

WHAT ARE LIVELIHOODS?

In the context of food security, livelihoods are the means by which households obtain and maintain access to essentials such as food, water, shelter, clothing, health care, and education. By understanding how people meet these basic needs - both in good years and in bad - we gain insight into their ability to cope with a shock, such as a drought, flood, price spike, or conflict. A building block of food security analysis, livelihoods information is also used by humanitarian assistance planners to identify interventions that will support the normal survival strategies of people in need.

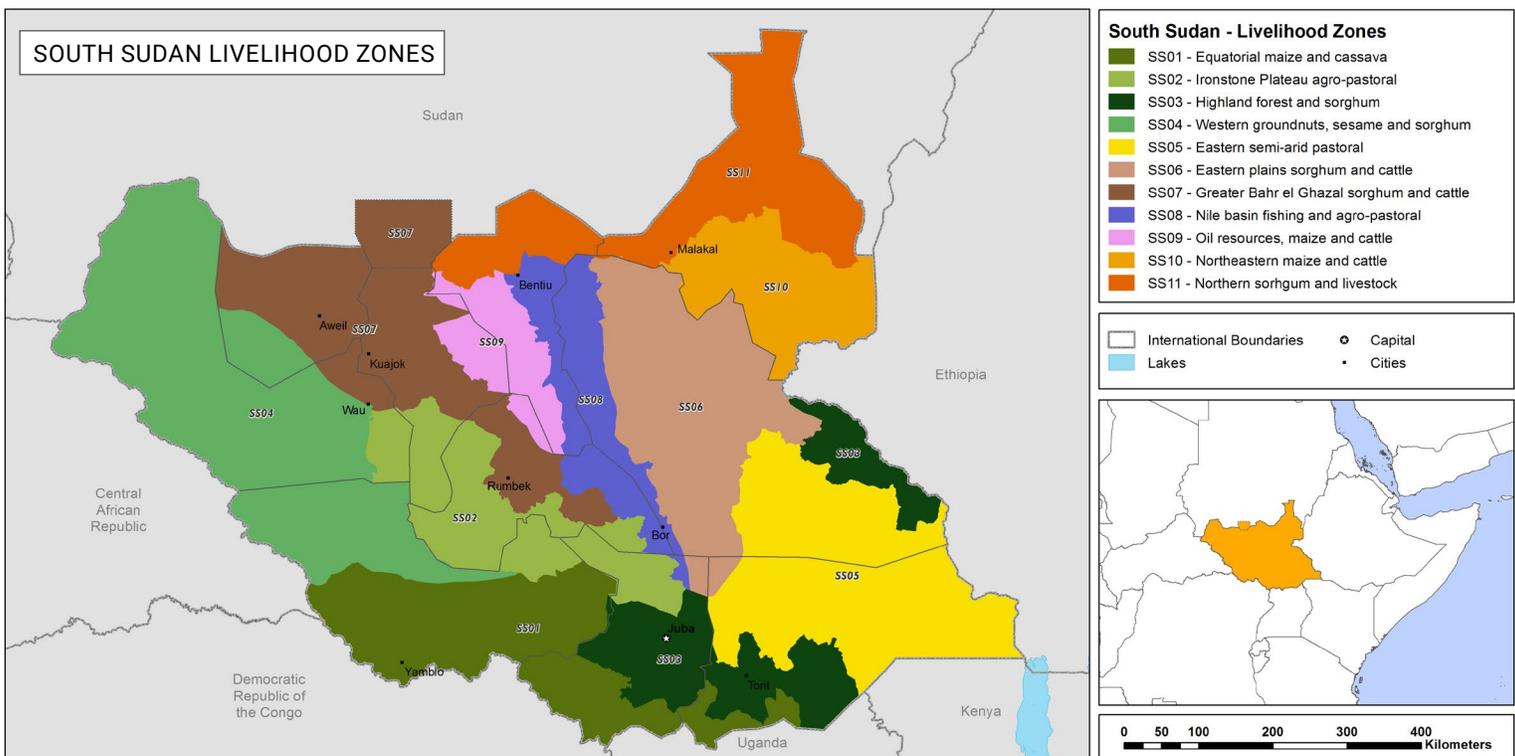
FEWS NET AND LIVELIHOODS

With an expansive knowledge base on 35 of the world's most food insecure countries, FEWS NET draws on livelihoods data in its monthly analysis. FEWS NET uses the Household Economy Approach, or HEA, to understand the economic and social networks through which people acquire and share assets. HEA defines a livelihood based on geography, systems of production, and wealth. It considers the interaction of all economic groups, specifically as to sources of food and cash, assets and opportunities, and options at times of crisis.

FEWS NET IN BRIEF

Created by USAID in response to the 1984 famines in East and West Africa, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) provides early warning and integrated, forward-looking analysis of the many factors that contribute to food insecurity. FEWS NET aims to:

- Inform decision-makers and contribute to their emergency response planning
- Support partners in conducting early warning analysis and forecasting
- Provide technical assistance to partner-led initiatives



HEA AND SCENARIO DEVELOPMENT

As part of its scenario development methodology, FEWS NET analysts look at livelihoods in a given country or zone to understand how people normally live (the baseline) and what options, or coping strategies, they have in the event of a shock. Next, they factor in the impact of local or international assistance. Through this approach, analysts can consider questions such as: how would the failure of rains affect pastoralists in Mali who have exhausted their own food stocks? Or: if pests destroyed crops in a cotton-farming area of Zambia, what would seasonal laborers do for income?

FEWS NET livelihoods products, which vary from country to country, may include zone maps, descriptions, profiles, baselines, and seasonal monitoring calendars. They are available at www.fews.net.