

[South Sudan: A year after averting famine, 'food insecurity outlook has never been so dire,' UN warns](#)

One year after famine was declared in parts of South Sudan, three United Nations agencies warned on Monday that without sustained humanitarian assistance and access, more than seven million people in the crisis-torn country— almost two-thirds of the population – could become severely food insecure in the coming months.

“The situation is [extremely fragile](#), and we are close to seeing another famine. The projections are stark,” said Serge Tissot, the [Food and Agriculture Organization's \(FAO\)](#) Representative in South Sudan.

Should this happen, it will be the highest-ever number of food insecure people in South Sudan.

“If we ignore them, we'll be faced with a growing tragedy. If farmers receive support to resume their livelihoods, we will see a rapid improvement in the country's food security situation due to increased local production,” he added.

The period of greatest risk will be the lean season, between May and July.

FAO, the UN Children's Fund ([UNICEF](#)) and the UN World Food Programme ([WFP](#)) warned that progress in preventing hunger-related deaths could be undone, and more people than ever could be pushed into severe hunger and famine-like conditions during May-July unless assistance and access are maintained.

Particularly at risk are 155,000 people, including 29,000 children, who could suffer from the most extreme levels of hunger.

“We are alarmed as the lean season, when the harvest runs out, is expected to start this year much earlier than usual. Unless we can pre-position assistance rather than mount a more costly response during the rains, more families will struggle to survive,” said Adnan Khan, WFP Representative and Country Director.

“The situation is deteriorating with each year of conflict as more people lose the little they had,” he elaborated.

In January, nearly half the population struggling to find enough food each day were in “crisis” or “emergency” levels of food insecurity – according to an Integrated Food Security Phase Classification report released Monday.

This represents a 40 per cent increase in the number of severely food insecure people compared to January 2017.

The report comes one year after famine was declared in parts of South Sudan last February.

Despite improved access and a massive humanitarian response in containing and averting famine later last year, the food insecurity outlook has never been as dire as it is now.

“We are preparing for rates of severe malnutrition among children never before seen in this country,” said Mahimbo Mdoe, UNICEF’s Representative in South Sudan.

“Without an urgent response and access to those most in need, many children will die. We cannot allow that to happen,” he warned.

A growing tragedy

Protracted conflict, the result of a political dispute that erupted between South Sudanese leaders and their rival factions in 2013, has led to reduced food production and disrupted livelihoods, has caused hunger levels to rise.

This was further exacerbated by an economic collapse that rendered markets and trade unable to compensate for the local food production decrease.

Prolonged dry spells, flooding and continued pest infestation also had a damaging impact.

In areas like Unity, Jonglei, Upper Nile, and Central Equatoria, riddled by reoccurring outbreaks of violent conflict and displacement, the proportion of people suffering from extreme food insecurity ranges from 52 to 62 per cent – more than half the states’ combined population.

The number is expected to increase unless people find the means to receive, produce or buy their own food.

Projections for February-April reveal 6.3 million people in “crisis,” “emergency” or “catastrophe” levels of food insecurity, including 50,000 people in the latter.

The May-July forecast put 7.1 million in those same levels, including 155,000 people in “catastrophe.” Moreover, 1.3 million children under age five risk acute malnutrition.