



Southern Sudan Food Security Update: October 15, 2000

Highlights

The FAO/WFP Annual Food Supply and Crop Assessment mission, currently in southern Sudan, is expected to present its preliminary findings on the 2000 production estimates by mid-October. Meanwhile, estimates by NGOs and findings by the WFP-led Annual Needs Assessment teams indicate a decline in cereal production in comparison to 1999. Contributing factors that vary by location include late rains with poor spatial and temporal distribution, a dry spell in May/June, late season flooding in lowland areas, striga weed infestation and crop damage by birds and pests, inadequate inputs, and increased insecurity and displacement interfering with agricultural activities.

Unseasonably dry weather conditions prevailed in several locations in Jonglei, Upper Nile and Bahr-el-Ghazal Regions during September. However, heavy to moderate rains were experienced in parts of Western Equatoria and Bahr-el-Ghazal Regions, respectively, during the first dekad with flash floods reported in some locations in Bahr-el-Ghazal Region.

The Drought Monitoring Center, Nairobi (DMCN) has updated the regional weather forecast, first released in August, for the period October-December 2000. Evolving sea-surface temperature anomalies in the Indian Ocean necessitated the revision. The forecast augurs well for the second season crop in the surplus-producing areas of Western Equatoria Region, which has a high likelihood of receiving near normal to above-normal rainfall during this period.

Cereal prices continue to increase as those of livestock decrease in the main markets in Bahr-el-Ghazal Region. The increase in cereal prices can be attributed to low quantities available as people are still harvesting. Given the anticipated poor yields this year, any price declines will most likely be short-lived. The decrease in livestock prices at this time can be attributed to lower demand for direct-consumption livestock as grain becomes available.

Food availability in most secure locations continues to improve with the incoming harvests. However, assessment findings indicate that these newly harvested crops are unlikely to last beyond December for a majority of the poorer socio-economic groups. The situation is likely to be made worse by the continuing involuntary displacement of populations, due to insecurity, to areas with poor harvests. Other options for obtaining food may be limited by their over-use in the coming months. The need for food from outside sources therefore continues and will likely be higher in 2001 than they were in 2000.

Dry weather conditions persisted in the pastoral areas of Kapoeta County during September. Vegetation conditions remain below the seasonal average and are unlikely to improve as the dry season sets in. This does not bode well for pastoralism as the ability of many pastoralists to cope with hardship, after four consecutive drought years, is severely strained. Crops, which are of minimal importance in most years anyway, have failed and other food options such as trade are limited given that neighboring pastoral locations in Kenya are equally affected. Tribal animosities are likely to preclude access to grazing areas in other locations and this will lead to further depletion of livestock holdings through increased morbidity and higher mortality rates. Food aid intervention and peace initiatives could help curtail depletion of livestock holdings by reducing slaughter rates and enabling access to water and pasture in less affected areas.

1. Overview of the Current Food Security Situation

Food availability in most secure locations continues to improve with the incoming harvests. However, assessment findings indicate that these newly harvested crops are not likely to last beyond the end of the year for a majority of the poorer socio-economic groups. In parts of Bahr-el-Ghazal Region, the resident populations have to share whatever they have with returnees from Wau and Gogrial towns and the displaced from Upper Nile Region.

The Annual Needs Assessment team report severe food shortages in Ajakuac, Twic County, Bahr-el-Ghazal Region. Food options are limited and assessment findings indicate that people are going for several days without food. A number of children are reported to be severely malnourished. The situation is expected to worsen with the influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing fighting in Leech State. Currently, people in the area rely heavily on wild foods, which fortunately, after the rainy season, are at peak availability. WFP is already helping with food aid and a multi-agency emergency assessment team visited Ajakuac in late September to determine actual needs.

The rains have improved wild food availability in most areas. Fish remains an exploitable food source especially in the Lakes, Bahr-el-Ghazal, Upper Nile and Jonglei Regions, but lack of fishing equipment continues to limit the availability of fish. Trade, as a means of acquiring food, remains constrained in those areas experiencing insecurity while kinship support is currently important especially for the returnees and displaced who have nothing. Various assessments have found pockets of food insecurity in parts of Bahr-el-Ghazal, Upper Nile, Eastern Equatoria and Jonglei Regions. The worst affected appear to be the poorer socio-economic groups with small livestock holdings and minimal assets.

