Nearly two-thirds of the population in South Sudan at risk of rising hunger

The food security situation in South Sudan has never been worse than it is today, and the scale of suffering worse than anticipated in the last quarter of 2017. The latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis, released on 26 February 2018 jointly by the Government of South Sudan, FAO, WFP and UNICEF, reveals that nearly half of the population are estimated to have been severely food insecure in January 2018. This is highest amount ever recorded during the post-harvest season, representing a 40% increase compared with the same time last year.

By the height of the lean season in May – in the absence of humanitarian aid – it is estimated that the number of severely food insecure people will surge to 7.1 million, about two-thirds of the total population. This would represent the peak of the continued escalation of food insecurity across the country since 2014. If the situation persists, there is a heightened risk of famine in areas where large populations are already experiencing severe food insecurity.

To avert a return to famine in 2018, it is critical to maintain improved humanitarian access, as well as scale up and sustain multi-sectoral assistance. Ending conflict and sustaining peace would prevent continued disruption of livelihoods and agricultural production, as well as disruptions to the provision of food aid and cash transfers, and reaching malnourished women and children with urgent support.

Response to date

Last year, FAO, WFP, UNICEF and their partners rolled out their largest ever aid campaign, saving lives and containing famine. In 2017, agency partners conducted more than 135 rapid humanitarian missions to the most hard-to-reach areas, providing life-saving assistance to over 1.8 million people.

FAO provided 5 million people - many in difficult-to-reach or conflict-affected areas - with seeds and tools for planting, and fishing kits in 2017. FAO has also vaccinated more than 6.1 million livestock to keep animals alive and healthy. This has been vital as most of the population rely on livestock for their survival.

UNICEF and partners admitted some 208,000 children with severe acute malnutrition in 2017 and plan to reach 215,000 this year. Together with WFP, UNICEF took part in 51 rapid response missions in 2017 to reach communities cut off from regular aid assistance. The Rapid Response Mechanism (RRM) will remain a key means of accessing conflict-affected communities in the coming months.

At the peak of its response this year, WFP aims to reach 4.4 million people with life-saving food and nutrition assistance. WFP is pre-positioning food in areas likely to be cut off during the rainy season, so people will not go hungry. WFP plans to pre-position 140,000 metric tons of food and nutrition supplies - 20 percent more than in 2017 - in more than 50 locations across the country.

More humanitarian access challenges in 2017

In 2017, 1,159 humanitarian access incidents were reported by aid agencies in South Sudan. This is the highest number of incidents in a year, representing a significant increase, compared to 908 in 2016 and 909 in 2015. Although these incidents differ in nature and severity, their scope and spread across the country indicate that obstacles to the delivery of humanitarian action have persisted in a highly fluid operating environment.

Thirty aid workers were killed in 2017, making it the deadliest year for humanitarians since conflict began in December 2013. At least 97 aid workers have been killed in South Sudan since the beginning of the crisis. About 47 per cent of the total incidents reported in 2017...
involved violence against aid workers and assets. These incidents included murder, robbery, looting and threats or harassment, mostly affecting Juba, Rubkona and Wau counties.

Although this is a reduction in the proportion of violent acts compared to 2016 (69 per cent), it is coupled with an increase in the number of aid worker deaths. Sixty-one looting incidents were reported in multiple locations across the country.

In 2017, active hostilities and violence against personnel continued to impact humanitarian operations, with 612 aid workers relocated in 54 incidents from multiple locations across the country. More than half of the relocations occurred in Koch, Leer and Mayendit (Unity) and Akobo (Jonglei), where over half a million people were in need of assistance and protection in 2017. Most of the relocations were followed by the suspension of life-saving activities affecting thousands of people, including in Unity, where teams responding to famine came under attack.

Looting spiked in July 2017, with 15 incidents reported across the country, including six in which warehouses and trucks in transit were looted in Eastern Equatoria, Lakes, Upper Nile and Warrap, leading to the loss of 670 metric tons of food aid, enough to feed 40,000 people for a month. In October 2017, authorities issued a circular announcing work permit rates of up to US$4,000 per permit per year, which implied up to $7 million could be diverted to fees.

