

Harvest season provides meagre respite to South Sudan's ongoing hunger crisis

6 November 2017 – The current harvest season has not brought enough food to end the hunger crisis in South Sudan, as conflict persists in most of the African country and hyperinflation puts food out of reach for many, the United Nations said Monday.

“The harvest season has not brought much relief to the millions of people in South Sudan who don't have enough food. The country's greenbelt has been ravaged by fighting, and finding a peaceful solution to [this man-made tragedy](#) should be the top priority or the situation will get even worse next year,” said Serge Tissot, South Sudan Representative of the Food and Agriculture Organization ([FAO](#)), in a press release jointly issued by the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) and the World Food Programme ([WFP](#)).

According to the updated Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) released Monday by the Government of South Sudan, UN agencies and other humanitarian partners, the number of people experiencing severe food insecurity across the country for the October-December period is likely to increase by 1.4 million from a year earlier to 4.8 million, although the number represents a drop from six million in June.

The report also projects the food security situation will deteriorate at the start of 2018, and the “hungry season” will arrive three months earlier than usual, when households will likely run out of food before the next harvest.

“A massive humanitarian response helped stop famine in parts of the country this year. But even in the current harvest period, millions of people need sustained assistance to survive,” said Adnan Khan, WFP Representative in South Sudan. “It is chilling to see that in a worst-case scenario, similar conditions could appear in multiple places in the lean season in 2018.”

Critical levels of malnutrition

Malnutrition has also worsened compared to the same period last year, with surveys showing malnutrition rates in most communities well above the WHO's emergency threshold of 15 per cent, and with more than 30 per cent of the population malnourished in several counties.

More than 1.1 million children under the age of five are forecast to be malnourished in 2018, including nearly 300,000 severely malnourished and at a heightened risk of death.

“Too many children are going hungry in South Sudan. More than one in five of those struggling to feed themselves is a child under five years of age,” said Mahimbo Mdoe, UNICEF's Representative in South Sudan. “This has created a malnutrition crisis that is putting many lives at risk.”

Soaring food prices

Coupled with a failing economy, insecurity continues to hamper food production and disrupt markets, leading to extremely high food prices. Large sacks of staples such as sorghum, maize, and wheat flour have increased in price by up to 281 per cent compared to last year, and were as high as 560 per cent during May, the peak of the lean season.

In Juba, a 100kg bag of sorghum costs 11,285 South Sudanese Pounds (SSP), compared to 4 314 SSP a year ago, and is vastly beyond what most families can afford.

Despite enormous logistical and security challenges, FAO has provided fishing, crop- and vegetable-growing kits to more than 4.2 million people, many in difficult to reach or conflict-affected areas. FAO has also vaccinated more than 4.8 million livestock.

UNICEF, together with its partners, has treated more than 160,000 children with severe acute malnutrition (SAM) so far this year. UNICEF has also provided over 750,000 people with safe drinking water and a further 230,000 people with access to sanitation facilities.

WFP and its partners have assisted 4.6 million people so far in 2017 with cash or food, including nutrition support for children under the age of five years. Emergency mobile teams usually travelling by helicopter on over 135 missions to areas isolated by conflict have supported 1.8 million people this year.