SOUTH SUDAN Food Security Outlook Update September 2019

Food security is expected to slightly improve, but Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) exists in Yirol East of Lakes

KEY MESSAGES

- According to the August 2019 IPC analysis, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes remain pervasive in South Sudan, but the proportion of the population experiencing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes during the May-August lean season slightly declined from 59 percent in 2018 to 54 percent in 2019. An estimated 6.35 million people faced Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes at the July-August peak of the lean season in the presence of humanitarian assistance. Of greatest concern is Yirol East county of Lakes state, where an estimated 10,000 people are in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5). Food security is expected to seasonally improve in several areas with the availability of the main harvest through January, but Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes or worse will likely remain prevalent. A risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) will continue to persist in areas already classified in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse.

- Humanitarian food assistance continues to prevent more extreme outcomes in parts of Greater Upper Nile, Greater Bahr el Ghazal, and Western Equatoria. However, despite lower conflict events and improvements in humanitarian access, the number of beneficiaries reached with humanitarian food assistance has declined since May. Assistance continues to remain below the estimated need and is slightly lower than the same time last year.

- Food security improvements through January are expected to be facilitated by the decline in conflict events and driven by similar to slightly better crop production compared to 2018. The decline in conflict has facilitated some improvements in trade flows and household movement, which is permitting greater engagement in livelihoods activities, access to markets, and seasonal declines in food prices. In areas where households lost crops to flooding or did not plant and where households still face limited access to markets or food assistance, Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes are expected to endure, as will a risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5).

- Despite the decline in conflict and anticipated improvement in food security, many households have lost key livelihood assets and coping strategies as a result of the protracted conflict. Consequently, high levels of acute food insecurity and a risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) will persist. Based on past trends, Famine (IPC Phase 5) would be likely if conflict shifts and 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.

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.
CURRENT SITUATION

According to the August 2019 South Sudan IPC analysis, food security has slightly improved during the 2019 lean season compared to the same time last year due to improved security conditions, which have permitted greater household movement and access to fish, wild foods, and markets. The proportion of the population in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse acute food insecurity during the May-August lean season declined from 59 percent in 2018 to 54 percent in 2019. The decline in conflict has also led to reduced humanitarian access incidents and constraints in 2019 relative to 2018, yet the number of beneficiaries reached with humanitarian food assistance remains lower than planned and below the number reached in previous years. Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes remain prevalent across the country, driven by localized conflict, flooding, poor macroeconomic conditions, and the impact of prolonged conflict on livelihoods. At the July-August peak of the lean season, an estimated 6.35 million people were in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse acute food insecurity in the presence of humanitarian food assistance. Of greatest concern is Yirol East of Lakes, where an estimated 10,000 people are in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5)1. Eastern and central Jonglei, southern and eastern Upper Nile, and parts of Eastern Equatoria and Northern Bahr el Ghazal also remain of high concern, as these areas are experiencing more severe food insecurity and high proportions of their population are facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes.

Although food security has slightly improved, high levels of acute malnutrition have endured. Nutrition data collected during the 24th round of Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring Systems (FSNMS R24) classified global acute malnutrition (GAM) prevalence by weight-for-height z-score (WHZ) in 58 counties as ‘Serious’ (GAM WHZ 10.0-14.9 percent) or ‘Critical’ (GAM WHZ 15.0-29.9 percent), which are indicative of Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Emergency (IPC Phase 4), respectively. ‘Critical’ levels of GAM continue to be observed in most counties in Unity, Upper Nile, Jonglei, and Warrap and in parts of Eastern Equatoria and Lakes. Of highest concern is Renk of Upper Nile, which recorded the highest level of acute malnutrition at 32.1 percent (CI: 27.4-37.2), reaching ‘Extremely Critical’ levels (GAM WHZ ≥30 percent). The high level of GAM amongst the local population in Renk is likely driven by both food and non-food factors, the latter including high morbidity, poor access to health, nutrition and WASH services; however, a casual analysis is planned to be conducted in November 2019. Budi of Eastern Equatoria is also of high concern, where GAM (WHZ) reached a ‘Critical’ level of 27.7 percent (CI: N/A).

Conflict events have occurred in recent months in Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile and in parts of Central Equatoria and Lakes, though relative calm exists in most parts of the country with the ongoing implementation of the peace deal (Figure 1). In early September, armed clashes in Mukaya and Lofugo of Yei and Bereka of Lainya between government and opposition forces led to loss of lives and disruption to trade flows along the Juba-Yei road. In late August, fighting between government and opposition forces in Aweil West of Northern Bahr el Ghazal led to loss of lives and disruption to trade flows and livelihoods activities. Similarly, in late July to early August, fighting involving opposition forces and armed civilians in Maiwut of Upper Nile led to loss of lives, disrupted market activities, and reduced household access to green harvests,

According to the IPC, a Famine (IPC Phase 5) has occurred when at least 20 percent of households in a given area have an extreme lack of food, the Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) prevalence, as measured by weight-for-height z-score (WHZ), exceeds 30 percent, and mortality, as measured by the Crude Death Rate (CDR), is greater than 2 per 10,000 per day. Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) is when a household group has an extreme lack of food and/or other basic needs even with the full employment of coping strategies.

Figure 1. Number of conflict events per month by region compared to 2014-2018 average, January 2018 – September 2019

Source: ACLED data

Figure 2. Rainfall as a percent of the 1981-2010 average, June 1 – September 20, 2019

Source: FEWS NET/USGS
fishing, and wild foods.

Key informant information indicates that an estimated 10,000 people were displaced internally, and deliveries of food assistance were suspended as staff from ICRC re-located following the attacks. Additionally, several ambushes along the Juba-Mundri, Juba-Yei of Central Equatoria, and Rumbek Centre-Cueibet roads have led to loss of lives and disruptions to trade flows. No other large-scale external and internal displacements have been reported between late July and September. As of July 31, UNHCR reports that 57,140 refugees have returned to South Sudan since January, though not all returnees have returned to their places of origin.

Throughout South Sudan, markets in state capitals and in some rural areas are beginning to recover. Based on a rapid assessment of Juba markets conducted by FEWS NET in late July and early August, relative improvements in security have served to open major trade routes and this is increasing both domestic and regional commodity flows. Exceptions include some areas where insecurity has persisted, such as in Yei, Lainya, and Morobo of Central Equatoria; Greater Mundri of Western Equatoria; Aweil West and Aweil North of Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Maiwut of Upper Nile. Despite increased trade flows and ongoing consumption of the first-season harvest in the Equatorias and the green harvest in other regions, staple food prices remain atypically high in all reference markets except in Aweil Centre. In August, the retail price of white sorghum in Wau was 128 percent higher than in August 2018 and 326 percent higher than the five-year average. In Juba, where market dependence is even higher, the retail price of sorghum was 126 percent above last year and 209 percent above the five-year average. This is driven by informal taxes and continued fluctuations in the U.S. Dollar (USD) to South Sudanese Pound (SSP) exchange rate. The high risk posed by the foreign exchange market has compelled traders to adopt a strategy of high turnover, in which they sell small quantities of staple foods quickly instead of storing larger quantities, and this continues to restrict market supply. However, in Aweil Centre, improved cross-border trade flows have driven the retail price of white sorghum to 42 percent below last year, though still 136 percent higher than five-year average.

Macro-economic conditions have remained poor despite recent increases in oil crude production from 175,000 barrels per day (bpd) in May to 180,000 bpd in late August. The need for hard currency earnings remains high, primarily including for peace deal implementation and infrastructure development as well as loan repayments. Given this, the USD: SSP exchange rate increased from 280 SSP per USD in mid-May to 310 SSP per USD in September. Conversely, the official exchange rate increased from 156 SSP per USD to 159.8 SSP per USD during the same period, indicative of fluctuations in the value of the local currency against the USD.

Green harvest consumption of maize and groundnuts is currently underway in unimodal rainfall-receiving areas of Greater Bahr el Ghazal and Greater Upper Nile. Based on the August 2019 IPC results, a majority of households are expecting harvests in 2019 to be similar to or slightly better than last year; however, some households – mainly in Lakes, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Jonglei, parts of Upper Nile and Unity – anticipate that harvests in 2019 will be lower than last year due to pests and diseases and flood-related destruction of crops from July to September. In bimodal Greater Equatoria, most households who planted this year have completed harvesting of first-season crops. A rapid assessment conducted by FEWS NET in Yei in mid-September indicates that more households planted this year than last year. Based on field observations, the first-season harvest in Yei is slightly better than last year and the planting of second season crops is ongoing. In parts of Central Equatoria and Western Equatoria, however, continued insecurity is limiting household access to farms, and this is likely to reduce area planted in the second cropping season.

Relative stability has improved household access to livelihoods activities and markets and has reduced humanitarian access constraints in all regions relative to 2018, though periodic disruptions due to seasonal flooding and insecurity have persisted. However, the number of beneficiaries reached to date in 2019 remains below that of previous years and has exhibited a declining trend from May to July. In July, 1.91 million people were reached with general food distributions (GFD) and food for assets programs, a six percent decline from the number of people reached in June and a 15 percent decline from the number of people reached in May. This assistance was distributed in some counties of high concern, including Cueibet and Yirol East of Lakes. In parts of Greater Upper Nile, parts of Greater Bahr el Ghazal, and Western Equatoria, assistance has mitigated the occurrence of more extreme food insecurity outcomes.

