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NEWS RELEASE

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
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312 000 South Sudanese families receive support during the main planting season

July 24, 2018 – As the main planting season draws to a close across most of the country, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and its partners have finalized efforts to provide South Sudanese farmers hardest hit by hunger and malnutrition with seeds and tools. The Organization has distributed over 4 530 tonnes of crop seeds – the largest quantity of seeds distributed during the main planting season to date.

For many years South Sudan has been facing severe food deficits mainly due to a decrease in local food production, resulting in poor food stocks from previous harvests and high staple food prices. Latest crop monitoring assessments show that in 2017 farmers had the smallest output of cereals since the start of the 2013 crisis, leaving a deficit of 482 000 tonnes, and the largest reductions in harvested areas occurring in Central Equatoria and Western Bahr el Ghazal.

“Given the good rainfall this year, we are hoping that farmers can increase their production that will enable thousands of families to feed themselves,” says Serge Tissot, FAO Representative in South Sudan.

Each family received up to 15 kilograms of crop seeds such as sorghum, cowpea and maize depending on the region being assisted. With this the amount, families can plant over 1 feddan (0.42 hectares) enabling them to produce food to feed a family of six for about seven months.

Supporting farmers

FAO supplies quality seeds through direct distribution or seed fairs – temporary markets where families receive cash vouchers that can be used to purchase seeds. Seed fairs are prioritized over a direct distribution, where families choose their seeds and supplies come from the local seed producers in the geographic area. This year 911 tonnes of seeds were distributed through seed fairs to about 62 000 families, and another 3 619 tonnes to about 250 000 families through direct distribution.

Coupled with the seed distributions, farmers also receive tools and advice from the network of extension workers trained by FAO and implementing partners to improve their agronomic practices. If the seeds are grown in the optimum conditions including proper spacing between crops, timely weeding and pest and disease management, farmers have the potential to produce more than last year.

New threats

Despite the great potential of the agriculture sector in South Sudan, farmers face many challenges throughout the planting season. A nationwide outbreak of Fall Armyworm was announced by the Government of South Sudan last year, after which the impact and continued threat of it has been felt not only in South Sudan but across the continent. It is especially harmful for farmers in South Sudan due to the lack of agronomic capacity to cope.

“This has been a difficult year for farmers as they have had to cope with a new pest, the Fall Armyworm, affecting crops in a way they had never seen before,” explains Charles Lagu, FAO Agriculture Officer.

The main season response has been made possible with thanks to the funding of USA, UK, Norway, South Sudan Humanitarian Fund (SSHF) and the Netherlands under the Emergency Livelihood Response Programme. In 2018, FAO aims to assist up to 800 000 families through this programme, however, it is currently only 63 percent funded with a gap of USD 28 million needed as soon as possible.

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Additional information is available online at:

<http://www.fao.org/emergencies/countries/detail/en/c/147627/>

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