Further scale up of food assistance required to prevent Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes

KEY MESSAGES

- Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes remain widespread during the harvesting period, despite a relative improvement in food security situation compared to the peak of the 2019 lean season. The loss of livelihood assets during the protracted conflict and current poor macroeconomic conditions continue to be the primary drivers of high food insecurity, marked by deficits in cereal production, below-normal access to livestock products, and high food prices. In areas worst affected by flooding, additional crop and livestock losses are driving an increase in the population in need and the severity of food insecurity, particularly in parts of Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Jonglei, Upper Nile, and Eastern Equatoria states.

- Food assistance remains a critical source of food in many areas of South Sudan, but the number of beneficiaries reached remains below the level of need. As of mid-December, food assistance reached more than 770,300 flood-affected people. In addition to the flood response, 944,185 people received food assistance in October. However, 4.5-5.5 million people are anticipated to face food consumption gaps during the harvesting period, even in the presence of planned food assistance. Further scale up of assistance is required to mitigate food consumption gaps and the use of coping strategies indicative of Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or Emergency (IPC Phase 4).

- The seasonal availability of the harvest, wild foods, fish, and livestock products is expected to sustain relatively improved food security outcomes in January. However, food security is expected to deteriorate from February to May as these sources of food decline. Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or Crisis! (IPC Phase 3!) will likely be widespread as many households experience widening food consumption gaps and increase the use of coping strategies. Emergency (IPC Phase 4) is expected in 16 counties in Jonglei, Upper Nile, Unity, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, and Eastern Equatoria states. In this period, more than 5.5 million people are anticipated to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes in the presence of humanitarian food assistance.

- As the 2020 lean season progresses, it is possible that some host, IDP, or refugee households would experience Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) without humanitarian food assistance, particularly among households who lost their harvest or did not harvest, do not own livestock, and have few other viable income sources. A risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) is also possible in the event of an increase in conflict that prevents populations from moving in search of food sources or restricts humanitarian access for a prolonged period of time. In order to sustain long-term food security improvements and end the risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5), full implementation of the September 2018 peace deal, an end to the conflict by all parties, and a scale up of assistance is needed.
CURRENT SITUATION

Seasonal rainfall performance during the October to December 2019 period is among the top three wettest seasons in at least forty years in southeastern South Sudan. Significantly above-average rainfall in October resulted in an unprecedented scale of flooding across eastern and northern South Sudan, and atypically heavy rainfall has continued through November and mid-December. As of mid-December, riverine areas and low-lying areas in Jonglei state – especially in Pibor, Duk, Twic East and Akobo counties – and parts of Aweil Centre and Aweil South counties of Northern Bahr el Ghazal state remain submerged, though flood waters have begun to recede in most other areas. The negative impacts of heavy rain and flooding on food security are significant, including the displacement of an estimated 420,000 people, crop and livestock losses and higher livestock disease incidence, constraints to trade flows and market access that have driven increases in staple food prices, and contamination of water sources and reduced access to health services. However, the rains have also resulted in good cropping and pasture conditions in other areas, and the availability of wild foods and fish is expected to be above-normal as flood waters recede. Given relatively low levels of conflict during the pre-transitional period, trade flows and market functioning are continuing to improve overall, including in flood-affected areas as flood waters recede.