Charges at checkpoints continued throughout the year and have remained fluid. In December, partners reported 66 checkpoints on the Juba-Bentiu road, some of which demanded up to SSP 3,000 (US$15) from motorists, making humanitarian cargo transport more costly.

Sharing experiences to build stronger grassroots engagement for an inclusive national dialogue

Participants from more than 50 organizations gathered in February to share experiences and lessons learnt from sensitization work conducted in Unity State in 2017. The outreach sought to find opportunities for local engagement on the National Dialogue as a pathway to community cohesion, reconciliation and healing.

The interactive gathering was organized by the Dialogue and Research Initiative (DRI), with support from UNDP’s project “Facilitating Grassroots Engagement to Create a Conducive Environment for the National Dialogue” funded by the Government of Japan.

The outreach in Unity State involved 400 direct participants in community dialogues, with 3,000 people total reached. The Japan-supported project previously held forums to boost inclusion of a diversity of voices into the National Dialogue process, including people with disabilities, minority groups, and women.

Ambassador H.E. Seiji Okada said: “Japan supports the home-grown initiative of the National Dialogue with the condition that the process is open to everyone which it has been so far; it is inclusive to all members and transparent. I am happy to note that our support is used for what it is aimed for.”

Participants highlighted pending issues on the National Dialogue, shared updates on the status of community level dialogues, as well as local demands for justice and accountability.

“There is no limit to dialogue. It is better to dialogue than to engage in war. Dialogue helps to bridge the gap between people and communities,” UNDP Country Director Kamil Kamaluddeen told the participants.

WHO steps up efforts to reach severely malnourished children with life-saving treatment in South Sudan

Regina Archangelo, walked in to the stabilization center inside Wau Teaching Hospital carrying her weak six months old twin boys Ochan and Opio. One could easily notice that not only the twins, the mother too was frail and underweight.

The twins are among the estimated over 261 000 children in South Sudan suffering from Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) in 2018. Luckily, their parents were able to take them to Wau Teaching hospital, former Western Bahr el Ghazal State.

“My boys have become weak, with a lot of diarrhoea and vomiting all the time,” says Regina recalling her twin’s condition. “I breastfeed them and also give them supplementary milk but they keep getting diarrhea, vomiting, cough and were losing weight day by day.” I was so worried about how sick they were,” she recalled.

“After three days of treatment at the stabilization center, I have started seeing the improvement, said Regina. No vomiting and no coughing, their diarrhoea has subsided, and now they are showing signs of recovery.”

Regina and the twins had just arrived in Wau from Wau North payam a week ago. Inside the stabilization center, over 10 malnourished children lay waiting to receive treatment. Some of them suffer from burn marks in their body, a side effect indicating the most severe stage of the disease.

In South Sudan, insecurity coupled with worsening economic crisis
has resulted in high food prices, local currency devaluation and hyperinflation, which in turn eroded household purchasing power. In addition, an anticipated earlier-than-normal start of the lean season in many areas further hampered people’s food security, threatening the survival of the most vulnerable population in hard to reach areas.

Acute malnutrition has worsened compared to the same period in 2016 and remains high in many parts of South Sudan including Wau County of former Western Bahr el Ghazal state.

In response to the worsening situation, WHO has doubled its support for inpatient facilities in areas affected by critical emergency and humanitarian catastrophe. So far 89 WHO severe acute malnutrition (SAM) kits have been provided to 41 stabilization centers between July and December 2017.

WHO has also sustained the provision of essential medical supplies to 13 facilities and has scaled up its support to 17 new health facilities including the stabilization centers in Wau County. One kit can treat and save the lives of 50 malnourished patients.

The WHO SAM kits contain medicines including antibiotics, antimalarial, treatment for diarrhoea, diagnostic kits and treatment for diseases like malaria, and supplies including thermometers, gloves and syringes. Over 5,000 children that have severe acute malnutrition with medical complications have been treated at the centres.

