

Food Security Update – December 2000

January 15, 2001

Summary

- Funding constraints are likely to be a major impediment to the prompt acquisition and distribution of agricultural inputs in 2001, particularly seeds. Several NGOs have finalized their distribution plans, but without funding, they may be forced to shelve them. Following the poor harvests in parts of Bahr-el-Ghazal, Upper Nile, and drought-ravaged Eastern Equatoria Regions, farming households have little seed stock to set aside for the next agricultural season which commences in March 2001. Consequently, supplying seeds to the affected households is crucial. Donor efforts are needed to provide timely funding so that inputs may be purchased and distributed before the rains begin in March.
- The success of any humanitarian intervention depends on proper planning, coordination, and execution. In light of this, tighter coordination among agricultural NGOs is needed for compiling a detailed master plan for distributing inputs. This will ensure that all needy areas are covered, security permitting. Coordination with WFP is equally essential to synchronize distribution of food aid along with seed to specific locations to guard against the consumption of seed by hungry households, an all too common practice.
- Food insecurity in Upper Nile States Region and parts of Eastern Equatoria Region remains of utmost concern. Conflict and insecurity remains the single most important determinant of food insecurity. Any upsurge in insecurity in these locations could result in a situation akin to the Bahr-el-Ghazal famine of 1998, when an estimated 70,000 people died of starvation following a massive exodus to food-insecure locations in the wake of fighting. Insecurity in Latjor State continues to worsen the already bad situation as populations are displaced to less food-secure areas. Despite food aid distributions that help to mitigate food insecurity, conditions can be so volatile that even food-secure locations require close and constant monitoring.
- The deteriorating nutritional situation of children under age 5 in the displaced- persons' camp in Labone and Isoke (Eastern Equatoria Region) is cause for concern. Malnutrition is on the rise in both locations despite regular food-aid distributions. With disease suspected as the cause, health interventions are urgently needed to complement nutrition programs and stem the rise in malnutrition.
- December remained seasonably dry as the dry season set in. Vegetative growth was minimal in most locations and even below the seasonal average in central parts of Jonglei Region and the northern and southwestern tips of Eastern Equatoria Region. Consequently, the seasonal movement of livestock to the *toics* (dry season grazing lands) has begun early in some places. The fear of conflict over grazing land is widespread during the dry season and could be triggered by cattle raiding, a traditional practice in some parts of Eastern Equatoria Region. Any reduction in livestock holdings will have a negative impact on the resilience of some households to food insecurity.