According to the latest field and preliminary FAO reports, heavy rainfall and flood-related damage could amount to a loss of approximately 72,611 metric tons (MT) of cereals for the 2019 production year, which is equivalent to 15 percent of total cereal production in the 2018 production year. The magnitude of metric tons lost is likely highest in Warrap and Northern Bahr el Ghazal, estimated to be approximately 25,000 MT or 13 percent and 21,000 MT or 13 percent, respectively, of state-level cereal production. Although the number of metric tons lost (4,900 to 6,000 MT) in Jonglei, Upper Nile, and Eastern Equatoria states was lower, given that these are agro-pastoral areas, the estimated cereal production loss still constitute an estimated 16-23 percent of total cereal production on the state level. Additionally, continuous rainfall and high soil moisture levels have impeded households’ ability to dry harvested grains and has resulted in higher post-harvest losses. Based on analysis of previous Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) data, post-harvest losses for 2019/20 are likely to exceed the 2018/19 national average of 20 percent of total production. The FAO also estimates that approximately 3 million heads of livestock, or 11 percent of the estimated national livestock population, have likely been affected by loss of forage, waterborne disease, injury, or death. The proportion of livestock affected at the state level is estimated to be highest in Jonglei at 25 percent. Standing water and high soil moisture conditions are conducive to higher incidence of livestock disease, such as Rift Valley Fever (RVF). In Torit county of Eastern Equatoria and Twic East county of Jonglei, cases of Contagious caprine pleuropneumonia, foot rot, Foot and Mouth Disease, and East Coast Fever were reported in November.

On the other hand, significantly above-normal cropping, pasture, and wild food conditions are observed across much of the country, according to field reports and the satellite-derived Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI, Figure 2). Above-average vegetation and rainfall is typically associated with enhanced wild food availability, such as lalob, water lilies, and fish, though it should be noted some field reports from REACH and inter-agency assessment missions indicate excessive water has rendered wild foods inedible or made it more dangerous to fish in flooded areas. In many areas not affected by flooding, crop production levels are expected to be higher than 2018. Harvesting of main season crops have been completed in unimodal areas in Greater Upper Nile, Greater Bahr el Ghazal, and Greater Equatoria regions, while harvesting of long-cycle sorghum in the states of Lakes, Western Bahr el Ghazal, Warrap, parts of Upper Nile, and Central Equatoria is underway and will be
completed in January. Based on field reports and key informant information, many flood-affected households have been able to move livestock to higher ground and access pasture, given relatively improved security conditions that permit household movement. It is anticipated that the results of the final verification of the impact on crop and livestock production, conducted under the 2019 CFSAM led by FAO and WFP, will be released in mid-January 2020.

Following the 100-day extension to 20\textsuperscript{th} February 2020 of the transitional period for the formation of a Government of National Unity, overall levels of conflict have remained relatively low. This continues to permit greater household movement relative to previous years, with improved access to markets, natural food sources, and food assistance. However, sporadic armed clashes occurred in several areas in November. Armed activity in Maiwut of Upper Nile displaced an estimated 3,600 people, while clashes occurred between government forces and hold-out opposition groups in parts of Unity, Jonglei, and Yei county of Central Equatoria.\textbf{Inter-communal fighting} and cattle raiding also remain of concern, particularly as rainfall subsides. For example, localized conflict between the Gak and Manuer communities in the Aloor area of Rumbek North county of Lakes led to the loss of about 80 lives and livelihood assets. In Yirol East county of Lakes, cattle raiding by armed youth resulted in loss of lives and over 200 cattle.

Trade flows and market functioning remain suspended due to the impact of heavy rainfall and flooding in many parts of the Greater Upper Nile and Greater Bahr el Ghazal regions. Feeder road conditions are extremely poor and rendered impassable, especially within Jonglei and along the Juba-Yirol-Rumbek corridor, the Ikwoto-Torit corridor of Eastern Equatoria, the Rweng-Rubkona corridor of Unity, and the Melut-Maban corridor of Upper Nile. These factors have significantly reduced market supply and led to additional increases in staple food prices, which were previously already high, and this has further exacerbated already limited household food access. In Maban and Maiwut counties of Upper Nile and Akobo and Pibor counties of Jonglei, the reduction in trade flows and therefore market supply has caused food prices to nearly double. However, relatively stable security conditions continue to facilitate overall market recovery and trade flows within South Sudan and between South Sudan and Sudan, Ethiopia, and Uganda. Trade is occurring along major corridors such as Juba-Nimule, Rumbek-Wau, and Sudan-Aweil through Warwar and GokMachar. River routes are also open from Sudan to Fashoda and Leer, Juba to Bor, Juba to Yei, and Uganda to Kapoeta through Tsrenyeta of Ikwoto, though limiting factors include periodic security-related disruptions and poor conditions on connecting feeder roads.

