BACKGROUND

Based on findings of people’s food security and nutrition projections for 2021 reflected in the reports released in mid-December,\(^1\) the humanitarian community in South Sudan scale up commenced. The multi-sectoral response focuses on vulnerable people in areas of most severe acute food insecurity including Pibor, Akobo, Aweil South, Tonj East, Tonj North and Tonj South. The immediate focus seeks to provide food and livelihoods assistance, health and nutrition support, protection services, logistics and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) support to the most vulnerable people including over 300,000 children suffering from severe acute malnutrition and some 480,000 pregnant or breastfeeding women who are acutely malnourished and in need of treatment.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

The focus of the humanitarian response is to provide complementary, integrated support for people in the areas most affected. These services aim to bolster existing services and fill gaps where feasible. The response takes into consideration the impact on the population of multiple and compounding shocks, made more acute as a result of food insecurity.

Food and Livelihoods

By the end of December, humanitarian organizations reached over 23,000 people in Pibor and 5,600 people in Duk with food assistance. In Duk, over 3,000 children under-five received fortified food and over 4,400 pregnant and lactating women received fortified dietary supplements to prevent malnutrition. Given the continued issues of physical access to people in some areas due to poor infrastructure, airdrops of food commodities including cereals, pulses and vegetable oil have commenced in Gumuruk, Pibor and hybrid cash and food assistance targeting over 40,000 people in Akobo East are scheduled to begin this week. Since mid-December, close to 33,000 livestock have been vaccinated in Pibor.

Health

Mobile health care units are in the process of being set up to reinforce existing health facilities and medical supplies are being replenished in priority counties. Maternal and child health care services, severe acute malnutrition management, mental health care, gender-based violence support, vaccine immunization and hygiene services are being re-enforced. Support to detect and respond to disease outbreaks and services for people with disabilities are also being strengthened. With cholera cases recently confirmed in Ethiopia, health cluster members and the Ministry of Health work together to prevent, prepare for and respond to cholera and other water born disease outbreaks in the bordering counties of Akobo, Boma, Kapoeta East, and Pochalla. People in these counties were affected by recent floods, are highly food insecure and the health response will be aligned with other measures such as public awareness, providing safe drinking water, improving personal hygiene, and providing access to improved sanitation facilities.

Nutrition

Nutrition treatment and emergency prevention services in the priority counties are being scaled up, with increased engagement of community nutrition volunteers in mid-upper arm circumference screening for acute malnutrition in children and pregnant women. Outreach and mobile multi-sectoral emergency response teams are being expanded and deployed to provide additional technical support in areas with limited capacity. Nutrition supplies are available and have been prepositioned in all of the priority counties and there is enough to cover needs for the first quarter of 2021.

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\(^1\) On 18 December, the Government of South Sudan released the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) report, projecting that by mid-2021, an estimated 7.24 million people or 60 per cent of the South Sudanese population will face severe acute food insecurity and will need urgent assistance. Around 1.4 million children under age 5 are expected to be acutely malnourished in 2021, which is the highest number since 2013.
Protection
Protection services are being provided through mobile protection teams. In Jonglei, a food drop zone was surveyed and cleared of two explosive items to allow aid to be safely delivered. Child protection services in Twic East, Duk and Bor South are scaling up, with frontline staff being deployed to areas with acute needs. Gender-based violence services are also scaling up. Some 3,300 dignity kits were distributed in Ayod, some 1,200 kits in Bor South and 800 kits in Twic East.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
Prior to the call for a scale up in humanitarian response, WASH cluster members had a good presence in the priority areas because of the recent conflict and floods. The WASH Cluster scale-up focuses on serving people with severe acute malnutrition. A total of 60 handpumps have been rehabilitated in Pibor, Bor South and Tonj North and water rehabilitation systems are operational in Pibor town to provide access to safe water. Over 21,000 water treatment kits have been distributed in areas of most severe acute food insecurity that were earlier affected by floods and conflict.

Logistics
Some 650 metric tons (MT) of relief cargo have been delivered to Akobo, Ayod, Bor South, Duk and Pibor since September and 68 MT of cargo since the scale up was announced. Thirteen metric tons of relief cargo destined for priority areas are currently pending due to a flooded airstrip and will be dispatched as soon as waters recede.

CRITICAL ENABLERS
UNMISS support to strengthen community security in the priority counties is ongoing. This support includes, but is not limited to, the establishment of temporary operating bases, conducting regular patrols, engaging community leaders in conflict resolution, with reconciliation and peace building initiatives. The overall objective is to reduce the risk of massive conflict-related displacement; deter conflict and ensure/create condition for humanitarian action and protect humanitarian preposition materials. These efforts will contribute to an increased environment of safety for humanitarian aid workers and the population they seek to serve.

GAPS AND CHALLENGES
Resource constraints limit the humanitarian communities’ ability to respond. Resources committed to the ongoing flood response are now being diverted to scale up in the areas of most severe acute food insecurity. Based on findings identified in the cluster assessment an estimated US$68.5 million will be required to respond to critical gaps to meet the affected populations’ needs across 10 counties under “Priority 1” and “Priority 2”. These priority counties are the most food insecure according to the recent IPC report. A third South Sudan Humanitarian Fund reserve allocation is planned for $13 million. The funding will be used in the initial lifesaving phase of the response to assist people in acute humanitarian needs with a view to mitigate the risks of food insecurity, the negative consequences of COVID-19 and protection issues in South Sudan.

Physical access is a challenge in many of the priority counties with many of the roads and infrastructure damaged by flooding. The floods waters are slowly receding; however, insecurity may hinder the delivery of aid to people in need. The threat of a cholera disease outbreak in areas bordering Ethiopia may divert resources from the scale up response.

The response scale-up is part of the broader intersectoral response planning and resource mobilization detailed in the forthcoming 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan.
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