2. Factors Affecting Food Availability

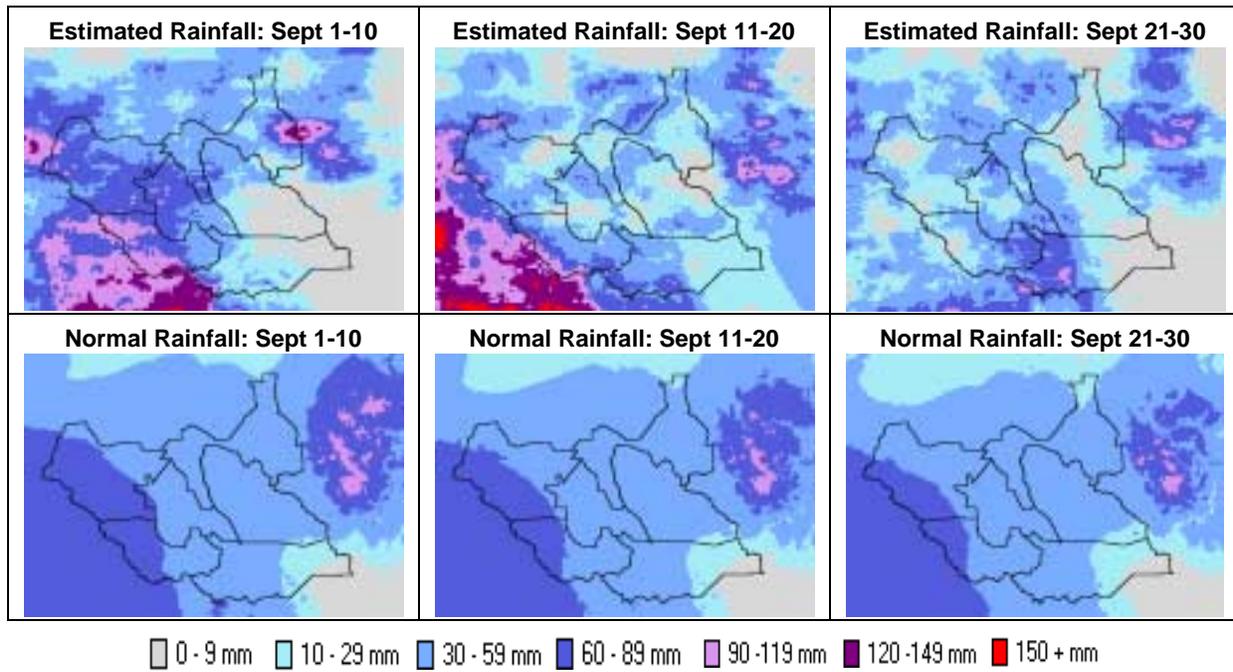
2.1. Rainfall and Vegetative Conditions

Heavy to moderate rains continued in parts of Western Equatoria and Bahr-el-Ghazal Regions, respectively, during the first dekad of September but declined in intensity as the month progressed. Field reports indicate intermittent rains resulting in flash floods in parts of Bahr-el-Ghazal Region during the month. Several locations in all the regions remained unseasonably dry during the second and third dekads, as indicated by the gray areas in the upper row. Kapoeta County in Eastern Equatoria Region, however, is normally dry (Figure 1).

Water levels in major rivers in Lakes and Bahr-el-Ghazal Regions remain high. This has caused flooding in areas adjacent to these rivers. This is normal, however, and reportedly not as severe as it was last year.

