Large-scale assistance needs and Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) outcomes persist at the peak of lean season

FEWS NET produces forward-looking food security analysis and IPC compatible mapping several times a year for 28 countries, including South Sudan. FEWS NET is a member of South Sudan’s multi-stakeholder IPC Technical Working Group and an active participant in national IPC analysis workshops in South Sudan. The map and classifications in this report use IPC standards and methods, but do not necessarily reflect a consensus view of the national IPC Technical Working Group, IPC partners, or the Government of the Republic of South Sudan. However, this report was reviewed by the South Sudan IPC Technical Working Group prior to publication. The next IPC analysis will take place in August 2019.

KEY MESSAGES

- Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes remain widespread in South Sudan. According to the May IPC analysis, an estimated 6.96 million people will face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes through the July/August peak of the lean season in the presence of planned humanitarian food assistance. Among those in need, an estimated 21,000 people are likely in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) in Canal/Pigi of Jonglei, Cueibet of Lakes, and Panyikang of Upper Nile. In several counties of Greater Upper Nile and Greater Bahr el Ghazal, ongoing humanitarian assistance is preventing more extreme outcomes, though a risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) persists in South Sudan.

- Critical levels of acute malnutrition also persist. In Leer, a SMART survey conducted in April by Medair found a Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) prevalence, as measured by weight-for-height z-score (WHZ), of 14.3 percent (10.8-18.6). This is somewhat higher than the GAM (WHZ) prevalence of 12.2 percent (9.2-16.0) recorded at the same time last year, though statistically similar. In Renk, SMART surveys conducted in May and June found a GAM (WHZ) prevalence of 24.4 percent (C.I. N/A) among IDPs and 32.1 percent (27.4-37.2) among the local population. The latter is an ‘Extremely Critical’ level of GAM, and likely driven in large part by disease and illness given the high reporting of morbidity. The non-trauma crude death rate of the same survey was 0.69/10,000/day, indicative of Crisis (IPC Phase 3). An Ebola case in DRC near the border with South Sudan has increased the risk of the disease spreading to South Sudan, prompting increased preparedness.

- Ongoing implementation of the September 2018 peace deal and lower conflict in Greater Bahr el Ghazal and Greater Upper Nile has supported greater household movement, the recovery of trade flows and markets functioning, and to some extent improved household engagement in typical livelihood activities. Additionally, relative calm has enabled the return of displaced populations. Data from IOM indicates that an estimated 500,000 displaced people have returned to their places of origin in South Sudan since the signing of the September peace deal, 210,000 of whom were refugees in neighboring countries. This has increased the return rate from roughly 18,000 people per month in 2018 through September to roughly 76,000 per month after September. Despite this, an estimated 1.9 million people remain internally displaced.

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1 According to the IPC, a Famine (IPC Phase 5) has occurred when at least 20 percent of households in a given area have an extreme lack of food, the Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) prevalence, as measured by weight-for-height z-score (WHZ), exceeds 30 percent, and mortality, as measured by the Crude Death Rate (CDR), is greater than 2 per 10,000 per day. Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) is when a household group has an extreme lack of food and/or other basic needs even with the full employment of coping strategies.

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In May, 2.25 million people have been reached with general food distributions and food for assets programs, and this assistance continues to prevent more extreme outcomes. However, the reach of humanitarian assistance is significantly lower than the estimated 7.7 million people in need and lower than the same time last year. Additionally, the ongoing rainy season is disrupting regular assistance delivery. In Central Unity, the roads linking Bentiu to Leer or Koch have seasonally deteriorated with the June to September rains and this is likely to limit ground delivery of assistance from Rubkona. In Agok area of southern Wau, the delivery of assistance to more than 2,000 displaced households was disrupted by heavy rainfall that damaged the bridge connecting Agok to Wau Town. In Fangak of Jonglei, key informant information indicates assistance deliveries were temporarily disrupted in areas significantly affected by the flooding.

Staple food prices continue to increase in several markets given exhaustion of 2018/19 local cereal stocks and seasonally deteriorated road conditions. In Rumbek, the state government’s attempts to implement price controls are driving up food prices as traders keep their stocks off of official, price-controlled markets. A malwa (3.5 kg) of white sorghum in June in Rumbek Center was 306 percent higher than the five-year average and 127 percent higher than same time last year. In Wau, the price of sorghum was 276 percent higher than the five-year average and 120 percent higher than last year. In Aweil, the price of sorghum was 231 percent higher than average, but 76 percent lower than last year, likely due to the distribution of food assistance and the state government’s interventions in late June to lower taxes on food.

Green harvest consumption is currently underway in most of Western Equatoria and parts of Central and Eastern Equatoria, though delayed in several counties including Nagero and Greater Mundri of Western Equatoria; rural Juba and parts of Kajo-Keji of Central Equatoria; and Lafon, Ikotos, Torit, Magwi, and Budi of Eastern Equatoria. In these counties maize crops are in the maturity stage and are likely to be harvested by late July/early August. In the northern parts of the country, key informant information indicates that heavy rains in Bentiu of Unity; southern Ayod; Twic East, Duk, and Pochalla of Jonglei; Torit of Eastern Equatoria and parts of Northern Bahr el Ghazal have damaged some crop fields, though the availability of both wild and cultivated vegetables has seasonally increased.

Acute food insecurity during the ongoing 2019 lean season is broadly similar to that of the 2018 lean season, though with improvement in some areas as lower conflict is improving food access. Food security outcomes through January 2020 are also expected to be similar or slightly better than the same period last year given some improvements in trade flows, expected slightly higher crop production, and improved household movement. However, widespread Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes are still expected to persist. Additionally, a risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) continues and Famine (IPC Phase 5) would be likely in the event that conflict shifts and significantly restricts household movement and humanitarian access. Data collection for the 24th round of Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring System is ongoing, and data collected from this survey is expected to inform current and projected food security outcomes during the upcoming August 2019 IPC analysis.

ABOUT THIS UPDATE
This monthly report covers current conditions as well as changes to the projected outlook for food insecurity in this country. It updates FEWS NET’s Food Security Outlook, which is published three times per year. Learn more about our work here.