SOUTH SUDAN Key Messages

Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) likely persists in Akobo and Duk of Jonglei as intercommunal clashes escalate

KEY MESSAGES

- In March, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes are widespread. Most households have depleted their cereal stocks from the 2019/2020 harvest and the availability of livestock products, fish, and wild foods is seasonally declining. At the same time, limited income sources and high food prices continue to constrain household food access. In Jonglei, Upper Nile, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Lakes, and Central and Eastern Equatoria states, Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes are driven by crop and livestock losses during the 2019 floods and/or escalations in intercommunal conflict that have disrupted food assistance delivery.

- FEWS NET and partners previously estimated that 20,000 people would likely be in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) in parts of Akobo and Duk of Jonglei state from February to April. Field information from partners indicate that WFP distributed food assistance equivalent to at least 25 percent of their daily kilocalorie needs for 45 days to 13,000 people in Walgak, Buong, and Diror payams of Akobo West in March, which may have reduced the severity of hunger among households who received the assistance. However, some households in Akobo and Duk likely remain in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5).

- Intercommunal conflicts in Jonglei (Duk, Nyirol, Akobo (West), and Pibor counties), Warrap (Gogrial East and Tonj South counties), and Lakes (Cueibet and Rumbek Centre counties) escalated from January to March, causing loss of life, loss of household assets, and disruptions to trade flows and food assistance delivery. Of significant concern are Pibor of Jonglei, where at least 6,000 people were newly displaced, and Tonj South of Warrap, where 55 people were killed in a cattle raid. In Lakes, conflict disrupted trade flows from Rumbek Centre to Wau of Western Bahr el Ghazal. In addition, there are reports of violations of the cessation of hostilities agreement between the government and hold-out groups in Kajo-Keji, Lainya, Yei, and Morobo counties of Central Equatoria state, which is likely to disrupt first-season planting, trade flows, and food assistance delivery.

- As of March 30th, there are no confirmed COVID-19 cases in South Sudan. The government has banned mass gatherings, closed borders, and implemented port of entry restrictions, though imports of food, fuel, and medicine – including humanitarian aid – are still permitted. Restrictions on gatherings have compelled the closure of tea shops, restaurants, and non-food shops such as salons/barbers and boda boda operators, affecting casual labor income in these sectors. FEWS NET anticipates port of entry and gathering restrictions could affect humanitarian operational capacity and distribution points, thereby slowing or reducing food assistance imports and delivery, which is planned to scale up during the lean season. Given that planned food assistance was likely to reach 20-26 percent of the country population per month with nearly 40 percent of their daily kilocalorie needs from March to July, delayed or reduced food assistance could lead to a deterioration in food security outcomes.

- Movement restrictions affecting trade activity within Uganda and Sudan and the closure of Nimule, Kaya, Warawar, Gok Machar, and Renk border ports of entry in response to the COVID-19 pandemic are already leading to reduced food commodity imports, price hikes, and panic buying. According to FEWS NET market and trade monitoring data, maize
imports from Uganda to South Sudan declined nearly 30 percent from the week of March 9th to the week of March 16th. In the Konyokonyo market in Juba, the price of a kg of maize more than doubled, while the price of a kg of sorghum rose nearly 15 percent from the week of March 2nd to the week of March 23rd. Speculative price hikes are also reported in Yei and Maridi in Greater Equatoria. Given South Sudan’s reliance on food commodity imports, FEWS NET anticipates a further decline in trade volumes, putting pressure on already high food prices and reducing poor households’ purchasing power during the lean season.

- The recently released 2019/20 Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) report estimates 2019/20 net national cereal production was 818,500 tons, confirming preliminary estimates that production was approximately 10 percent above 2018/19. Nationally, the increase was driven by Greater Equatoria and parts of Lakes and Western Bahr el Ghazal states, where improved security and above-normal rainfall led to higher area planted and crop yields. However, state-level crop production declined by up to 25 percent in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Upper Nile, and Jonglei due to the 2019 floods. The 2020 national cereal deficit is an estimated 482,500 tons, covering 63 percent of national cereal needs.

- The March to May bimodal rainfall season has started on time in parts of Greater Equatoria. Key informants report that farmers are preparing land for first-season planting. Although total area planted is expected to be higher in 2020 than 2019, localized insecurity and shortages of seeds and tools are likely to delay planting and limit area planted to below pre-conflict levels. In addition, FAO’s Desert Locust update on March 24th reported that mature desert locusts arrived from Uganda and split into two swarmlets; one moved on through Bor South of Jonglei toward Ethiopia, while the other spread to Mundri of Western Equatoria. There remains a risk that new swarms could enter South Sudan when vegetative crops emerge in Greater Equatoria in April or May. If control measures in Kenya or Uganda do not prevent the spread of desert locust into South Sudan, damage to crops and pasture could exacerbate food insecurity in the country.

- In agropastoral and pastoral livelihoods zones, livestock are currently in dry season grazing areas, where some water and pasture remain seasonally available. Although livestock body conditions range from fair to good, milk availability is atypically low due to the impact of conflict, the 2019 floods, and high dry-season temperatures on access to rangeland resources. In parts of Lakes, Warrap, and Jonglei, the escalation in intercommunal conflicts has prevented some livestock from accessing typical dry season grazing areas with adequate water and pasture. In most flood-affected areas, key informants report that livestock health generally remains very poor due to inadequate veterinary services, resulting in livestock deaths from pests and disease such as worms and liver flukes. However, milk production and access are relatively better in parts of Upper Nile state, where rangeland conditions are above normal and livestock body conditions are good.

- Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes are expected to remain prevalent through September, driven by conflict-related household asset erosion, escalation in intercommunal conflict, poor macroeconomic conditions and high food prices, and the national cereal deficit. Reductions in food assistance and trade activity due to COVID-19 response measures, as well as potential crop and pasture losses from the desert locust upsurge, could further exacerbate existing food insecurity. Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) is likely among pockets of the most vulnerable household groups, including the displaced, newly returned refugees, or poor host households who lack access to arable land and do not own livestock. In the event that a resurgence of political conflict or other movement restrictions prevent populations from accessing food sources or restrict humanitarian access for a prolonged period, Famine (IPC Phase 5) would be possible in South Sudan.

- In the event that COVID-19 enters and spreads within South Sudan, limited health services and sanitation infrastructure could lead to high infection rates. Close living quarters in protection of civilian sites and IDP camps could also contribute to high infection rates. If put into place, additional movement restrictions or enforcement of quarantines to limit the spread would likely reduce household income and food access, as high proportions of the population are market-dependent and dependent on food assistance or daily income. Further, in rural areas, a high rate of infection and movement restrictions could affect households’ ability to engage in main season land preparation and planting from April to May, leading to more severe food insecurity outcomes in the long term.