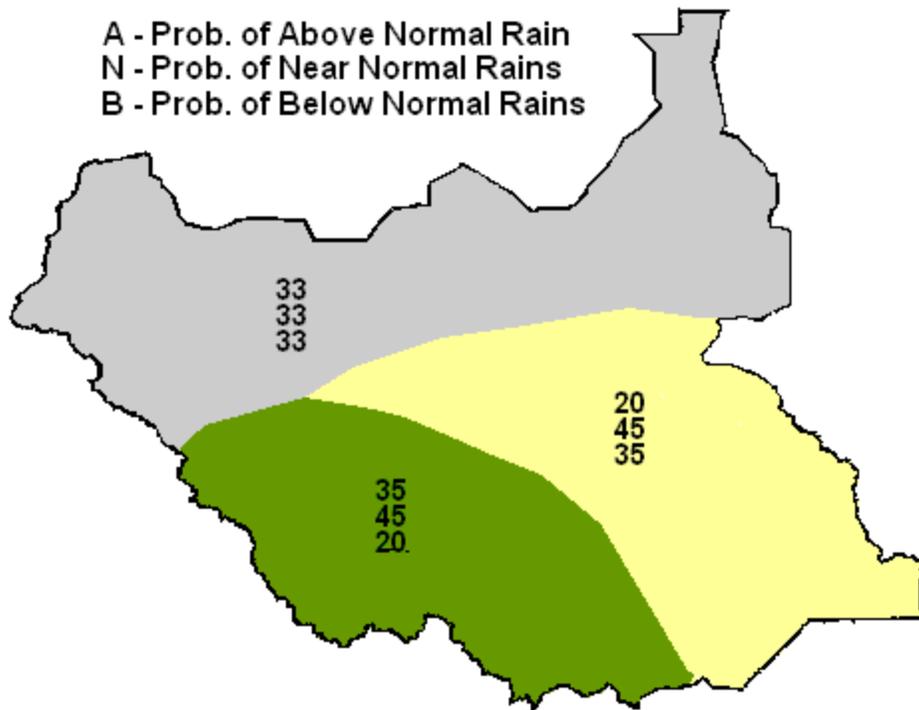
The Drought Monitoring Centre, Nairobi (DMCN) has updated the regional rainfall forecast, issued at the Climate Outlook Forum in August (see August Food Security Update), for the period October-December 2000. Evolving sea-surface temperature anomalies in the Indian Ocean necessitated the update. The updated forecast suggests slightly better prospects for near-normal rainfall in the lower half of Southern Sudan. The update indicates a high likelihood of near normal to above-normal rainfall over southwestern parts of southern Sudan, which include Western Equatoria, and the southern tip of Bahr-el-Ghazal Regions. There is a high likelihood of near normal to below-normal rainfall over much of the eastern side of the country. The northern parts, including north Sudan, are likely to receive normal rains for this time of the year. Figure 2 depicts these updated rainfall probability distributions for southern Sudan.