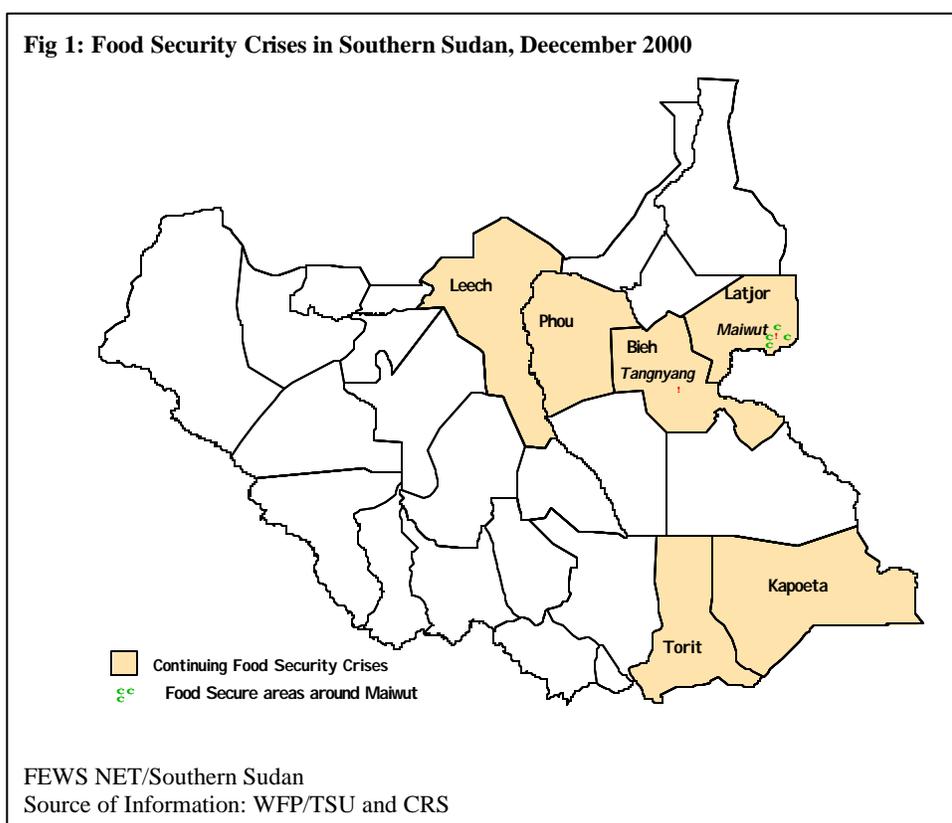
1. Review of Continuing Food Crises

Food insecurity persists in Leech, Bieh, Phou, and Latjor States in Upper Nile Region, and in Torit and Kapoeta County in Eastern Equatoria Region. Insecurity continues to undermine the already bad situation in Latjor State as populations are displaced to food-insecure areas. Aggravating the situation is cattle raiding in parts of Bieh State with recent high malnutrition rates. Even though food aid interventions continue to mitigate food insecurity, close monitoring of these locations remains necessary.

Food insecurity in Upper Nile Region continues to be a major concern. The situation in Leech, Bieh, and Phou States has not changed much since last reported. In Latjor State, the food-insecurity situation appears to be worsening given the limited access to food options due to the continuing insecurity. Last month, the Government of Sudan (GoS) militia attacked the areas around Maiwut (Figure 1), which are among the few food-secure areas in the state. Consequently, people have been forced to flee and are concentrated in the less food-secure locations.

In Bieh State, cattle raiding in the central area of Tangnyang by Murle tribesmen worsened an already bad situation there. This area has also experienced high malnutrition rates in the recent past. Cattle raiding has reduced livestock holdings for some households, limiting their access to milk and other livestock products.

Food aid interventions during December in Torit County, Eastern Equatoria Region is mitigating the emerging food-security crises. Although the food-security situation remains precarious given that their is overreliance on food aid, the nutrition situation is reportedly not alarming. Still, close monitoring is necessary as the food-security



situation there could readily deteriorate, depending on the security situation and its impact on access to other food sources. The security situation also needs to be watched closely for signs of an upsurge in fighting. Concerns are that such fighting could lead to a situation similar to the

Bahr-el-Ghazal famine of 1998, when an estimated 70,000 people died of starvation following a massive exodus to food-insecure locations in the wake of fighting.

2. Current Food Security Conditions and Prospects

Food availability in the surplus-producing counties of Western Equatoria Region remains good. The same applies to the counties in Lakes Region (Tonj, Yirol, and Rumbek) that have experienced a marked improvement in cereal production in the last two years. However, in parts of Bahr-el-Ghazal and Upper Nile Regions, household food stocks are gradually declining as internally displaced people (IDPs) place further strain on already limited food stocks. The availability of other food sources, such as wild foods and fish, is also declining in most areas and is not expected to improve until the first rains in late February-March 2001.

Household cereal stocks in the surplus-producing counties of Western Equatoria Region remain high, as most farmers have not been able to sell their surplus. Consequently, cereal availability in the markets is also good, but prices are reportedly low as supply far outstrips demand.

In the Lakes Region (Tonj, Yirol, and Rumbek Counties), cereal availability remains good. There has been marked improvement in cereal production in the region in the last two years, thanks to relative stability. Access to milk and livestock products is also good in view of the increased numbers of livestock in the region. Access to the markets within the region and in neighboring Western Equatoria Region is possible, enabling households to purchase various foods.

In Bahr-el-Ghazal Region, household food stocks are gradually declining. In Maluakon, Aweil East County, the NGO TearFund notes that the internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Aweil West County, forced to flee their homes due to prolonged fighting between Sudan Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA) and Government of Sudan (GoS) forces, are already placing a strain on the scarce food resources. Food stocks for most households in Maluakon will be depleted by February 2001. Households are then expected to expand their consumption of wild foods and there will be more reliance on food aid from WFP.

In Upper Nile Region, access to the various food sources remains limited due to insecurity. Cereal availability is low and most households are on the verge of depleting their stocks.

On a more general note, wild foods and fish availability is declining in most areas of southern Sudan. Availability is expected to start improving in late February/March.

3. National Trends Affecting Parts of Southern Sudan: Hazard Information

The dry season has set in with December remaining seasonably dry. Vegetative growth is currently minimal, a seasonal phenomenon, but is notably below the expected levels in central parts of Jonglei Region and the northern and southwestern tips of Eastern Equatoria Region. Consequently, livestock in some of the affected areas are moving to the toics earlier than usual. With the poor crop performance, households are relying more on livestock as a food source, both for milk and to sell if they have more than three so they can purchase grain or meet other needs. The movement to the toics will therefore reduce milk and other livestock products' availability for those remaining in the villages and will negatively affect their food security.

Planning by NGOs for the annual agricultural input distribution continues despite uncertainty over funding. A number of the NGOs have neither funding nor pledges for funding. A timely response by donors is crucial to ensure that seeds are distributed on time, before the roads become impassable, to let farmers take advantage of the early rains. Coordination among NGOs is also necessary to ensure that all needy areas are covered, security permitting. NGO distribution plans need to be drawn up in collaboration with WFP to synchronize food distribution with seed distribution. This will reduce seed consumption by hungry households, an all too common practice.

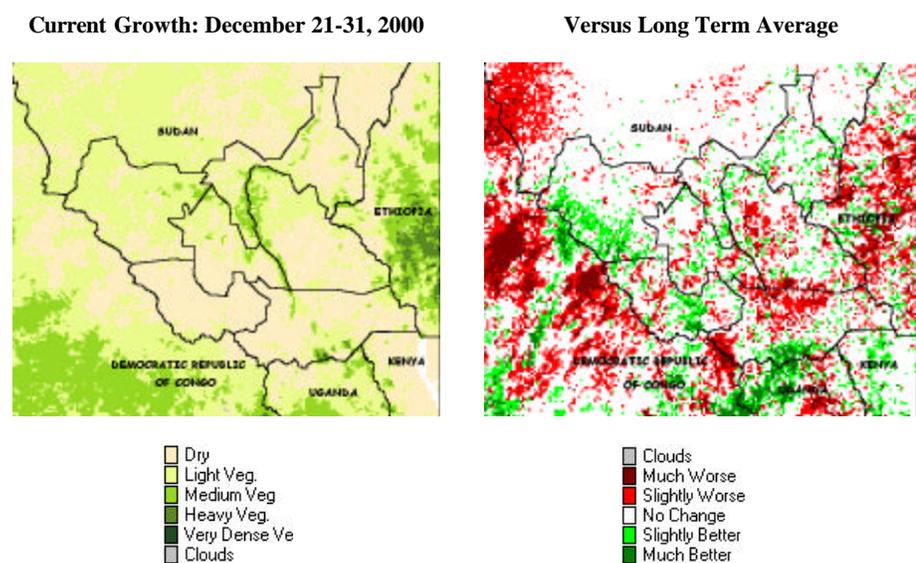
The rise in malnutrition levels in the Labone displaced persons' camp and Isoke in Eastern Equatoria is cause for concern despite regular food distribution. If, as suspected, disease is found to be the cause, a multi-faceted approach is needed to stem the rise in malnutrition. Individual health and nutrition programs need to be implemented together for maximum effectiveness.

3.1 Rainfall and Vegetation Conditions

December remained seasonably dry except for light showers in Western Equatoria Region during the third dekad. These were of no significance as the agricultural season has effectively ended.

Vegetative growth is currently minimal, with conditions notably below seasonal averages in central parts of Jonglei Region and the northern and southwestern tips of Eastern Equatoria Region (Figure 2). These are expected to deteriorate further, given that the dry season has set in. In the remaining areas, vegetative conditions are slightly better or within seasonal levels.

Fig 2: Normalized Difference Vegetative Index for Southern Sudan



FEWS NET/Southern Sudan
Source of Data: NASA

3.2. Crop Production

With the dry season setting in, crop production activities were minimal during December. Harvesting of the second season crop continued in a few remaining locations in the bimodal zone of Western and Eastern Equatoria Regions. Harvesting should be finalized by the end of January.

Meanwhile, NGOs have begun planning for the annual seeds and tools distribution exercise. However, planning has not moved along as well as last year at this time because uncertainty over funding. Given the poor harvests, especially among the poor households in Bahr-el-Ghazal and Upper Nile Regions and in the drought-stricken areas of Eastern Equatoria Region, farming households have little seed stock to set aside for the next agricultural season, which starts in March-April. Consequently, supplying seeds to these affected households is critical. Donors need to step up efforts to ensure funds are available in a timely manner so that inputs can be acquired and distributed before the rains begin..

Now may be the right time for NGOs to rethink the annual ritual of waiting for donor funds to purchase seeds. Strategies are needed to ensure availability of seeds for distribution, even when donor funds are not forthcoming. Communities need to participate in devising more sustainable methods of seed acquisition. Success stories in Western Equatoria offer important lessons for NGO and community collaboration. Farmers need to be encouraged to save some seed from their harvests, however meager. This requires giving farmers incentives to save their seed, such as food aid, to prevent seed consumption following poor harvests.

Assuming donor funds are forthcoming in the next month or two, coordination is urgently needed among NGOs to determine who will distribute inputs, where, and in what quantities. This will ensure that all needy areas are covered and prevent oversupply to locations where there are more NGOs while other locations go underserved. It will also allow FAO, as the lead agency, to compile these plans and make arrangements for areas that may not be covered by NGOs and yet are needy. This information needs to be shared on a timely basis with WFP to ensure coordination of food and seed distribution to avoid consumption of the seeds by the recipients.

Despite the funding uncertainties, which may be holding up some agencies from promptly acquiring inputs, several NGOs have tentative plans in place while others are still finalizing them. One important lesson from 1998 was the understanding that input distributions need to begin early in the planting season, by February/March, so farmers can take advantage of the early rains. In light of this, NGOs need to finalize their purchase and distribution plans as soon as possible, and share them with others to enable proper and effective coordination. Table 1 summarizes plans for a few NGOs who have made them known. Some of these plans are tentative given the funding uncertainties.

Table 1: NGO Plans for the 2001 Agricultural Season.

Region	NGO	Plans
Bahr-el-Ghazal	TearFund	TearFund plans to distribute a total of 62 MT of sorghum, 62 MT of groundnuts, 37 MT of <i>simsim</i> (sesame), and 0.2 MT of okra to 12,289 beneficiaries in Mangok, Madhol, Malualbai, and Malualkon in Aweil East County. TearFund will also distribute locally manufactured farm implements. No funding has been secured so far, and the plans may be shelved if no funding is forthcoming.
	CARE	CARE will distribute limited quantities of vegetable seeds to 3,000 women in Kuajina Payam, Wau County.
Upper Nile	CARE	CARE is targeting 35 percent of the total population in Maiwut and Wudier (Latjor State) with seeds and tools. Some 70 percent of the population will be targeted for fishing gear distribution.
Lakes	TearFund	Crop production in the Lakes Region was relatively good. Consequently, NGOs that have been operating in the area such as OXFAM (GB) do not have plans to distribute seeds unless need arises due to insecurity, poor germination, or seed consumption. However, TearFund will support agricultural activities in the Deng Nhial school for demobilized child soldiers. This is aimed at making the school self-sufficient in food production. FAO has given verbal assurances for funding of certain aspects of the project.
Western Equatoria	MRDA	Most of the region has surplus seeds. However, MRDA will distribute 21 MT of sorghum to 1,200 beneficiaries drawn from all payams in Mundri County. The seeds will be bought locally from Mvolo and Yeri Payams within the county. No funding has been secured for this.
Eastern Equatoria	CRS	CRS will target a total of 10,819 households in Torit County. These form 35 percent of the total number of households. Most of the seed will be purchased from within southern Sudan.
Jonglei	CARE	CARE intends to distribute inputs to anticipated returnees from the Equatoria Region and 50 percent of the resident population in Bor County. Limited quantities of tools will be distributed for the dike rehabilitation.
	NCA	NCA plans to buy and distribute local seeds in parts of Bor County. Quantities are yet to be determined.

3.3. Livestock Production

The seasonal movement of livestock away from the main homesteads to the *toics* commenced in parts of Tonj County in late November-early December. This is a month earlier than usual and indicates poor water and forage availability around the homesteads. The same scenario is expected in other livestock-important areas of Lakes, Bahr-el-Ghazal, Jonglei, and Upper Nile Regions. This will reduce milk and other livestock products' availability among affected households earlier than usual. In parts of Eastern Equatoria Region, given the drought conditions that prevailed during 2000, movement to the dry season traditional grazing areas in the Nile River valley began as early as late September instead of October, as usual. The fear of conflict over grazing land in this region abounds and will be worsened by cattle raiding, a practice engaged in by some of the communities. Either outright conflict or cattle raiding would aggravate the already grave food security situation, as currently there is overdependence on livestock, given the crop failure in parts of Eastern Equatoria.

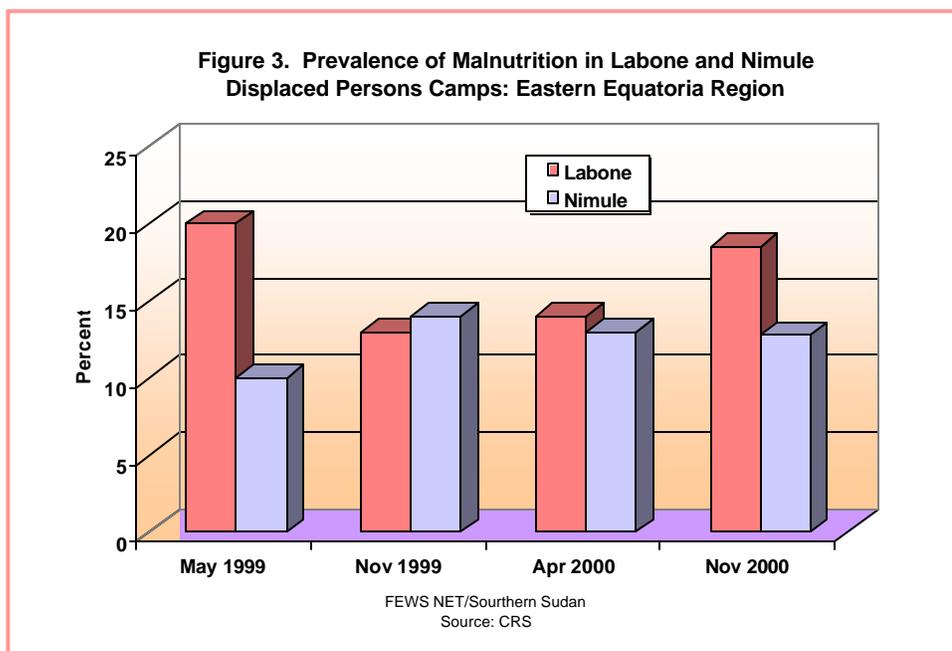
Livestock vaccination continues in most parts of southern Sudan. With the exception of Anthrax and Black Quarter outbreaks in Marial Lou (Akop Payam, Tonj County) in late November-early December, the FAO/Livestock office and veterinary NGOs report no serious outbreaks of livestock diseases. However, with the dry season having set in and pasture and water availability declining in several places, the incidence of stress-induced diseases, such as Haemorrhagic Septicaemia, is expected to increase.

3.4. Health and Nutrition

The nutrition situation is reportedly fair in most parts of southern Sudan and malnutrition levels are within accepted limits. However, Catholic Relief Services (CRS) notes that in Isoke, around Ikotos (Eastern Equatoria Region), many children are visibly malnourished. The malnutrition is attributed to disease because no health NGOs are undertaking primary health care activities in the area. The nearest Primary Health Care Unit, run by Norwegian Peoples' Aid (NPA), is poorly equipped and lacks essential drugs.

To address malnutrition in and around Ikotos, a comprehensive survey needs to be carried out to determine whether disease is the actual cause. If so, then health interventions are needed and the Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) administration needs to encourage health NGOs to intervene. Health programs would complement the nutrition program that is already in place.

A survey undertaken by CRS in the displaced camps of Nimule and Labone in November indicated a rise in malnutrition levels (using weight-for-height indicator) in Labone compared with levels in April, when a similar survey was undertaken (Figure 3). The rate in Labone was even higher than at the same time last year.



Normally at this time of year, malnutrition levels should be low because harvesting is still ongoing in some bimodal areas around the camps and ration distribution in the camps is regular. CRS intends to initiate several interventions, which will hopefully lead to lowered malnutrition rates. These include increasing the size of the general ration and initiating blanket (general) feeding for all children under age 5 in the camp. In addition, the NGO intends to intensify the health education component to ensure high sanitary conditions, provide mosquito nets to curb the incidence of

malaria, and distribute oral rehydration salts (ORS) to control diarrhea, which predisposes children to malnutrition.

3.5. Conflict and Insecurity Issues

As a result of GoS bombing of civilian targets, popular defense forces (PDF) raiding, and inter-factional fighting, insecurity continued in various parts of southern Sudan during December. These incidents continue to preclude access to northern markets in Bahr-el-Ghazal and Upper Nile Regions, limit peoples' mobility to get food, and interfere with humanitarian assistance. Insecurity, therefore, continues to be a major determinant of food insecurity in southern Sudan.

With the dry season having set in, Government forces may intensify their offensives to try and capture Gogrial town from SPLA. In turn, the SPLA may also try to liberate more areas. These military offensives may lead to renewed displacements with more people becoming vulnerable to food insecurity. Insecurity in the Upper Nile Region also shows no signs of abating. With limited access for humanitarian interventions, more and more people will become vulnerable to food insecurity, disease, and deteriorating living conditions. Peace initiatives by the international community and various regional bodies need to be intensified to stem a potential situation akin to that of 1998.