COVID-19 control measures expect to significantly limit incomes, driving further assistance needs

KEY MESSAGES

• Increased numbers of people, including protracted IDPs in Darfur and South Kordofan, and poor households in Red Sea and Kassala states are expected to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse food security outcomes through September 2020. Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes are expected among IDPs in conflict-affected areas of Jebel Marra in Darfur and SPLM-N areas of South Kordofan as well as parts of Red Sea and Kassala during the peak lean season between June and September 2020.

• COVID-19 related restrictions on populations movements and economic activities in urban areas are exacerbating Sudan’s long-standing macroeconomic crisis. This is resulting in significant decreases in income-earning opportunities, particularly for poor households, alongside continued reductions in the value of the Sudanese Pound and high prices for fuel and food.

• Staple food prices continued their atypical increases during the February to April post-harvest period. Prices for sorghum, millet, and wheat have increased by 20 to 50 percent over the past two months and remain several times higher than the recent five-year average. These high prices, in combination with significant reductions in labor income, are likely to continue driving well above average humanitarian assistance needs through at least September 2020.

CURRENT SITUATION

The long-standing macroeconomic crisis in Sudan has deteriorated further during March and April. As of April 2020, Sudan continued facing low reserves of foreign currency and increased shortages of USD in the official banking system with increased demand to import essential food and non-food items as well as urgently required health and medical equipment. This has resulted in rapid depreciation of the Sudanese pound in the parallel market and led to further devaluation of the official exchange rate. As of April 2020, the parallel market exchange rate reached 145 SDG/USD compared to 130 SDG/USD in March, while the official exchange rate was 55 SDG/USD during March and April compared to 52 SDG/USD during February 2020.

Numerous confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been reported in Sudan. As of late April, Sudan has reported 375 confirmed COVID-19 cases, including 28 deaths, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). Confirmed cases have been reported in Khartoum and nine other states. Increasing numbers of COVID-19 cases are reported to be in quarantine in Sudan’s isolation centers.
Measures taken to control the spread of COVID-19 are restricting trade and population movements and negatively impacting food security conditions. In mid-March, the government of Sudan closed all airports, ports, and official land border points. In addition, the government mandated a nationwide twelve-hour daily curfew, shut down schools and universities, and suspended bus transportation between cities and states in Sudan. In addition, on April 18th, the government imposed a wide-ranging lockdown in Khartoum for an initial period of three weeks.

The lockdown in Khartoum includes wide-ranging limitations on population movements and labor opportunities, with only essential activities permitted. The lockdown includes the closure of all public transportation, and the closure of all entry points into and out of Khartoum, with exceptions only for transport of essential commodities. In addition, a 24-hour curfew is in place with allowances for residents to move within their own neighborhoods between 6 a.m. and 1 p.m. Bakeries are permitted to operate during the night. Gas stations, pharmacies, and shops selling essential food items within the residential areas are allowed to be open from 6 a.m. until 1 p.m., and a few pharmacies are permitted to remain open 24 hours/day. Initial compliance with the curfew was not absolute, but the government has indicated it will strictly enforce the curfew following increases in reported COVID-19 cases in late April. Larger industries like big milling companies, transport companies for food, companies providing feed for animals and livestock have also been allowed to move outside the normal curfew hours and distribute products to the main shops.

Exports of vegetables, fruits, cash crops, and livestock have been very limited during March and April due to extremely high costs for long transit and for air and sea freight. The significantly increased costs of transportation within Sudan due to the continuing fuel crisis and extremely high costs of air and sea freight has significantly limited the ability of producers and exporters to continue transporting and exporting their products as normal. Despite the reported resumption of some exports of onion and live animals to Saudi Arabia during mid-April, field reports indicate large amounts of vegetables and fruit have accumulated in areas of production. Populations worst affected by these reductions are vegetable and fruit producers and exporters, particularly those in the Northern Riverine Livelihood Zone of northern Sudan and the Flood Retreat Livelihood Zone of eastern Sudan, for whom the sale of exported products are a major source of income.

Access to major sources of food and income by poor groups in urban and semi-urban areas across the country has been seriously curtailed by measures intended to control COVID-19. Worst affected populations are those in urban and semi-urban centers who depend on daily work, such as food and tea vendors, people doing odd jobs at the markets and in industrial areas, women doing domestic work in main urban centers, and migrant laborers in agricultural production and traditional gold mining areas. As a result, household income has been significantly reduced, with some facing a near complete loss of income. The negative impact on livelihoods is expected in some pastoral and agropastoral community due to reduced access to main markets where they normally obtain better prices for their animals and agricultural products, and better terms of trade.

Sudan continues to face difficulty importing sufficient quantities of wheat to cover expected cereal needs. The government of Sudan recently signed an agreement with WFP to import 200,000 MT of wheat with the cost paid in local currency. The Strategic Grain Reserve has also contracted companies to import approximately 420,000 MT of wheat, of which 55,000 MT has already been received.

As of late April 2020, Sudan continues facing severe fuel shortages, with below normal fuel imports reported during March and April 2020. In an attempt to ensure timely and effective wheat harvests, the government has reported prioritizing provision of imported diesel to wheat production schemes during March and April. This has contributed to increased fuel shortage across other parts of the country, including Khartoum, and shortages and high costs of transportation across the country.