In the context of poor macroeconomic conditions, national cereal deficits and high transportation costs due to the cost of fuel and multiple taxation at unauthorized checkpoints continue to be significant drivers of high food prices. From October to November, the retail price of staple food commodities remained fairly stable in Juba and Bor markets and declined in Wau and Aweil markets. In Juba, Wau, and Bor markets, however, prices remained above November 2018 and the November five-year average. The price of \textit{a malwa} of white sorghum (3.5 kg) ranges from 120 to 178 percent above November 2018 and 181-353 the five-year average. Despite the significant loss of cereals from flooding in Aweil, the price of \textit{a malwa} of white sorghum ranges from 72 to 94 percent lower than November 2018, likely due to availability of some harvests, food aid and increased availability of natural food sources such as fish, greens, and wild foods.

As of November 30, UNHCR reports that 92,174 refugees have returned to South Sudan since January 2019. The majority of returnees have returned to Eastern Equatoria, Jonglei, and Unity, where high proportions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) are also being hosted. Together, the returnee and IDP population accounts for an estimated 12 percent of the total population in Eastern Equatoria and Jonglei and an estimated 28 percent of the total population in Unity. Given that most refugees returned in mid- to late 2019, it is expected most did not return in time to plant. Given locally deficit cereal production in these areas and already high food prices, it is expected that increased food demand from the returnee population – particularly in counties where the returnee population exceeds five percent – is likely contributing to additional pressure on market supply and food prices. However, the total number of returnees is somewhat lower than previously anticipated, and many returnees have not continued onward to their places of origin due to periodic conflict in some areas and concern for the slow pace of implementation of the peace deal. According to OCHA reports and key informant information, nearly 2,000 IDPs relocated within Western Bahr el Ghazal from September to mid-October in anticipation of high levels of intercommunal violence over water and agricultural resources during the upcoming dry season.

Food assistance remains a critical source of food in many areas of South Sudan, due to the protracted loss of livelihood assets that have resulted in limited household food and income sources and low coping capacity. Based on WFP distribution reports from August to October and WFP situation reports on the emergency flood response, the level of food assistance continues to be significant, but the population reached remains well below the 4.5-5.5 million people estimated to be facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes by the August 2019 IPC. As of mid-December, WFP has reached more than 770,300 flood-affected people – equivalent to 85 percent of the flood-affected population – with 8,400 metric tons of food and nutrition assistance,
which is roughly equivalent to a 20-day ration. In areas of greatest need, approximately 148,000 people received food assistance in Maban of Upper Nile and more than 65,000 received food assistance in Pibor of Jonglei, equivalent to approximately 74 percent and 43 percent of the flood-affected population in these counties, respectively. Although humanitarian access has significantly improved in 2019 relative to previous years, food assistance delivery to these areas is currently heavily reliant on air and waterway transportation due to high water levels and impassable roads. In addition to the flood response, WFP distribution reports for October indicate 944,185 people were reached with general food distribution and food for assets programs. This represents a 53 percent decline from the number of beneficiaries reached in September.

As a result of the above factors, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes remain widespread during the harvesting period, despite a relative improvement in the food security situation compared to the peak of the 2019 lean season. The loss of livelihood assets during the protracted conflict and current poor macroeconomic conditions continue to be the primary drivers of high food insecurity, marked by deficits in cereal production, below-normal access to livestock products, and high food prices. Although the availability of the main harvest, seasonal livestock products, and fish and wild foods has slightly reduced the severity of food insecurity across Greater Equatoria and parts of Greater Bahr el Ghazal, the severity of food insecurity and the number of the food insecure population has increased in areas worst-affected by flooding. This includes counties in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Jonglei, and Upper Nile, where crop losses were significant and households are more heavily reliant on food assistance, fish and wild foods, and livelihoods coping strategies.