Out of the estimated over 261,000 children to be suffering from severe acute malnutrition this year, at least 10 to 15% are expected to develop medical complications. Without proper treatment, children with severe acute malnutrition are ten times more likely to die than their healthier peers, says Ms Marina Adrianopoli, Technical Officer for Nutrition at WHO South Sudan.

“A malnourished child is a sick child, says Mr Evans Liyosi, WHO Representative a.i for South Sudan. The child needs medical treatment to control medical complications such as fever, diarrhoea and pneumonia.” The provision of medical supplies along with capacity building training program on inpatient care to prevent child mortality is the utmost priority of WHO, says Mr Liyosi.

UNMISS supports pre-migration conference between cattle keepers and farmers in Tali

In South Sudan, cattle are like gold.

Millions of people rely on the animals to survive, but as the preferred currency and indicator of a family’s economic and social standing, cattle and their seasonal movements also create problems. Violent clashes between farmers and semi-nomadic cattle keepers, and between cattle keepers themselves, competing for scarce water and grazing resources, have become more frequent.

The ongoing civil war has exacerbated the problem by disrupting traditional cattle migration routes and patterns. Yet these annual movements of cows during the dry season are an integral part of the South Sudanese social fabric.

David Achiek Machar, a cattle owner from Tali, a small pastoral village 200 km north of Juba, said that before the war the land belonged to everyone.

“There were no issues of this is your area, and this is my area. Cattle keepers moved freely.”

The Civil Affairs Division of the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) recently facilitated an inter-state Pre-migration Conference in Tali, in the Terekeka region, where local authorities, cattle owners and farmers from the five bordering regions met.

The objective was to reach an agreement that regulates seasonal cattle movements to prevent conflict, identifies water resources and grazing lands and sets out compensation rules for the destruction of crops and beehives by cattle as well as for theft or killings of cattle.

“The UN Mission is very pleased to support this conference,” said UNMISS Civil Affairs Officer, Stella Abayomi. “We hope to help replicate a model on management of cattle migration that has worked in other parts of the country like in Northern Bahr-el-Ghazal.”

During the conference, state governors in the region formally handed over the authority to settle disputes between cattle owners and farmers to a recently formed Joint Border Peace Committee/Court.
Easing a mother’s burden through improved access to water and sanitation

Nanyuru, a pregnant 25-year old mother of two, used to have to walk for an entire day to reach the nearest water point, where she would then have to spend the night, just to fetch water for her family.

“It was not safe to walk the long distance to get water. You could encounter bad people on the way, and they could even steal your water or harm you. We would go in groups, sometimes with men for protection, two times a week.”

In Lotir boma, a remote village in Kapoeta North, IOM recently repaired a borehole as part of a larger USAID-funded project to improve water, sanitation and hygiene conditions and prevent gender-based violence in affected areas like Kapoeta, which was severely affected by the cholera outbreak in 2017.

Now that she can access water closer to her home, Nanyuru and women like her can avoid the risks associated with the long walks. In addition to repairing boreholes, IOM will return to the village to conduct community-driven hygiene and sanitation promotion. Nanyuru and other women in Lotir said that they still become sick, pointing to dirty jerry cans.

They cannot consistently access soap, and they said that using ash—a common alternative to soap—to clean is taboo in their culture. Recognizing the need for greater awareness of basic hygiene and sanitation practices to encourage more sustainable improvements in health and WASH conditions, IOM will work closely with the community to share and in still good WASH practices.

UNICEF’s unique dry season prepositioning strategy

As South Sudan enters the fifth year of civil war, conflict persists in 9 of its 10 States. Nearly 7.6 million people – more than half of them children – are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance. In 2017, the country suffered from the first famine anywhere in the world in six years, and the worst cholera outbreak in history. Coupled with an inflation rate of 165 per cent as of December 2017, there is now a continued and escalated dependence on humanitarian aid.

However, delivering aid in the country is fraught with numerous challenges besides those arising from conflict. For seven months in the year, from November to May, roads across the country become impassable due to torrential rains.

UNICEF’s unique prepositioning strategy, therefore, make most of the five dry months to move life-saving supplies for use throughout the year. Yet, transporting supplies even in the dry season is rid with complexities of poor road infrastructure, clashes and looting that escalate due to ease of movement.