Prices of the main staples, such as sorghum and millet, have continued rapid unseasonal increases during the post-harvest period between February and April 2020, when prices typically stabilize or decline. Following a reported 15-30 percent...
increase between February and March, sorghum and millet prices have increased by 20-50 percent between March and April 2020 in most of the main production and consumption markets in Sudan. These price levels are 150-163 percent higher than in April 2020 and 400-470 percent higher than the five-year average.

Retail prices of locally produced wheat continued unseasonal increases during March and April despite the ongoing winter harvest. Prices increased 10-20 percent across most production and consumption markets in Sudan between March and April 2020 and remained on average 115 percent above April 2019 and 390 percent above the five-year average. Recent price increases have been attributed to disrupted market supplies due to restrictions on transportation and population movements, which coincided with below-average market supplies, high production transportation costs, household stocking in preparation for COVID-19 control measures, as well as preparation for the fasting month of Ramadan beginning in late April. Prices of non-cereal food items also increased 10-20 percent between March and April 2020.

WFP is working to increase food allocations for Sudan to mitigate expected impacts of the COVID-19 outbreak on food security and acute malnutrition. In line with COVID-19 measures, humanitarian agencies have limited staff working in both home and field offices to essential staff. WFP and partners are introducing new food distribution arrangements intended to ensure crowd control, physical distancing, and handwashing, and in most cases, assistance targeting a two-month ration.

In addition, mosques and community groups have secured some in-kind support from the private sector and government and have started distributing some support to very poor groups in Khartoum. The Ministry of Labor and Social Development (MoLSD) is planning to provide assistance to approximately 600,000 households in Khartoum. Populations expected to be targeted in Khartoum include those who are highly dependent on daily labor.

**UPDATED ASSUMPTIONS**

The assumptions used to develop FEWS NET’s most likely scenario for the Sudan Food Security Outlook for February to September 2020 remain unchanged except the following:

- Based on available information from leading health experts in Sudan including MoH and WHO, the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to continue in the country in the near to medium term, and an increasing number of cases is likely in Sudan due to both the spread of the virus and increased testing. While it is difficult to predict the length and severity of the outbreak in the country given that it will depend heavily on global and country government actions and capacity, it is anticipated that the effects on food and income sources will persist through at least September 2020.

- Sudan is likely to continue COVID-19 infection prevention and control measures in the form of closures of airports, ports, and land crossings for both people and goods and restrictions on population movements between different parts of the country at least through end of September 2020. Exemptions for the import of planned humanitarian support and assistance, essential health and medicine, export of live animals and some agricultural products, and transportation of essential goods between the states are likely to continue.

- Poor households’ access to food and cash income is expected to be negatively impacted by restrictions on population movements. Of high concern are poor groups in urban and semi-urban areas dependent on daily wage labor and petty trade and poor groups of pastoral and agropastoral communities whose access to cash and in-kind payments would be significantly reduced.

- Remittances by migrant family members in areas of seasonal migration and traditional gold mining in Sudan as well as remittances by family members abroad represents a major income source for poor and middle groups in most livelihood zones of Sudan. Remittances are likely to be affected by restricted population movements, closures of borders, and curfews in areas of migration, and will remain below-average during implementation of COVID-19 control measures.

**PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH SEPTEMBER 2020**

- Protracted displacement due to long-standing conflict in Darfur, South Kordofan, and Blue Nile, and the continuing macroeconomic crisis in Sudan, which has been exacerbated by the outbreak COVID-19, will likely drive above-average needs for humanitarian assistance through at least the peak of the lean season in September 2020. Of high concern are poor groups in urban and semi-urban areas who depend on daily work as a major source of income and market purchases as a major source of food. These groups are likely to face high losses of income, very low purchasing power, and reduced...
ability to access food from the market. In urban areas, a significant number of households will face Stressed (IPC Phase 2) and Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes.

- Poor households in the pastoral areas are likely to continue facing difficulty meeting their minimum food needs as a result of very high staple food prices, reduced access to labor, and lower than normal terms of trade. Most poor groups are likely to face difficulty purchasing sufficient quantities of food to meet their household needs. In addition, access to animal products will remain seasonally low during the dry season between April and May. Poor households in pastoral zones of the northern part of North Darfur, parts of North Kordofan, as well as poor groups in northern Kassala and Red Sea states of the Eastern Pastoral zone are likely to face moderate food consumption gaps and Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes by April. The situation is likely to worsen during the peak of the lean season between June and September 2020 and increased numbers of people will be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3). In parts of Red Sea and Kassala, poor chronically food insecure households in seasonal riverine areas and small pastoral areas are likely to face significant reductions in income associated with the closure of the seaport and businesses in Port Sudan. These populations, who depend on unskilled labor income, are expected to face growing food consumption gaps as the lean season progresses, with Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes likely during August and September 2020.

- In the agropastoral and agricultural areas of Sudan, poor groups are expected to continue facing reduced access to agricultural and non-agricultural labor opportunities due to COVID-19-related restrictions. Household income and purchasing power is expected to be lower than normal. Given below-average grain stocks at the household level due to below-average cereal harvests last season, and high prices of food and non-food items, poor households are likely to continue facing deteriorating food consumption, but maintain minimally adequate dietary intake and remain in Stressed (IPC Phase 2) into April. Food security outcomes are likely to deteriorate to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) during the lean season between June and September 2020. IDPs in less accessible areas of SPLM-N-controlled areas of South Kordofan and parts of Darfur are expected to continue facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) acute food insecurity between April and May 2020, before deteriorating to Emergency (IPC Phase 4) acute food insecurity during the peak of the lean season.

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.