Figure 1: METEOSAT Rainfall Estimates for Southern Sudan, September 2000



FEWS NET/Southern Sudan; Source of Data: NASA

**Figure 2: Climate Outlook for Southern Sudan
October - December 2000**

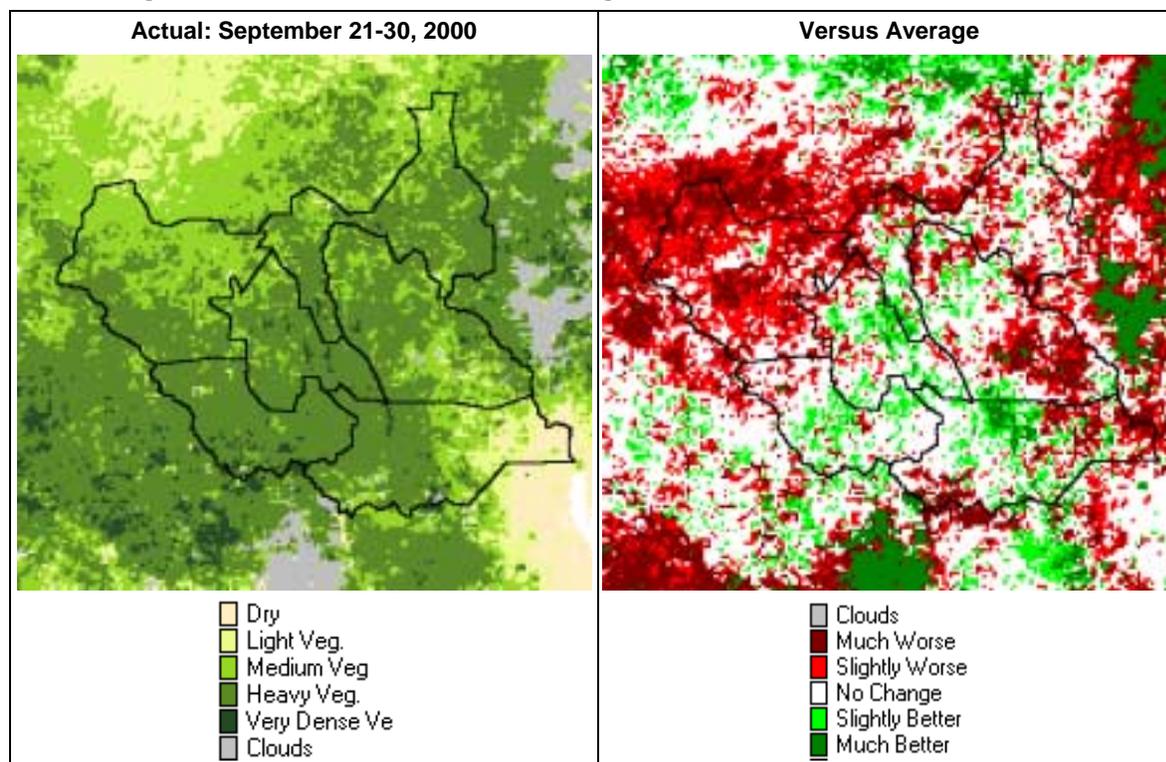


Source: Drought Monitoring Centre, Nairobi. September 2000

The likelihood of above normal rains in the surplus-producing areas of Western Equatoria Region would further enhance vegetative growth in the region. Such rains would also be expected to have a positive impact on the second season crops grown in the region from June/July to November/December.

Despite the continuing rains, vegetative conditions as of the third dekad of September remain below the seasonal average, mostly in Bahr-el-Ghazal, southern parts of Jonglei and parts of Eastern Equatoria Regions (Figure 3). These conditions reflect the lower than average rains that these areas have received during the rainy season, which is currently nearing its end.

Figure 3: Normalized Difference Vegetative Index for Southern Sudan



FEWS NET/Southern Sudan; Source of Data: NASA

2.2 Crop Production

2.2.1. Current Crop Status

Harvesting of the first season (March – November) crop is nearing completion in most areas of southern Sudan. A FEWS NET field trip to Gogrial County in Bahr-el-Ghazal Region in September revealed that, while harvesting of short-term sorghum, maize and sesame is complete, groundnuts are yet to be harvested in many areas. Harvesting of long-maturing sorghum is not expected to begin until November.

The second season (June/July – November/December) is in progress in parts of Equatoria Region. Long-maturing sorghum and sesame (main crops in the second planting), groundnuts, beans, maize and cassava (minor crops) have been planted in Eastern Equatoria Region. Harvesting of short-term crops is expected to commence in November/December.

2.2.2. Crop Harvest Assessments

The FAO/WFP Annual Food Supply and Crop Assessment mission for 2000/01 (October - September) commenced its work in early October. The mission is expected to complete its work in southern Sudan by mid-October and present its preliminary findings before proceeding to the north.

NGOs involved in agriculture continue to undertake harvest assessments in their respective areas of operation. Their findings, like those of the WFP-led Annual Needs Assessment teams, indicate a general decline in cereal production this year compared to 1999. However, isolated locations in the various regions are noted to have recorded some good harvests. Catholic Relief Services (CRS), which operates in the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps of Labone, Nimule, Ikotos and New Cush (Eastern Equatoria Region), note that good harvests have been achieved in pockets of these locations. Households in Labone camp, which last year recorded an average of 187 kg of sorghum and 209 kg of maize per household, have recorded better harvests this year. Sorghum harvests per household in Nimule and Ikotos camps are about the same this year as those of last year, which reached an average of 362 kg and 125 kg, respectively. Consequently, CRS began halting food distributions in September for varying periods in the different camps — Labone (for six months), Nimule (five months), Ikotos and New Cush (two months each).