Secure road routes and need in every region are, therefore, thoroughly mapped to increase UNICEF’s field presence in these months. Over 60 per cent of nearly $40 million worth multi-sectoral supplies are prepositioned in seven key hubs for timely access even to the most remote locations.

Some essential supplies prepositioned in the dry months include: ready-to-use therapeutic food that has saved many lives from severe acute malnutrition, items necessary for the preventive of and response to cholera such as soaps, water purifiers, medicines, insecticidal nets for malaria prevention, material for water supply and sanitation facilities, teaching and learning material, among others.

UNHCR survey shows poor nutrition status among refugee children in South Sudan

Over 24 thousand or 44% of refugee children under the age of 5 in South Sudan suffer from growth retardation or stunting, according to a nutrition survey findings published by UNHCR today.

The survey which was conducted among refugee children under 5 years old in 8 refugee camps and settlements across South Sudan in December 2017 revealed that 6.2 per cent or 3,391 out of the total of 54,172 refugee children under 5 years old were suffering from acute malnutrition. Although below the emergency threshold of 15%, 6.2% prevalence indicates poor nutrition status of
refugee children. The survey also revealed that 48% or 26,000 of refugee children were suffering from anemia.

Overall nutrition status of refugee children has improved as compared to previous years, however the number of children suffering from stunting, acute malnutrition and anemia remains to be a matter of high concern.

“Both stunting and anemia can have long-term negative consequences for children and affect children’s immune system as well as intellectual capacity and mental development,” UNHCR Representative in South Sudan Johann Siffonte said, adding that more efforts and resources need to be invested in preventive measures.

In addition to the nutrition status of refugee children, the survey also looked into families’ coping mechanisms to offset lack of food. Over 80% of those polled during the survey stated resorting to negative coping strategies, including selling assets that would normally have not been sold, cash and food borrowings and reducing meal quantities and frequency.

Working closely with partners and other UN agencies, in particular, UNICEF and WFP, UNHCR is implementing a number of initiatives and programs that are called to address the problem of malnourished refugee children. In particular, UNHCR together with partners have been implementing Comprehensive Management of Acute Malnutrition for all identified malnourished children, Blanket Supplementary Feeding Program for children under 2 years old and pregnant and lactating women as a malnutrition preventive measure.

In addition to awareness raising sessions aimed at promoting early initiation of breastfeeding and appropriate infant and young children feeding practices, UNHCR and its partners have also embarked on the implementation of a strategy that addresses the problem of anemia and micronutrient deficiencies.

“The solution to the problem of malnutrition among refugee children in South Sudan requires a holistic approach and should include, among others, provision of adequate healthcare and water and sanitation services and expansion of livelihoods activities to allow refugees to attain food security at a household level,” UNHCR Representative in South Sudan emphasized.

**Leveraging South Sudan’s Natural Highway – the White Nile River**

UNOPS, with funding from the Government of Japan, has concluded a feasibility study of the White Nile River, which will inform future development of South Sudan’s river barge system. The report will be launched at a workshop in Juba on 13 March.

South Sudan has an underdeveloped road system, worsened by lack of maintenance, conflict and heavy rainy seasons, with more than 70 percent of the roads inaccessible half the year. Some of the biggest humanitarian issues like food insecurity and lack of access to basic services are directly linked to, and worsened by, the poor infrastructure. At the same time, the White Nile River is an untapped transport corridor, which, if well-functioning, could greatly improve access and reduce the cost of transport of food and humanitarian aid.

Today, the river is barely used for larger transports – in some parts due to security issues and in others because it is not deep or wide enough. Also, the lack of port structures make unloading larger quantities of goods difficult or impossible in many locations. While UNOPS has previously built a port with Japan in Mingkaman, most ports in South Sudan do not even have a jetty.

The aim of this project, River Barge System Feasibility Study, was therefore to assess the conditions of the river and ports to inform future investments. This included a mapping of the river’s width and depth between Juba and Bor (a bathymetric survey) and detailed assessment of nine river ports.

