**Widespread Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes and rising COVID-19 cases during the lean season**

**KEY MESSAGES**

- In May, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes continue to be driven by low household food access during the lean season due to the impacts of recent COVID-19 movement restrictions and long-term impacts of the 2019 floods, poor macroeconomic conditions, and conflict on household income and food prices. Food consumption gaps indicative of Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes are present in counties that have been most significantly affected by these shocks, including in Jonglei, Upper Nile, Lakes, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, and parts of Central and Eastern Equatoria states.

- There is continued concern that some households may be in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) in Akobo and Duk counties and renewed concern that some households may be in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) in Ayod county of Jonglei. A SMART survey conducted by Action Against Hunger in Ayod in April concluded the prevalence of global acute malnutrition (GAM) was above the Extremely Critical threshold at 30.9 percent (GAM weight-for-height z-score ≥30 percent). Although the convergence of food security outcome indicator data does not suggest large pockets of households are in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5), dependence on humanitarian food assistance is very high and is likely preventing such an occurrence. The higher GAM prevalence relative to previous surveys may be driven by a combination of high disease prevalence, low access to water, and low dietary diversity and quality.

- Although the number of COVID-19 cases continues to rise, the government of South Sudan lifted most movement restrictions on May 8th so that people could resume income-earning activities. As of May 25th, 95 percent of the 655 confirmed cases were reported in Juba county, with remaining cases in Yei, Torit, and Abyei counties as well as Bentiu Protection of Civilians (PoC) site in Rubkona and Juba POC3. With the re-opening of businesses and interstate borders and the reduction of curfew hours, market and trade activities are beginning to rebound and poor urban households are likely to see their daily income gradually recover. However, concerns remain for the direct impacts of COVID-19 on the food security of at-risk households, who are likely to lose income for food purchases or shift expenditures to health care costs if infected. Although IDP households have regained freedom of movement, the spread of the virus within PoC sites remains of very high concern since close living quarters and limited preventive measures could lead to high infection rates.

- According to data collected by ACLED, the recent escalation in intercommunal conflict – particularly in Warrap, Lakes, and Jonglei – has driven monthly conflict events up by 20 percent in 2020 compared to 2019. In addition, political conflict persists between government forces and hold-out groups in Yei and Lainya of Central Equatoria. Although implementation of South Sudan’s peace deal is ongoing, COVID-19 movement restrictions and resource constraints are slowing down security arrangements, particularly the training of unified forces and the formation of the national army. In addition to causing loss of life, conflict and insecurity drive food insecurity in these localized areas of concern by disrupting first-season crop management, causing loss of livestock assets, and disrupting trade flows and access to food sources.

- In April, staple food prices continued to spike or fluctuate and remained above last year and the five-year average across reference markets, according to price data from the South Sudan Crop and Livestock Information System (CLiMIS) and corroborated by key informant information. Although market functioning and trade flows are improving, declining oil revenue and local currency depreciation, high transportation costs, speculative hoarding in anticipation of a total lockdown, and supply chain delays due to mandatory testing and clearance of truck drivers at the border crossing points are all contributing to above-average food prices during the lean season. The retail price of a malwa (3.5 kg) of white
sorghum was 7-31 percent above March 2020, 14-80 percent above April 2019, and 112-398 percent above the five-year average in Rumbek Central, Aweil, Torit, Wau, Juba and Bor South markets.

- Overall, the June/July bimodal harvest is expected to be lower than last year due to reduced area planted, damage from desert locusts, and the likelihood of damage from anticipated floods. Many farmers struggled to afford seeds after seed prices rose to atypically high levels after the onset of COVID-19. Larger production shortfalls may be mitigated by seed distributions carried out by PLAN International and Save the Children to 8,965 households in Eastern Equatoria and by FAO to more than 90,000 people across Greater Equatoria and Western Bahr el Ghazal. In most of Greater Equatoria, cumulative March to May rainfall is favorable for the June/July maize and sorghum harvest. In Yei, stream-rafted maize and vegetables are already available. Maize is in the emergence stage in southern Jonglei, southern Unity, and eastern Western Bahr el Ghazal and sorghum planting has yet to occur in parts of Kapoeta East due to delayed rainfall.

- Based on information from county-level agriculture departments and key informants, desert locusts are still present in Magwi, Torit, Lopa/Lafon, Budi, and Ikotos counties of Eastern Equatoria and recently spread to Kapoeta North county of Eastern Equatoria and Renk county of Upper Nile as of mid-May. Although quantitative assessments are not available, damage to crops and pasture reportedly range from moderate to severe. Meanwhile, desert locusts previously located in western part of Lakes state have reportedly migrated to Western Equatoria state, though key informants have yet to verify this. Based on information available from FAO, control operations have been impeded by COVID-19 response measures but capacity building of the GoRSS Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security to combat desert locusts is ongoing.

- Nationally, the consumption of milk at the household level is seasonally at its lowest point prior to the onset of the main rainfall season. In May, field reports suggest an atypical decline in livestock body conditions and health in Northern Bahr el Ghazal due to shortages of pasture and water resulting from over-saturation and contamination by the 2019 floods. An assessment conducted by FAO in Aweil East and Aweil North attributed livestock deaths to liver fluke, a waterborne disease. Conversely, in Jonglei, milk production and access are relatively better for the households in cattle camps, where livestock conditions are good due to better access to water and pasture. In bimodal areas, key informant information from Greater Kapoeta indicate improving rangeland and livestock body conditions during the rainfall season.

- Humanitarian food assistance continues to mitigate food consumption gaps or prevent worse food security outcomes among approximately 20-40 percent of the total food insecure population. Operational constraints and access constraints due to intercommunal conflict or COVID-19 remain of concern. Although final distribution data for April is not yet available, WFP reported that nearly 2.6 million people in 68 locations received a two-month general food distribution and an additional 630,000 people in 21 locations received a one-month distribution as of 30th April. In mid-May, WFP reported reaching 103,000 people in Ayod, Akobo West, and Duk counties of Jonglei State with a two-month distribution. Further, 28,500 people in Wau and 40,000 people in Juba received a one or two-month distribution through an urban safety program, 3,100 of whom are internally displaced people. As of May 10, WFP had prepositioned 74 percent of planned assistance for two million people living in areas that will be inaccessible during the rainy season.

- Based on the NOAA/CPC NMME, ECMWF C35, and GHACOF55 forecasts, the main rainfall season from June to September is expected to be above average. Above-normal flooding is anticipated in low-lying areas due to expectation for localized, high intensity rainfall during the June to September period, which is likely to destroy crops, damage roads and airstrips, periodically limit access to markets and food assistance, and impede desert locust control activities. For example, some areas in Terekeke and Juba in Central Equatoria reported flash floods in May due to excessive rainfall.

- From June to September, more widespread Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes are expected at the July/August peak of the lean season. Based on low household food availability, high food prices, and limited livelihoods coping options, many households will be extremely vulnerable to disrupted access to food assistance and markets during the main rainfall season and to the direct or indirect impacts of COVID-19. Given that many flood-prone areas are already in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), it is likely that some households in these areas will deteriorate to Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) in the event of severe floods. More broadly, Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) is also possible among pockets of other vulnerable households, including internally displaced or poor rural and urban households who rely on daily casual labor income to fund food purchases. 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.

ABOUT SCENARIO DEVELOPMENT
To project food security outcomes, FEWS NET develops a set of assumptions about likely events, their effects, and the probable responses of various actors. FEWS NET analyzes these assumptions in the context of current conditions and local livelihoods to arrive at a most likely scenario for the coming eight months. Learn more here.