and pedigree in order to resume all activities. This includes the non-GPAA humanitarian workers, who are essential for ensuring the quality of services and accountable operations. Request for removal of any aid workers, absent grave ethical concerns, is not acceptable.
- All cases of allegations will be followed up and investigated as long as facts and evidence are provided. Additionally, the humanitarian community requests the GPAA Youth Committee and the wider community to come forward with new information relating to allegations by reporting these to established systems in GPAA. However, the humanitarian community does not want the wider community to instrumentalize PSEA as a tool for demanding jobs or to leverage power against the humanitarian community.
- NGOs are committed to enhancing and strengthening community engagement to address the grievances raised by the GPAA Youth Committee.
- The NGOs are willing and committed to work with communities and seek inputs on how they can make recruitment processes more transparent and harmonize them across agencies working in Pibor. (i.e., perhaps lay out some initial ideas on what makes the process more transparent, and seek further feedback from youth, OCHA, govt., etc., in creating transparency where it might have seemed non-transparent). At the same time, NGOs cannot compromise on the quality of services provided by creating space to have undue influence on specific hires by youth, government, or any other stakeholders. Expertise and experience will always remain a key requirement for all technical jobs.

1.3 Lesson Learnt and Good Practices

- Uncoordinated communications and commitments by the humanitarian community, while well-intentioned, run the risk of further inflaming tensions between the Youth Committee and humanitarian actors on the ground as it can potentially lead to a scenario where NGOs are not able to deliver on the promises made which can further deteriorate the trust and make an already sensitive situation worse.
- The humanitarian community to strengthen and improve existing conflict and community sensitivity activities. NGO and UN agencies active in Pibor to harmonize community engagement, outreach, and communication activities.
- The humanitarian community to look into reviewing, aligning, and communicating their internal recruitment process to the local RRC and Ministry of Labour to clarify procedures and manage expectations among applicants to avoid any accusations of malpractice or misinformation to the wider community.

The primary responsibility to provide for the needs of the people in South Sudan rest with the Government of the Republic of South Sudan. Therefore, there is the need to engage the government at the highest levels to ameliorate the real or perceived feeling of neglect among the GPAA communities. Perception of neglect has made humanitarian actors become the main avenues for youth to express their grievances at lack of job opportunities.
- In a coordinated effort, the Donors, HCT, HC, UN agencies, and NGO Forum must lead the process of engagement with State and National Ministry of Labor Director-General and the Director to ensure the government is at the forefront of discussions regarding the 80/20 employment provisions in the Labour Law.
- On the immediate front, HCT must lead the process to engage donors to increase investment in education and new programs targeting youth via internships, entrepreneurship, and vocational opportunities to increase the employability of youths living within GPAA.