

RECOVERY IS POSSIBLE

ONE MAN'S TRIUMPH OVER MENTAL ILLNESS IN SOUTH SUDAN

SUBMITTED BY INTERNATIONAL MEDICAL CORPS

WAR DROVE LABON DOKA at the age of 20 to abandon his home in Sudan for a refugee camp in Ethiopia. It was in the refugee camp that his behavior started to change, subtly at first, and then more drastically. He eventually stopped going to the school where he was a teacher and it was not long before he could no longer support himself. In 2013, he joined his father, who was living in Maban, a country in South Sudan not far from the Sudanese border. Labon's mental health continued to deteriorate. They tried traditional healers, but nothing seemed to work. Then, in October 2013, they learned about mental health care services provided by International Medical Corps to refugees living in Maban.

"A community health worker who lives in our neighborhood informed us about the mental health treatment and services available at the facility," Labon's father said. "He gave us a referral paper and the health facility staff treated us very well." The International Medical Corps health care providers evaluated Labon and diagnosed him with schizophrenia. He was enrolled in International Medical Corps' mental health care program and was provided with medication. Within the first few weeks of treatment, Labon's condition began to improve. "It was exciting to see my son properly communicating and socializing with others as well as taking good care of his own personal hygiene after such a long period of time," his father said.

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-LABON DOKA

Today, Labon's symptoms are fully controlled by medication and he continues to receive regular follow up with International Medical Corps' mental health team. A few months into his recovery, Labon applied to be a community health worker with International Medical Corps. It was a very competitive hiring process, but Labon stood out and was selected. As a community health worker, Labon shares mental health messages with individuals and families in the community, and connects them with services for further care if needed – just as a community health worker had done for him one year ago.

"Now I [am able] to work and I will always share my experience of mental illness and recovery with the community, families, and patients," Labon said.

Labon also got married and supports his family through his work as a community health worker. His father, having seen the transformation in his son, said, "I personally referred three individuals with mental illness similar to my son's condition to International Medical Corps' health facility for treatment. I also encouraged my son, Labon, to talk openly to the community as everyone in the community is witnessing [that] recovery from mental illness is possible with proper treatment."