Of high concern are Duk county of Jonglei and Ulang county of Upper Nile, where Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes have persisted since August, humanitarian assistance levels have remained low, and flooding has disrupted markets and submerged crop fields and pastures. In other areas of high concern, including in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Unity, and Jonglei, food assistance is likely mitigating a more rapid deterioration in food security, leading to Crisis! (IPC Phase 3!) outcomes. Among areas in Crisis! (IPC Phase 3!), Maban of Upper Nile and Pibor of Jonglei are of high concern, where severe flooding led to 20-30 percent crop loss on the county level, market functioning is minimal, and assistance delivery is hindered by poor road access. Based on an IRNA assessment conducted in October, households are reportedly engaging in gathering wild foods, fishing, kinship support, and some income-earning activities such as transporting people across the river. Aweil North, Aweil East, and Aweil South counties are also of concern, given the loss of an estimated 13 percent of cereal area. Based on a field assessment conducted by FEWS NET in early December, households who harvested are consuming own foods while fish, wild foods, and livestock products remain seasonally high and accessible to many households. In Twic East county, where Crisis (IPC Phase 3) is expected, the seasonal availability of natural food sources has supported improved consumption, and FEWS NET observed households preparing for flood recession farming during a recent field assessment. However, an estimated 20 percent of cereals planted were damaged by flooding, and some 6-12 percent of households recently lost their livestock due to flooding and cattle-raiding.

In areas where flooding was less severe and in other areas that were not affected by flooding, households have access to the main season harvest, natural food sources, and relatively better functioning markets. The availability of harvests and wild foods, and well as milk in many areas, are currently at their annual peak. Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes or Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes are present. In Yirol East county of Lakes, where high levels of food insecurity existed during the lean season, a rapid assessment conducted by FEWS NET in early December indicates that food security conditions at the household level improved relative to lean season, and the improvements have been driven by availability of harvests from the early-maturing sorghum, groundnuts, tubers, vegetables, fish and milk. Further, improved security has granted greater household access to wild food gathering, fishing grounds and markets.

**UPDATED ASSUMPTIONS**

The assumptions used to develop FEWS NET’s most likely scenario for the South Sudan Food Security Outlook for October 2019 to May 2020 remain unchanged except for the below:

- The pre-transitional period has been extended through February 2020 to allow more time for agreement on key benchmarks, including the formation of a unified security force and determination of state boundaries, prior to the formation of the new government. Given the uncertainty introduced by a second extension and the slow pace of peace deal implementation, sporadic armed clashes are likely in certain flashpoints and more generalized insecurity will likely endure. To a limited extent, this is expected to constrain humanitarian access and food assistance delivery in some areas.

- Based on the Global Ensemble Forecast System, the bimodal seasonal rains are forecast to generally subside in late December, though the southeastern region of Kapoeta in Eastern Equatoria is forecast to continue to receive light to
moderate rainfall. January is expected to be marked by dry conditions, indicating the start of the dry season.

- Based on FEWS NET’s monitoring and preliminary information from the 2019 CFSAM, 2019/20 national crop production is expected to be slightly higher than last year as a result of improved security that led to increase in planted areas and higher crop yields in areas not directly affected by the flooding, particularly in the Greater Equatoria region and parts of Lakes, Western Equatoria, and Western Bahr el Ghazal states. However, due to the impact of flooding, the harvest is expected to be lower than last year in Northern Bahr el Ghazal state and parts of Upper Nile, Jonglei, and Unity states.

- Based on current trends in returnee flows, expected refugee returns are likely to be somewhat lower than previously anticipated. However, given the volume of returnees in 2019 and additional returnees expected from December through May, and the fact that these households did not plant and there is a national cereal deficit, it is anticipated that there will still be additional pressure on market supply of staple foods in areas with large concentrations of returnees. However, due to lower returnee flows and the expectation of localized insecurity, previous assumptions of an increase in area planted for 2020 first season cultivation in the Greater Equatoria region have been revised. Area planted is now more likely to be similar to or only slightly higher than 2019.

**PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH MAY 2020**

Prior to the onset of flooding in October, 5.5 million people were expected to be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse in the presence of expected humanitarian food assistance in early 2020. Despite the decline in conflict, the anticipated scale of need was already high, as many households were expected to face widening food consumption gaps during the 2020 lean season due to cereal production deficits at the household and national level, seasonal declines in livestock products and wild foods, and high food prices. The impact of flooding on household food and income sources in worst-affected areas is expected to lead to both an increase in the population in need of food assistance and an increase in the severity of food insecurity in some areas. As a result, the population in need of food assistance is now most likely to be higher than previously anticipated. Based on an analysis of WFP distribution data from 2017 to 2019, past delivery trends indicated that monthly assistance would likely reach an average of 2.1 million people from January to April, which is far below the population in need of food assistance. Further scale up of food assistance is required to mitigate widening food consumption gaps and severe coping strategies indicative of Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Emergency (IPC Phase 5). Many of these areas recorded Critical (GAM WHZ 15-29.9 percent) levels of acute malnutrition in mid-2019, and there is an increased likelihood of deterioration within Critical levels due to the contamination of water sources and increased vulnerability to waterborne diseases.

Through May, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or Crisis! (IPC Phase 3!) will likely be widespread as many households experience widening food consumption gaps and increase the use of coping strategies, including in counties that have previously been of high concern such as Yirol East, Cueibet, and Rumbek North of Lakes, Panyikang of Upper Nile, and several parts of Unity. In 16 counties in Jonglei, Upper Nile, Unity, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, and Eastern Equatoria, Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes are expected, which are associated with large food consumption gaps, severe coping, and atypically high acute malnutrition. Although the recently completed and ongoing long-cycle sorghum harvest will provide food stocks through January, most households are likely to exhaust their household food stocks by February or March. Additional pressure on available food sources and market supply is expected in the February to May period, particularly in areas with high crop and livestock losses and in areas with IDP or refugee returnees, which is anticipated to contribute to a rise in staple food prices. Given these factors, the lean season will start atypically earlier than usual in February. Despite this, Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes are expected in 11 counties in Western Equatoria and Lakes, due to availability of harvests, wild foods, and relatively improved food access.

As the 2020 lean season progresses and the availability of wild foods and fish declines, it is possible that some host, IDP, or refugee households would experience Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) without humanitarian food assistance. Based on past analysis of Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring System data, Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) has been observed among households who lost their harvest or did not harvest, do not own livestock, and have few other viable income sources, as they are the most vulnerable to high food prices and have low capacity to cope further. This is of increased concern in areas worst affected by flooding. In the event that the peace deal does not hold and there is an increase in conflict that prevents households in a given area from moving in search of food sources or accessing food assistance for a prolonged period of time, Famine (IPC Phase 5) would be likely in areas where food insecurity is already severe. A scale-up of humanitarian food assistance and full implementation of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan is needed to prevent further loss of lives and livelihoods.
SEASONAL CALENDAR FOR A TYPICAL YEAR

MOST LIKELY FOOD SECURITY OUTCOMES AND AREAS RECEIVING SIGNIFICANT LEVELS OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE*

Each of these maps adheres to IPC v3.0 humanitarian assistance mapping protocols and flags where significant levels of humanitarian assistance are being/are expected to be provided. ☝ indicates that at least 25 percent of households receive on average 25–50 percent of caloric needs from humanitarian food assistance (HFA). ☝️ indicates that at least 25 percent of households receive on average over 50 percent of caloric needs through HFA. This mapping protocol differs from the (!) protocol used in the maps at the top of the report. The use of (!) indicates areas that would likely be at least one phase worse in the absence of current or programmed humanitarian assistance.

Projected food security outcomes, December 2019 to January 2020

Projected food security outcomes, February to May 2020

FEWS NET classification is IPC-compatible. IPC-compatible analysis follows key IPC protocols but does not necessarily reflect the consensus of national food security partners.

ABOUT THIS UPDATE
This report covers current conditions as well as changes to the projected outlook for food insecurity in this country. It updates the FEWS NET’s Food Security Outlook, which is published three times per year. Learn more about our work here.