The report findings show that dredging to accommodate larger traffic is a necessary step in order to fully leverage the river, and could provide long-term financial savings for humanitarian donors. Rehabilitation of river ports and installation of navigation aids along the river are also key recommendations of the study, which includes a detailed breakdown of the estimated costs of investing in different areas and locations.

At the workshop, UNOPS will present the findings and future prospective to donors and stakeholders to raise interest in future developments in the river infrastructure. Future improvements and investments in South Sudan’s river transport could make a huge difference for humanitarian access, stabilization of market prices and long-term development.

**UNESCO and UNFPA support government of South Sudan to raise peaceful and productive youth**

UNESCO and UNFPA, United Nations Population Fund, have joined forces to support youth initiatives in South Sudan. Representatives from the two UN agencies met with Undersecretary Agum Ring and officials from the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports on...
22 February 2018 to identify the Government of South Sudan’s priorities in youth engagement and support.

People under the age of 29 represent roughly 70% of the South Sudanese population, thus highlighting the need to involve youth in all programme activities and policy-making to ensure peaceful and sustainable national development (UN DESA, 2017).

Both UNESCO and UNFPA believe it is important to address youth needs in economic opportunities, education, health, family, security and more to foster peaceful co-existence and discourage youth involvement in conflict. The partnership between UNESCO and UNFPA will support the Government to empower the youth to take their responsibility and unleash their potentials in building the young nation.

“Youth are the majority of the population in South Sudan, and they are the future of this country. If we ignore youth needs, you ignore the future of South Sudan” says UNESCO Representative to South Sudan, Mr. Sardar Umar Alam.

“The collaboration between UNESCO and UNFPA to support the Government of South Sudan to build a productive youth population will go a long way to realize the full potentials of South Sudanese youth,” says the UNFPA Country Representative, Ms. Esperance Fundira.

Preliminary efforts will focus on revising or drafting various national youth bills/policies and forums for youth to be engaged in decision-making. UNESCO and UNFPA also invite the involvement of other UN partners for engagement to ensure effectiveness and streamlined approaches in interventions.

Promoting local sports through radio for peaceful co-existence

South Sudan media stakeholders have used the occasion to commemorate the 2018 World Radio Day to call for use of radio to encourage local sports for peaceful coexistence in the country. The event under the theme “Radio and Sports” took place on 13 February at the University of Juba Play Ground.

It was marked with speeches from different radio stakeholders and government officials graced with a football match between radio journalists and local football coaches as well as traditional dances from different cultural groups.

Hon. Dr. Nadia Arop Dudi, National Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports who delivered the keynote address during the celebrations called on radio managers to challenge gender stereotypes.

“Let’s give equal opportunities for women broadcasters and promote balanced coverage of men, women and mixed sports. I encourage all the radio stations in the country to promote fair portrayal of sportspeople, irrespective of gender.” Hon. Dr Dudi said.

The UNESCO Representative to South Sudan Mr. Sardar Umar Alam appreciated the radio stations in promoting freedom of expression and peace building in South Sudan “today’s event provided another opportunity to nurture diversity, as a force for dialogue and tolerance. The fight for gender equality is critical to this effort.” Mr. Alam said.

Ms. Mary Ajith, the Acting Chairperson for the Association for Media Development in South Sudan (AMDISSS) call on media practitioners to use radio to promote sports for peace.” Female Journalists should bring out the potential in them in the media sector and make sure that woman voices are heard in sporting activities,” Ms Ajith said. In a divided society like ours, radio have helped in sending out peace messages and this should be continued with responsibility.”

Speaking at the same occasion was Mr. Charles Haskins, Chief of Party, Internews who said, “Sports has a language for togetherness, it doesn’t have a tribe but it has one team from different cultures, this means sports can be strong tool for bringing together to live in peace”

The 2018 World Radio Day celebration was organized by broadcast journalists representing different radio stations with support from UNESCO project “Strengthening Dialogue for Peace and Reconciliation in South Sudan” which is funded by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund in partnership with Internews, USAID, University of Juba and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports.