

Guidance for emergency livestock actions in the context of COVID-19 in South Sudan: – addressing emerging needs related to the pandemic and reprogramming on-going critical activities.

1. Introduction

This guidance note is aimed at all livestock sector stakeholders in South Sudan especially those operating in our context of already experiencing or at risk of high levels of acute food insecurity, and further compounded by the pandemic. The Global FSC TWG developed the [original paper](#), comprising a range of key partners¹ and each country has been then asked to contextualize the guidance. The aim of members of FAO, the Livestock TWG and FSL cluster is to contextualize this paper for South Sudan.

The guidance note aims to complement existing useful reference materials:

General guidance:	COVID-19 guidance:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS) handbook²; and • Livestock-related interventions during emergencies by FAO – The how-to-do-it manual³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LEGS Guidance Note on COVID-19 • FAO policy brief: “<i>Mitigating the Impacts of COVID-19 on the Livestock Sector</i>”, here.

The note follows the main components of LEGS namely; the provision of animal health services, emergency feeding and water supplies, destocking (marketing, slaughtering) and restocking. LEGS also highlights the importance of cash based transfers (CBT) in enhancing safe and swift delivery of livestock inputs, products and services and CBT is likely to play a key role in the COVID-19 response also.

2. Background

In South Sudan, the livestock sector contributes about 16.5% to the national GDP. Despite supporting the livelihoods of more than 65% of the population, this sector continues to face major challenges, and this fragile context of COVID-19 could push people further into an already existing food security crisis. Livestock keepers face issues in the depth of the lean season around scarcity of pasture and water which historically has resulted in seasonal conflict. In the past 10 years, with the increase in the number of small arms and other weapons within communities, and the civil war (2013 – 2018), there has been an intensification of conflict, disruption of livelihoods and in the delivery of essential services, and continuing levels of insecurity. South Sudan is already expecting to have 6.5 million people facing severe food insecurity (IPC 3 or worse) by the peak of the lean season May – July projected by the January IPC analysis. With the arrival now of COVID-19 there is a fear of a **Triple Menace**: in some locations desert locust damage to crops and pasture is highly likely with a second wave of swarms already in the country and the forecast of ‘above normal’ rainfall and flooding for the second consecutive year. The year 2020 will be yet another exceedingly challenging year for the vast proportion of the population including livestock keepers.

The COVID-19 pandemic reached South Sudan on 5 April 2020 and as of 16 June; there were 1,776 confirmed cases and 30 deaths. COVID-19 is expected to affect areas across South Sudan differently: at high risk are locations on border crossings, congested POC⁴ and collective IDP camps, and dense urban slums especially Juba (with 95% of cases⁵), Nimule and Yei; and far less exposed to the virus (currently) in the more isolated and remote locations where cattle camps are found and areas seasonally difficult to access. However, livestock keepers need, by necessity, continue to interact with largely urban-based livestock markets to meet their livelihood needs and to interact with actors along the livestock production/marketing chain. Traders will also need to be able to transport (trucking and trekking) animals to markets.

No sector, or group is likely to be unaffected by the direct or indirect effects of the virus and therefore it is important to support measures that address the direct impacts by reducing/ mitigating the spread and transmission of the virus and the indirect impacts by providing supportive measures to safeguard livelihoods (in this case livestock based livelihoods). Achievements already in place in South Sudan to address the effects of the virus include the development of key COVID-19 messaging, posters, Public Service Announcements (PSA) for use through FM radio stations, agreements from donors (e.g. ODFA) for partners to re-purpose funding to cover the increase in operational costs during the pandemic: procuring masks / Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), hand washing materials etc. Animal vaccines will be pre-positioned (starting from June / July) targeting to vaccinate and treat 11 million animals. The network of solar vaccine cold chain facilities has been extended to cover 130 locations across the country and there is agreement with WFP/ UNHAS to prioritize the movement of essential vaccines and other veterinary inputs to the field. There will need to advocacy to prioritize movement of technical staff to the field to conduct livestock campaigns.

¹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards (LEGS), Mercy Corps, Plan International and WFP.

² LEGS. 2014. Livestock Emergency Guidelines and Standards, 2nd edition.

³ FAO. 2016. Livestock-related interventions during emergencies – The how-to-do-it manual. Edited by Philippe Ankers, Suzan Bishop, Simon Mack and Klaas Dietze. FAO Animal Production and Health Manual No. 18. Rome.