2.2.3. Overview of the 2000/01 Agricultural Season

FAO/Sudan notes that the 1999/2000 FAO/WFP Crop and Food Supply Assessment mission to Sudan a year ago this time estimated overall total cereal production at 389,000 MT, an increase of about 12 percent over the 1998/1999 period in the traditional sector of southern Sudan. Factors that influenced the increase in production last year, unlike this year, included good rains with good spatial and temporal distribution in Western Equatoria Region and adequate seeds in almost all locations. Those factors that decreased production included insecurity and drought, mainly in Eastern Equatoria, as has been the case this year. Upper Nile Region had 44 percent lower production in 1999/2000 compared to 1998/99.

2000/01 production estimates are not yet available, but indications are that there will be a substantial decline in 2000/01 compared to 1999/2000 in all the regions. FAO/Sudan estimates that a reduction of about 50 percent below last year's level is expected in some areas. Factors contributing to this decline in production are:

- Late rains with poor spatial and temporal distribution that affected all regions. Consequently, planting was delayed, as much as two months in some parts of Bahr-el-Ghazal. The drought experienced in May/June worsened the situation and maize and groundnut crop were mostly affected. Sorghum recovered after rains resumed in June but low yields were realized in most locations.
- Inadequate inputs following last year's poor harvests in some locations in Bahr-el-Ghazal, Upper Nile, Jonglei and Eastern Equatoria Regions. The situation was worsened when some of the agricultural NGOs withdrew from Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA) areas after refusing to sign the Memorandum of Understanding between them and SRRA. Their withdrawal left farmers with no seeds for replanting when rains resumed in late June following a dry spell in May/June that withered crops.
- Increased insecurity and displacements in Upper Nile and Bahr-el-Ghazal Regions, which resulted in farms being abandoned during the critical weeding time.

- Crop damage caused by birds, insect pests and striga weeds. The striga weed was noted to be a major problem in Gogrial County during a FEWS NET field in September. In some instances, the weed accounts for more than half of the vegetation in sorghum fields.
- Late season flooding in lowland areas of Bahr-el-Ghazal and Upper Nile Regions.

2.3. Livestock Production

Dry weather conditions persisted in the pastoral areas of Kapoeta County, Eastern Equatoria Region, during September. Consequently, vegetative conditions remain below the seasonal average and are unlikely to improve given that the dry season has set in there. This does not bode well for the viability of pastoralism as the ability of many pastoralists to cope with hardship is severely strained after four consecutive drought years.

Trekking to neighboring locations in search of pasture, browse and water or to trade, may not be possible due to tribal animosities. Bordering pastoral locations in Kenya have also been severely hit by drought and livestock prices are depressed there, too. Trade, as an option for acquiring food, is therefore limited. The on-going Annual Needs Assessment should, security permitting, provide a clear indication of the impact of four successive years of drought on pastoralist livelihoods. Given the prevailing conditions, food aid interventions and peace initiatives could help curtail the depletion of livestock holdings by reducing slaughter rates and enabling access to water and pasture in less affected areas.

3. Food Accessibility and Prices

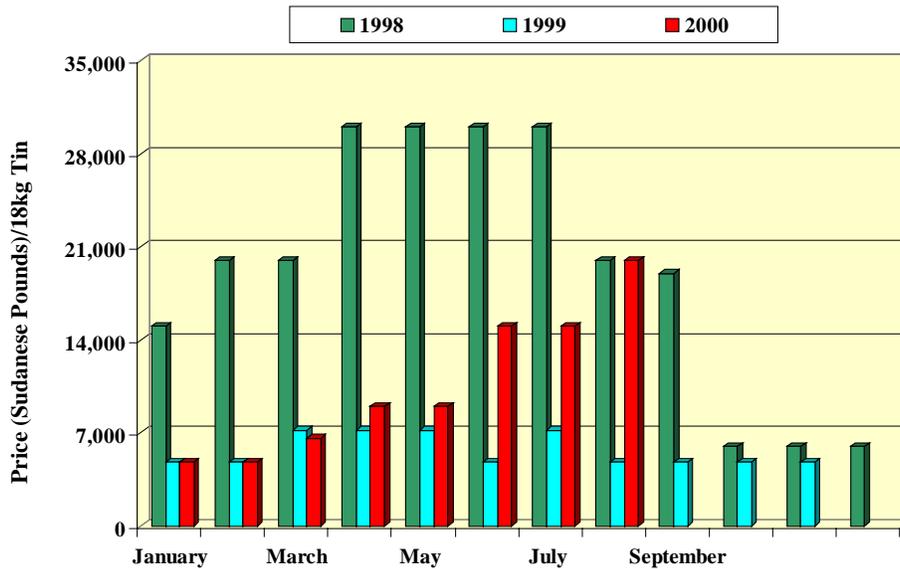
Food accessibility continues to be hampered by several factors, including insecurity, high prices and few options for obtaining food. Of these factors, insecurity and the fear of conflict remain the single most important determinant of food security. Conflict and insecurity continue unabated in Western Upper Nile Region, causing population displacements to other locations in the region or to neighboring regions perceived as safer. Insecurity continues to have a profound, disruptive impact on food distributions and limits other food options as well.

WFP notes that locations along the railway corridor from Aweil to Wau towns experienced insecurity during the month due to movements of Government militia securing the rail line in advance of supply deliveries to garrison towns. Many locations along the rail line were made inaccessible, forcing postponement of food aid distributions. In some cases, beneficiaries reportedly had to walk for 6 to 24 hours to receive food aid.

CRS/Sudan also reports that it is currently providing food to over 1,000 returnees in Nimule, Eastern Equatoria Region. These returnees fled from refugee camps in Adjumani, Uganda due to hunger and due to activities of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). The returnees have reported that the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) cannot provide them with food and the Ugandan Government has failed to protect them against LRA attacks, lootings and abductions.

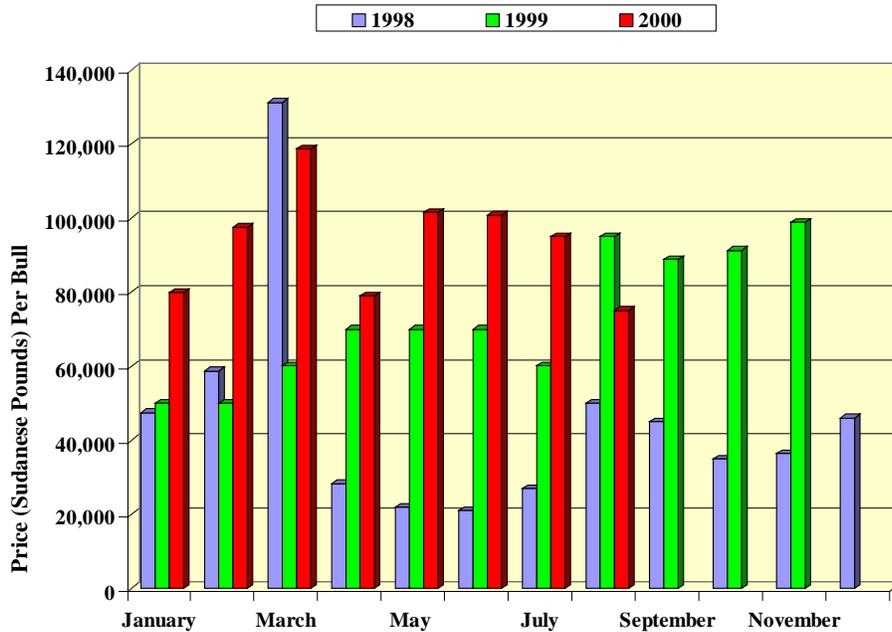
Cereal market prices continue to increase in main markets in Bahr-el-Ghazal Region. These can be attributed to the low quantities still available for sale while people are harvesting. Figure 4 compares sorghum prices over the past three years in Mayen Rual market, a major local market in Gogrial County, Bahr-el-Ghazal. Current prices are thrice the price at a similar time last year when harvesting was completed and yields were comparatively better. Current prices are comparable to those of 1998 when the region suffered severe food shortages culminating in a famine, for which the number of victims remains in dispute.

Figure 4: Comparative Sorghum Prices in Mayen Rual Market



Source of Data: SRRRA Database and Monitoring Unit

Figure 5: Comparative Bull Grade 1 Prices in Mayen Rual Market



Source of Data: SRRRA Database and Monitoring Unit

In 1998, however, sorghum prices had already peaked in the April-July period at levels several times higher than prices this year. While circumstances in Bahr-el Ghazal are better this year in terms of available food, aircraft and airstrips, FEWS NET and its partners are keeping a watchful eye on the situation, especially as renewed insecurity could change conditions overnight.

Livestock prices have declined in main markets in Bahr-el-Ghazal Region compared to prices at the peak of the “hunger gap” period in June. This can be attributed to the low demand for livestock given that harvesting is currently in progress and people have some grain for consumption. However, harvests are reportedly minimal and may not last beyond the end of the year. Consequently, there may be those still selling their livestock to get cash to buy more food or other necessities. The low demand for livestock, however, forces them to sell at even lower prices. Current livestock prices remain lower than prices at a similar time last year but higher than they were in 1998 when the region was experiencing severe food deficits. Figure 5 compares Grade 1 Bull prices in Mayen Rual market.

4. Current Food Security Interventions

During September, WFP distributed about 4,259 MT of food, 57 percent of the planned level of 7,435 MT. Distribution was hampered, in particular, by insecurity along the rail corridor in Bahr-el-Ghazal and fear of aerial bombardments in parts of Equatoria Region. WFP notes that recently introduced Government of Sudan flight scheduling restrictions are causing delays in staff travel and food deliveries, resulting in cancellation of some scheduled activities.

As at the end of September, WFP had delivered about 91 percent of the 43,163 MT of food planned for in the EMOP 6215 (January – December 2000). However, food needs persist and, as assessed on the ground, are much higher than originally expected in the EMOP. In August and September, the original planning figures were 2,758 MT and 2,364 MT, respectively, whereas assessed food needs, which were the basis of the working figures during the two months, were 7,643 MT and 7,435 MT, respectively. As WFP does not expect to experience any food aid shortages before the end of the year, the issue at hand is not the availability of food stocks for unanticipated increased needs but instead insecurity that precludes access and thereby restricts deliveries. Every window of opportunity, therefore, needs to be fully utilized to step up deliveries to areas that have been so far under-served, such as Upper Nile and Eastern Equatoria Regions. With the incoming harvests, need for food from the outside may decline marginally for only two or three months, as the crops harvested may not last beyond the end of the year.

5. Areas of Concern

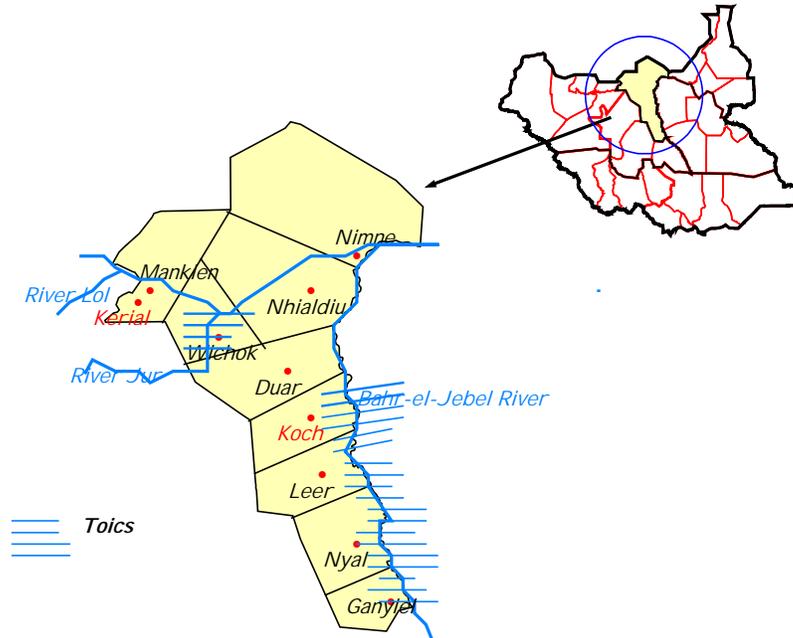
Areas of serious food insecurity are Leech State (Upper Nile Region), Ajakuac (Twic County, Bahr-el-Ghazal Region) and Kapoeta County (Eastern Equatoria Region).

Food insecurity in Kapoeta County is currently being mitigated by WFP’s food aid distributions. However, in the recent past, looting of food has disrupted distributions in the county, forcing WFP to suspend the exercise until issues are sorted out with the local authorities. The on-going Annual Needs Assessment (ANA) in the area should provide a clear indication of the impact of the drought and food needs.

Preliminary findings of the ANA in Ajakuac indicate high rates of malnutrition amongst children under-five. Adults are visibly emaciated and reportedly going for several days without food. The population is currently getting by on wild grass and wild sorghum as they await harvest of the long-maturing sorghum and maize in late October/early November. The ANA continues to further analyze information from the area and will release details within the month.

In last month’s Update, Leech State was covered as an area of concern with limited current information. During September, multi-agency teams undertook rapid emergency assessments in two locations in the state, Koch and Kerial (Figure 6).

Figure 6: Leech State, Upper Nile Region



Source of Information: WFP/TSU

5.1. Koch

Findings indicate that Koch was systematically attacked and vandalized by Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) forces in July 2000 shortly after people had planted their first season crops. The area is noted to have remained uncharacteristically dry during the agricultural season, causing both maize and sorghum to wither and die. In addition, fields were not adequately weeded as people fled, leaving their farms unattended. Consequently, minimal harvests, if any, are expected.

Livestock were also reportedly looted, women abducted and several civilians killed. Most of the population moved to the *toics* (dry season grazing areas) and to other areas to the southeast. Koch town reportedly remains an abandoned "ghost town." Reports attributed to the chief indicate that those in the *toics* are currently surviving on water lilies and fish. However, their capacity to exploit fishing as a food source is extremely limited as they only have spears, which are not useful in deep water. Those who returned to the villages are eating wild grass seeds. The population appears to be stretching available food options to their limits and the situation is expected to worsen in the next two months or so as the dry season sets in.

5.2. Kerial

Planting began in June, one month later than usual. Poor and erratic rains in July and August negatively affected the sorghum crop, and consequently low yields are expected in late October.

It is estimated that this year's sorghum harvest will probably last a maximum of two months, depending on how much longer host populations have to feed the IDPs who remain in the location. The area was attacked at the beginning of September and part of the population fled to Gogrial County while the rest hid in nearby forests.

Some cattle were reportedly looted during the attack. Most of the cattle are currently in the cattle camps while some milking cows have been brought to the village to provide milk. Livestock slaughtering is noted to be taking place, probably an indication of low grain stocks as cattle are rarely slaughtered. Overnight fishing trips are also conducted at a distance a 6 hours walk away. The women accompany the fishermen to collect water lily seeds, which are in abundance and are currently a food staple as people await their meager harvests. Hunting is also an exploitable food source in the area but fear of insecurity probably limits this option. Market access is limited because the only functional market is about a two and a half hour walk away and no grain is currently available.

Given this situation, food aid is urgently required and any window of opportunity should be utilized to assist the populations in these two locations. Given that part of the populations have fled to neighboring locations, they need to be identified and given food assistance, and if possible, given fishing equipment now and agricultural inputs early next year to help rebuild their livelihoods.