

SOUTHERN SUDAN Food Security Alert

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Extreme food insecurity and malnutrition persist in Akobo County

Food security conditions have continued to worsen in southern Sudan due to poor 2009 crop production, continued conflicts, and the progression of the lean season which lasts through August. Of particular concern are the extreme levels of food insecurity in Akobo County of Jonglei State (Fig. 1), where conflicts since early 2009 have displaced over 20,000 people. According to a March 2010 FEWS NET assessment in Akobo, poor and displaced households (30-40 percent of the population) are likely to meet only 60 percent of basic food needs during 2009-10. Furthermore, a February 2010 survey indicates an extremely high prevalence of acute malnutrition in the area, and only slight improvements in food security are expected among the displaced with the green harvest in September.

A nutrition survey conducted by Save the Children and Medair in Akobo County¹ in February 2010 reported a global acute malnutrition (GAM) prevalence of 45.7 percent (WHZ<-2SD, WHO 2006) and a severe acute malnutrition (SAM) prevalence of 15.5 percent (WHZ<-3SD, WHO 2006). These levels are triple the emergency thresholds of 15 percent (GAM) and 4 percent (SAM). Using the NCHS standard, GAM and SAM prevalence were 47.6 percent and 9.3 percent, respectively. Malnutrition in these areas is strongly linked to several factors. This year, the continued presence of the displaced population in the town has led to increased water shortages and poor sanitation/hygiene practices, along with heightened food deficits.

Rates are often high in this area, particularly at this time of year (Table 1). For example, similar levels of malnutrition in Akobo were recorded in both February and May 2002, although fish, wild plants, and game were more available during 2002 than this year. Nonetheless, these levels are a significant cause for concern, especially given the poor food security outlook for the displaced in the coming months.

Several humanitarian response programs are underway in Akobo. Save the Children established an Outpatient Therapeutic Program (OTP) in Akobo Town in March, and efforts are underway to open another OTP in the neighbouring Dengiok area. As of mid-May, more than 2,000 children have been screened for malnutrition: 756 cases of moderate acute malnutrition and 454 cases of severe malnutrition were identified, while 458 children were admitted for treatment. In addition, pregnant and lactating women and children under five were registered for a blanket supplementary feeding program. The blanket feeding will be implemented in collaboration with WFP and will target all children under five with corn-soya blend, oil, and sugar for three months, after which only those discharged from the OTP will continue receiving rations. WFP General Food Distributions have been ongoing since January. Displaced households are receiving full rations while their hosts receive half rations. To supplement food aid, some of the displaced are engaging in activities such as cutting grass and wood to sell in the market to obtain money for meeting other basic needs.

Food security conditions are expected to deteriorate in Akobo during the May to August period, although food aid is anticipated to mitigate food shortages. Though slight improvements in food security are expected around September due to consumption of early maturing crops, displaced households are likely to remain food insecure as they are unlikely to return home and cultivate for the June-September cropping season. Meanwhile, WFP expects a food pipeline break in August 2010, implying that assistance to displaced households may be interrupted.

Given the current conditions, continued monitoring of food security and nutrition conditions remains critical in the remaining months of 2010, particularly humanitarian access to Akobo County during the June-September rainy season.

Figure 1. Akobo County, Jonglei State



GAM %	SAM %	Date/ Agency
24.8	1.9	Oct. 1998 - MSF Belgium
33.4	4.8	April 1999 - MSF Belgium
17.0	2.0	Sept. 1999 - MSF Belgium
33.8	7.7	June 2000 - MSF Belgium
25.2	3.3	Oct. 2000 - MSF Belgium
32.0	9.0	Feb. 2002 - MSF Belgium
39.9	9.8	May 2002 - MSF Belgium
20.3	2.4	Sept. 2005 - ACF (USA)
20.2	5.5	Dec. 2008 - STC
47.6	9.3	Feb. 2010 - STC/Medair

¹ FEWS NET is awaiting the data quality report from this survey.

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