⁴ In South Sudan there are 5 Protection of Civilian (POC) sites;

⁵ As of June 11th 2020;

3. Guidance across the relevant LEGS components (The guidance is presented under six objectives)

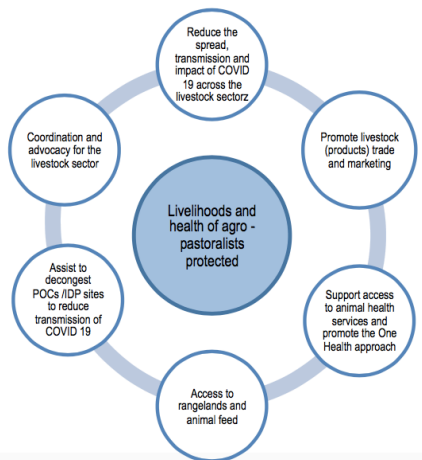


Figure 1: Strategic objectives for the livestock sector COVID 19 pandemic

SO 1: Reduce the spread, transmission and impact of COVID-19 across livestock sector

The FSL cluster engagement with the national RCCE TWG⁶ is essential to ensure COVID-19 messaging is harmonized with that of the Ministry of Health, WHO and UNICEF and that approved materials are cascaded across the country, to cattle camps, livestock markets, milk and meat stores etc. One exceptional resource in South Sudan is to build on the existing network of around 2000 Community Animal Health Workers (CAHW) that has been in existence for the past 20+ years. These same networks have been used to conduct livestock disease surveillance and early warning of outbreaks of animal diseases including zoonoses such as Rift Valley Fever (endemic South Sudan).

All actors along the livestock production/ marketing chain and CAHWs to be trained on the COVID-19: signs and symptoms, importance of hand washing, the need for social distancing to enable them to remain safe and to avoid themselves being the transmitters of the virus into otherwise remote / isolated communities;

- Any training to respect social distancing and to be conducted in small groups (10 or less); currently most face to face trainings has been cancelled and any forms of distribution must consider a reduction in the number of persons attending at any one time and to ensure sufficient hand washing facilities, along with messaging and awareness raising around COVID-19;
- Non – medical face masks must also be provided to CAHWs and agro-pastoralists during any trainings / sensitization events
- Use network of CAHWs to disseminate COVID-19 awareness information whilst providing frontline animal health services; messaging is best when communicated in the local language directly in the community where feasible by trusted local respected influencers – many of the CAHWs fit this description;
- Livestock partners to support with provision of Information Education Communication (IEC) materials through written posters/ pictures through radio announcements played on local FM stations or at markets and around key communal places including cattle camp settings. Key messages must include: No handshakes, social distancing, the main signs and symptoms of the disease etc. and done in a way that best suits the local culture;
- Key messages on COVID-19 and livestock-related issues should be articulated, agreed upon and widely disseminated at the local level to counter misinformation. FSL Cluster / LTWG meetings are appropriate forums for this coordination as are the Inter Cluster forums at State level, trade associations, existing in kind, cash and livelihood support distributions and even at a lower levels such as cattle camps

SO 2: Promote livestock (product) trade and marketing

Access to markets and trading opportunities are critical for pastoralists & livestock owners to generate income, by exchanging livestock for other essential needs. These exchanges are time sensitive, in view of seasonality & market prices, to ensure the best prices are achieved. In South Sudan the main rainy season (May-October) fetches good prices for livestock, also the improved security situation gives access to key internal and cross-border markets with resultant high demand. Missing this peak season has ramifications for food security, income and herd dynamics for the entire year and beyond, delaying recovery from repeated crises where herd sizes have diminished.

Restricted trade movements both:

- (a) Internal: from Kapoeta to Juba through Torit, Pibor, Awerial & Terekeka corridors, Ameit market (serves Abyei, Unity, Warrap and parts of Northern Bahr El Ghazal), Wau (serves Gogrial, Tonj, Warawar in NBeG) and
- (b) External: cross border trade with Uganda/Sudan affects livestock keepers' ability to meet their essential needs. Therefore, interventions must help ensure adaptation of appropriate measures and practices, so that the key players (traders and pastoralist/agro-pastoralist etc.), along the livestock supply chain, are not further at risk of COVID-19 transmission and their means to exchange livestock and earn income/ barter is not compromised.

There is also an important role for livestock in supporting **urban livelihoods** with many urban dwellers, in times of stress/ need, falling back on their livestock resources, selling animals to meet consumption gaps or losses in other income streams (unemployment/ loss of casual labour opportunities). Again the importance of ensuring local markets remain functional cannot be over stated.

- Local authorities need to be supported to regulate access and functioning of the markets/ auction yards in accordance with WHO guidance and operate within measures (frequent hand washing, using disinfectants, wearing facemask⁷ & physical distancing) to avoid spreading of virus; and offer guidance such as markings for safe negotiations among traders & security services for orderly operations.

⁶ Risk Communication and Community Engagement (RCCE) Technical Working Group (TWG);

⁷ OCHA have permitted their partners to re-purpose up to \$50,000 of their grants to help ensure interventions are COVID 19 compliant

- Where possible to promote decentralized markets & auction yards to reduce overcrowding and the need to travel. The stakeholders (livestock keepers, traders, veterinarians, para vets, marketing authorities) require appropriate PPEs including masks; with hand-washing stands installed;
- The CAHW network (extensive across & especially in hard to reach areas of South Sudan) and livestock partners present on the ground provide an excellent cascading resource to disseminate essential COVID-19 messaging to livestock traders at these market points;
- Encourage the use of mobile money transfers where applicable to minimize exchange of cash monies at markets/ auction yards and ensure the people transacting have gloves and correct PPE.
- In order to minimize food loss, promote food safety practices in the handling of livestock products (milk, meat, eggs etc.). This can be done through supporting livestock/ livestock products value chain(s).
- WFP, FAO, FEWSNET, REACH and 25 FSLC⁸ partners already monitoring market prices (basic commodities including livestock and cereals) across the country on a monthly basis and effects of COVID-19 on a fortnightly basis; this is essential to monitor the shift in terms of trade between cereal producers/ sellers and livestock keepers/ sellers and the effect on agro pastoralist/ pastoralist livelihoods;
- Encourage national-level, government/ humanitarian-led finance schemes, such as soft loans for agriculture and livestock sectors. It is also important to work through trader associations and pastoralist unions, the South Sudan chapter of the North Eastern Africa Livestock Development Council, for extensive impacts, beyond households, to the national economy.

SO 3: Support access to animal health services

Animal health service providers require unrestricted movement to conduct treatment and vaccinations, as timely access to these services is critical for protecting livestock assets. Large areas of South Sudan will be at the peak of the rains through August – September that is also a time when there is a high prevalence of diseases. As much as possible, animals must be vaccinated according to the seasonal calendar. In areas affected and cut-off by flooding there is increased chances of animal disease outbreaks. Animals are generally stressed and conditions are conducive for outbreaks of diseases such as parasitaemia (internal and external) haemorrhagic septicaemia, anthrax, foot rot (infectious pododermatitis), leptospirosis and, foot and mouth disease among others. Additionally, rangelands are also inundated by flood waters resulting in possible deaths of animals due to starvation.

Movement restriction of pastoralists and their herd, including across borders, poses a great risk of animal disease outbreaks. This is due to possible disruption of strategic movements e.g. from wet to dry season grazing areas. During the wet season, restrictions in movement would also result in livestock being held areas infested by ticks, tsetse flies, mosquitoes, internal parasites etc.

- It is important that disease surveillance and monitoring of risk factors be enhanced during the COVID-19 crisis, so as to ensure appropriate response to unusual events. In the current wet season across the East African region, there is an alert for Rift Valley Fever (endemic in South Sudan) linked with flooding. It is likely that reporting of such an important disease may be ignored, and collaboration with One Health partners weakened as a result of COVID-19. Smartphone / tablet based reporting will be explored.
- The pre-positioning of veterinary vaccines, drugs and supplies is important to mitigate movement restrictions; rainy season and / or COVID-19 associated logistic challenges related to importation and the supply chain. Livestock will inputs to be pre-positioned in the key humanitarian hubs: in Juba, Wau, Torit, Rumbek and Aweil.
- Mobile applications for livestock owners can help them, ask questions, seek advice and access drugs from nearby agrovet dealers.
- Public Health and Veterinary Services should work together using a **One Health approach** to share information, assessments and service delivery to livestock keepers as may be feasible at the local level ([OIE Questions and Answers on the COVID-19](#)). This should include messaging to the general public on the safety of livestock products and transmission of COVID-19.
- Integrate “One Health” approach in the training of the CAHWs to promote their contribution to biosecurity, food hygiene and sanitary practices among pastoralists. Enhance collaboration with CAHWs, ensure that they are well equipped (with PPEs). Link them to local government authorities, technical teams and the nearest agrovet dealers to maintain flows of livestock inputs.

SO 4: Support access to livestock rangelands and feed

It is normal that with the onset of the dry season, before the rains, there is competition amongst livestock keepers over access to good pasture and water. Traditionally this has often resulted in localized conflict and often mediated by local traditional cattle camp and higher level chieftain authorities. However, conflict related to livestock (mostly cattle raiding) has escalated in recent years.

The **Triple Menace** of COVID-19, Desert Locusts and excessive Flooding (now forecast for a second consecutive year) is expected to further worsen the situation. The Desert Locust invasion is estimated to potentially affect close to 2.76 million persons with considerable damage to crops and pasture (full extent of the impact will not be known until later in the year after impact assessments). The unprecedented flooding in 2019 resulted in large livestock losses as animals starved without pasture and died from various livestock diseases due to poor diet and heightened prevalence of diseases associated with floods.