Based on the August 2019 IPC results, there are slight improvements in food security outcomes during the 2019 lean season relative to same time last year. However, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes remained widespread at the July-August peak of the lean season due to continued low access to food and income. Of highest concern is Yirol East of Lakes, where food insecurity is most severe and Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) exists. These outcomes reflect continued low quantity and poor quality of diets across South Sudan. Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes were observed in 28 counties, including Cueibet of Lakes, Canal/Pigi of Jonglei, and Koch and Mayendit of Unity. Crisis! (IPC Phase 3!) outcomes are
present in Maban of Upper Nile; Fangak, Ayod, and Uror of Jonglei; Awerial of Lakes; Kajo-Kei East of Eastern Equatoria; Nagero of Western Equatoria; Wau and Raja of Western Bahr el Ghazal; Aweil Centre of Northern Bahr el Ghazal; and Leer and Rubkona of Unity, where humanitarian food assistance is likely preventing more extreme outcomes. Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes are present in Tambura and Maridi of Western Equatoria, where households have access to the first season harvest and functioning markets. All remaining counties are in Crisis (IPC Phase 3).

UPDATED ASSUMPTIONS

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

- Due to the impact of flooding and pests, national 2019/20 crop production is likely to be somewhat lower in some counties than previously expected. Based on field assessments and FSNMS 24 household data, production is most likely to be similar to or slightly better than 2018/19. Production is still expected to remain below pre-crisis levels.

- Macro-economic conditions are expected to remain poor despite recent increases in oil production from 175,000 bdp in mid-May to 180,000 bdp in late August. Hard currency inflows from oil exports are likely to be spent for peace deal implementation and infrastructure development, and very little is expected to be available for food imports and livelihoods recovery. Given this, the USD:SSP exchange rate is expected to trade between 300 and 350 SSP per USD due to increased needs for USD and fluctuations in the value of the local currency against the USD.

PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH JANUARY 2020

Through January, food security is expected to improve throughout most of the country as the main harvest becomes available beginning in October for households who planted. Where relative stability exists, markets are expected to continue to recover and food prices are expected to seasonally decline given the availability of the dry harvest and other market sources coupled with the expectation that improved feeder road conditions will permit greater trade flows. During this period, households who depend on market food purchases are likely to be able to purchase increased quantities of food and therefore reduce consumption gaps. Other food sources including fish, livestock products, and wild foods will also continue to be available, except in counties where insecurity is likely to periodically disrupt access to these food sources; however, seasonal declines are expected to begin in January. Increased food access through January is expected to reduce the magnitude of household food consumption gaps in most areas, though households who lost crops to flooding or did not harvest and households who face more limited access to markets or humanitarian food assistance are still expected to face moderate to large food consumption gaps.

Due to the above-mentioned contributing factors, food security is expected to improve from Emergency (IPC Phase 4) to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in most areas of greatest concern and from Crisis (IPC Phase 3) to Stressed (IPC Phase 2) in several counties from October through January. Crisis (IPC Phase 3) will likely remain widespread. Several counties are expected to remain in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), including Duk of Jonglei and Ulang, Maiwut, and Nasir of Upper Nile, due to anticipated poor harvest availability and lower food access. As previously projected, improvement to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) is still expected in Yirol East, Cueibet, and Rumbek North of Lakes; Leer and Mayendit of Unity; and Kajo-Kei East of Eastern Equatoria. However, outcomes are expected to be slightly better than previously projected in Koch of Unity, Canal/Pigi and Fangak of Jonglei, and Panyikang of Upper Nile; these counties are now most likely to improve to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) due to better-than-expected harvests and access to natural food sources.

Overall, food security outcomes through January are expected to be slightly better than the same period last year, driven by the expectation of similar to slightly better crop production, improved household movement permitting engagement in livelihoods activities, and some improvements in trade flows and seasonal declines in food prices. The prevalence of acute malnutrition is expected to decrease slightly, driven by improved access to harvests and reduced morbidity, though GAM (WHZ) prevalence will still remain at ‘Serious’ (10-14.9 percent) or ‘Critical’ (15-29.9 percent) levels in most counties. However, widespread Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes are still expected to persist across South Sudan, as will a risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5). Planned and likely humanitarian food assistance is expected to prevent more extreme outcomes in several counties, but the level of planned assistance is expected to remain notably lower than the anticipated number of people in need of humanitarian food assistance. Sustained, full implementation of the peace deal and a scale-up of humanitarian assistance, in addition to unhindered humanitarian access, is critically needed to minimize the risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) and facilitate investments in livelihoods recovery and health and nutrition services in the medium to long term.
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, September 2019

Projected food security outcomes, October 2019 to January 2020

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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.