

Famine (IPC Phase 5) possible in South Sudan during 2017

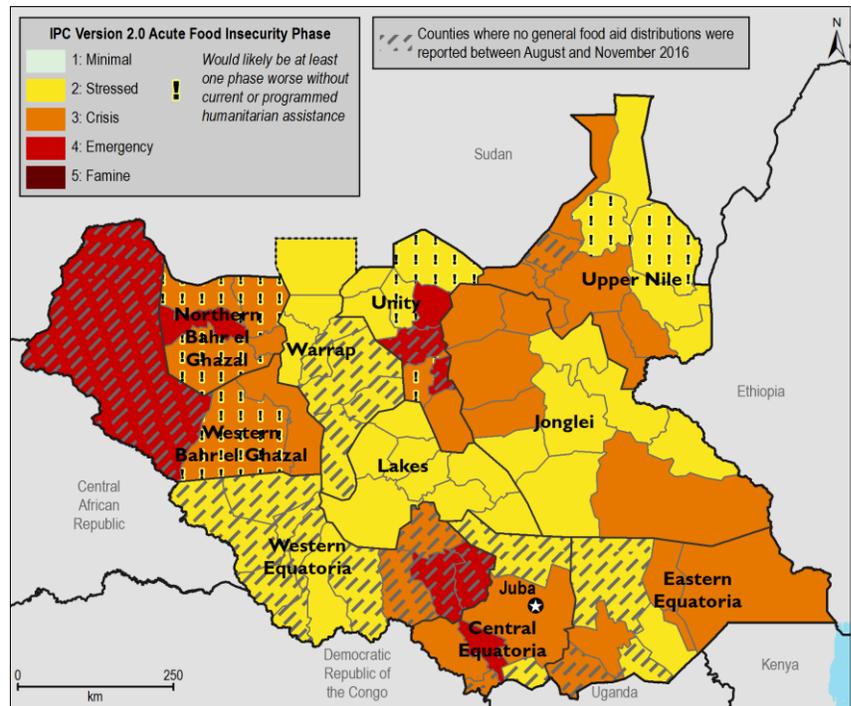
Extreme levels of food insecurity persist across South Sudan and nearly one third of the population is in need of emergency food assistance. Further deterioration in food security is likely during an extended lean season (February-July), as widespread insecurity continues to limit livelihoods, disrupt trade, and block humanitarian access. In a worst-case scenario where conflict intensifies and humanitarian access is further limited, Famine (IPC Phase 5), marked by high levels of excess mortality, is possible. Unity State, where displaced households already face an extreme lack of food, is the area of greatest concern. Urgent action to end conflict and increase the size and scope of emergency assistance delivery is critical to save lives over the coming year.

Since the resurgence of conflict in July 2016, violence has spread to Greater Equatoria, and now affects all regions of South Sudan. Over 450,000 people have fled the country since July, bringing the total number of refugees to 1.3 million. Nearly two million people are internally displaced. Across much of the country, household access to food and cash income has declined as conflict has disrupted planting, harvesting, and other livelihood activities. Ongoing crop assessments and key informant information indicate that 2016 staple food production is below average in many areas, including the typically surplus-producing areas of Western Equatoria.

Meanwhile, macroeconomic factors continue to drive exorbitant staple food prices. A substantial decline in oil revenue since 2014 has contributed to a sharp drop in both foreign currency reserves and the value of the South Sudanese pound. These factors, along with insecurity along key trade routes, have restricted normal trade flows into South Sudan and from the capital to wider areas of the country. This is occurring at a time when import requirements are higher than usual given below-average harvests. The subsequent reduction in food availability on local markets has driven prices to record levels. As of November 2016, retail sorghum prices in Aweil, Wau, and Juba averaged 49 SSD/kg, four times higher than the previous year and 10 to 15 times higher than November 2013, the month before the initial outbreak of conflict. These high prices, along with declining incomes, have significantly eroded household purchasing power.

All regions of South Sudan are in need of significant humanitarian response. Crisis (IPC Phase 3) is widespread and Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes exist in parts of Unity, Western Bahr el Ghazal, Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Central Equatoria, and Western Equatoria (Figure 1). An estimated 675,000 people are currently in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) or worse, meaning that they face large gaps in their ability to meet basic food requirements. These populations, particularly children, face a significantly elevated risk of malnutrition and mortality. An additional 2.8 million people are in Crisis (IPC Phase 3). The prevalence of Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM), recorded by SMART surveys conducted between September and November 2016, remained *Serious* or worse (10 percent or higher) throughout the country during the harvest period.

Figure 1. Food security outcomes, October 2016 – January 2017 and food assistance deliveries



Source: FEWS NET

Food security is expected to deteriorate further during the February to July lean season, and to be as severe as, or worse than, last year's lean season, when some food security outcomes in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Western Bahr el Ghazal, and Unity States surpassed Emergency (IPC Phase 4) or Famine (IPC Phase 5) thresholds (Figure 2). In a worst-case scenario, where increased conflict further disrupts livelihoods and limits humanitarian assistance, Famine (IPC Phase 5) could occur during 2017.

Figure 2. Food security outcomes during the February-July 2016 lean season

		Unity	Northern Bahr el Ghazal	Western Bahr el Ghazal
Food security indicators	Food Consumption Score	47% poor, 32% borderline	55% poor, 32% borderline	52% poor, 30% borderline
	Household Hunger Score	2% severe, 80% moderate	3% severe, 77% moderate	4% severe, 19% moderate
Nutritional status	Global Acute Malnutrition (WHZ)	26.2% (21.3-31.1)	33.3% (27.8-39.4)	20.6% (15.9-26.3)

Source: FSNMS Round 18

Of greatest concern are Guit, Koch, Leer, and Panyijiar counties in Unity State. In these areas, Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of food insecurity observed during the 2016 lean season have likely persisted during the typical harvest period, as many households were unable to cultivate. Most continue to rely primarily on fish and wild foods to survive. Conflict is driving new displacement, putting additional stress on available wild food sources. Little to no food assistance was distributed in these counties from August to November due to access constraints.

Other areas of concern include: 1) Western Bahr el Ghazal, where conflict is also limiting agricultural activities, driving displacement, and disrupting normal market functioning; 2) Northern Bahr el Ghazal, where prices are extremely high and households are especially dependent on markets to access food; and 3) Greater Equatoria where ongoing conflict has disrupted crop production and restricted the movement of local populations. The forthcoming multi-partner IPC analysis will consider a variety of new information and provide an updated assessment of current and future acute food insecurity.

Urgent action to end the conflict, improve humanitarian access to severely food insecure populations, and increase size and scope of emergency assistance delivery is critical to save lives over the coming year.