⁸ This data is combined by REACH to produce the monthly Joint Market Monitoring Initiative (JMMI) report;

Internal and cross border access to grazing areas, feed supplies and livestock supply chain may be affected due to movement restrictions, which require continued dialogue between pastoralists and government authorities to find suitable movement options and also help mitigating farmers-herders conflict. Provision of livestock feed to pastoralists whose herds (pregnant & lactating) are left at home due to drought or strained supply chains and cash or voucher interventions alongside the feed are important to ease pressure on the vulnerable households and to enable them obtain other supplementary feed inputs. Awareness radio program and cash plus programming needs to be undertaken with care and due consideration to all measures against the spread of COVID-19.

As part a pilot to respond to the Desert Locust DL and the anticipated flood emergency (all in the COVID-19 pandemic), FAO is pre-positioning about 800 MT of **Total Mix Ration (TMR)**, a feed supplement that is meant for ruminants. It is constituted from roughage, concentrate, vitamins and minerals. It is fed during times of crisis to ensure the survival, welfare and production / productivity of the core livestock categories. Targeted animals are offered modest amounts of TMR until the feed emergency is over. The targeting of some few animals per select households will cover healthy breeding females (lactating/pregnant females / breeding males). Focusing on these categories of animals has dividends as it helps to rebuild the herd during the post-emergency period.

SO 5: Provide livestock to (re) establish livestock – based livelihoods to support COVID-19 mitigations actions

Livestock actors in South Sudan already have experience in the implementation of appropriate restocking packages through the provision of poultry and small ruminants. The focus of this support will be to promote the de-congestion in Protection of Civilian Sites (POCs) and other Internally Displaced Persons camp - like settings with a high risk of viral spread and transmission. Additionally, the use of cash grants is also seen as a useful alongside restocking with small ruminants and poultry for support to (re) establish livestock based livelihoods (e.g. VSF's small ruminants of reproductive age restocking initiatives, as well as, small ruminant husbandry training, vaccination, treatment and linkage to veterinary care)

SO 6: Coordination and advocacy

The main coordination bodies within the livestock sector remains the Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries and FAO (policy support, resource mobilization etc) extending to partners (implementation of activities), the Ministry of Health, UNICEF and WHO regarding the One Health approach. In terms of the humanitarian response there is an important role for the FSL cluster/ LTWG and also the Health cluster in measuring achievement against planned targets, identifying response gaps and partner mapping to determine service delivery gaps.

The specific needs of livestock owners, and particularly nomadic pastoralists, are frequently overlooked in traditional humanitarian assistance. It is critical that governments, aid Agencies, local authorities and all relevant actors take account of these groups when planning pandemic containment measures, responses, and medium and long-term actions to reduce the impact of these on national and local economies. Targets of such advocacy include line ministries related to livestock production and animal health, regional organizations such as Inter Governmental Authority on Development, policy- and decision-makers in state and county authorities, UN, NGOs and other organizations involved in the humanitarian response (health and otherwise). There are then a number of crucial advocacy issues then to highlight during this critical time:

(a) Markets and livelihoods:

- GOSS/Ministry of Livestock & Fisheries (MOLF): the importance of prioritizing the needs & constraints faced by livestock keepers across the country especially unrestricted movement/ circulation/ migratory routes on which livestock-based livelihoods depend;
- GOSS/MOLF for **unhindered internal and cross border trade flows** for livestock whilst promoting strict adherence to requisite hygiene, sanitary and phytosanitary measures to protect people from COVID-19

(b) Animal and human health are One Health:

- Donors: That COVID 19 does not result in the neglect in funding community based animal health services because of its importance to the livelihoods of families dependent upon pastoral and agro pastoral lifestyles;
- Government of South Sudan / Ministry of Livestock and Fisheries / Ministry of Health: as part of the **One Health approach** respective Ministries, FAO and WHO should not neglect important disease outbreaks such as RVF which run the risk of being neglected due to the focus on COVID 19 with detrimental effects on both livestock and humans;
- GOSS/ MOH: as part of the One Health approach with UNICEF and WHO to ensure that children's vaccines are made available and that health workers alongside CAHWS continue to reach remote locations and cattle camps;
- Such advocacy should be undertaken as much as possible jointly with other Agencies and organizations in order to ensure coherence and amplification of messaging. COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the critical need for the institutionalization of the One Health approach in the context of fragile situations⁹.
- GOSS/ MOLF: Considering the critical role of livestock in food security, there's a need for special exemptions/ corridors to facilitate movement and transportation of inputs during livestock vaccination campaigns. Permission for special chartered flights to transport inputs and vaccines to the 130 solar vaccine cold chain facilities across South Sudan. Vaccinations will be delivered through small teams that observe the WHO regulations.

⁹ African Union, 2020. COVID-19: How should the Animal resource sector in Africa respond?