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RESEARCH FOR A PEACEFUL, JUST AND PROSPEROUS SOUTH SUDAN

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## Policy Brief

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### Food Security and Nutrition Vulnerability and Risk Analysis in Former Warrap and Northern Bahr el Ghazal States

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# Food Security and Nutrition Vulnerability and Risk Analysis in Former Warrap and Northern Bahr el Ghazal States

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## Summary

*Despite<sup>1</sup> no direct politically driven armed conflict in former Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Warrap States, assessments have shown deteriorating food security and nutritional conditions. More generally, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) shows a growing food security problem in South Sudan, with a large proportion of people sliding into crisis and emergency food insecurity level. In order to understand the causes of increasing food insecurity and malnutrition in those states, the key IPC partners within the UN, namely FAO, UNICEF, and WFP working alongside the Ministry of Health (Department of Nutrition) and key nutrition partners within the NGOs (including SCF and ACF), have conducted an Integrated Food and Nutrition Security Causal Analysis (IFANSCA) study. Alongside the IFANSCA study, the Sudd Institute, with generous support from Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), has explored the proximal risk factors associated with vulnerabilities in the former states of Warrap and Northern Bahr el Ghazal. This brief summarizes key results by examining six major assumptions using Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) tools to draw information from the rural households. The findings from this research have been incorporated into the IFANSCA report. However, due to their uniqueness a longer report and this policy brief have been independently produced.*

## Vulnerability causes

**Poverty** permeates much of the studied populations. The poorest members of the society are generally physically weak to adequately farm; they also lack resources to invest in alternative, more productive livelihoods. Furthermore, poverty amplifies competition over limited resources, resulting in violence and costly human flight. Summarily, poverty impacts massively on food production. Due to the current economic shocks, the rate of poverty has dramatically increased nationwide, with as many as 66 out of 100 South Sudanese living below the poverty line in 2015 (World Bank, 2015). Poverty moves in a cycle, starting with a physical weakness that makes it nearly impossible to adequately work the farm. But more generally, the direction of relationship between poverty and food insecurity is not readily identifiable; it is reversed. This means addressing one arguably fixes the other.

**Market dependence and changes in traditional wealth** lead to unsustainable changes in livelihoods. The growth in the cash economy during the CPA era seems to have negatively influenced young people's attitude and mindsets towards the traditional economy, which largely depends on social support mechanisms. There is a growing tendency to replace the monetized

economy, which depends on the South Sudanese Pound or the US Dollar. This means that the traditional wealth system is either declining or changing fast in many parts of the country. The wealth source has changed over the years, with salaries becoming increasingly important in the recent periods. Unfortunately, the collapsing macro-economy has shrunk employment opportunities, leaving many young people jobless both in urban and rural areas.

As the economy collapses, with hyperinflation as a result, low and stagnant wages are not keeping pace with drastically rising costs of living. With communities steadily becoming less self-sufficient the UN humanitarian food distribution system has become an essential recourse for their survival, hence creating dependence on international food assistance.

As the traditional economy declines, there is a marked shift of wealth towards business people and government employees. Traders and government employees, a negligible fraction of the population, control the modernizing economy. This crowds out the barter system, as the demand for money increasingly heightens. Thus, money, cattle, and other resources are now concentrated in the hands of the elite, posing serious food security threats for a vast majority of the population.

**Security** impacts considerably on livelihood sustainability. Border conflicts and violent ethnic feuds, some of such being associated with increasing competition over natural resources, and the recent civil war, have deeply undermined livelihoods in the studied areas. Consequently, local food production has been limited, displacement back to North Sudan has been induced, and trade routes between the two Sudans have been closed.

**Devaluation and the oil shutdown** drastically reduced state's revenues and household's purchasing power. Resultant austerity measures and high inflation rates have meant significant loss of incomes and diminished purchasing power for government employees. Since then, food prices have unabatedly hiked.

**Climate Change**, which is increasingly evident in South Sudan, is causing floods and droughts. Both events negatively affect crop growth, eventually causing food insecurity.

## **Conclusion**

This analysis has explored using qualitative data what proximately explains the current food security deficits in South Sudan's former two states of Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Warrap. This exercise is important in light of the growing concern that the current food insecurity situation could prove overwhelming if no strategic interventions are quickly devised and implemented. The results are not particularly surprising, as many man-made events have readily enabled such a state of affairs in the country, with causes of food insecurity ranging from insecurity to lack of jobs. South Sudan faces acute food shortage, with some parts of the country experiencing famine. As expected, the situation has culminated in rising malnutrition rates and costly migration to North Sudan.

Although the respondents of this study made a sundry of suggestions, they share one thing in common: a call for a sustained response strategy that saves millions of lives.

## **Policy ideas**

### Short-term

- **Food relief is urgently needed.** Scaling up internationally backed relief programming and targeting it to households and areas with an immediate need can save millions of lives.
- **Food subsidies could boost commodity supplies, assist low-income households, and alleviate the burden of high food prices.** This policy advice is intended to appeal to the government or its partners to purchase enough food and trade it at a relatively low cost to poor families or households.
- **The UN relief support needs increased oversight, perhaps even government's hands off.** Corruption hampers access to the UN food in the studied areas. Use of local chiefs to identify the needy and distribute relief food is suggested. The local authorities seem to agree with this suggestion.
- **Ending the current violence makes for an essential point of departure into improving food security in the country.** There ought to be political stability for South Sudan's economy to recover.

### Medium-term

- **Supplying seeds and farming equipment fosters an impetus for long-term food security improvement.** As the hunger looms, an urgent relief response is essential, but such makes for a Band-Aid strategy towards food security stabilization. A long-term food security design demands enlisting plans that eventually wean the population from international aid. Hence, increased farming support is suggested. Thus, of importance is the provision of seed varieties, depending on livelihood zone, to local farmers. But because farming in South Sudan tends to be quite rudimentary, with majority of the farmers being illiterate, providing seeds and farming equipment alone may not significantly improve food production. We therefore propose a complementary capacity building element, especially the use of extension technologies, to enhance agricultural practices, hence increasing food security.
- **Making safe, drinking water more accessible in more fertile lands in the country fosters increased food production.** There is little farming activity taking place in areas that are considered fertile but lack safe, drinking water. Given the experience of the last two years, where crops have not been doing well in the lowlands due to floods, the residents we interviewed now express interest to instead farm in the highlands but lack of drinking water in these areas, particularly during field preparation, hampers this objective. Poor transport infrastructure burdens the farmers to transport enough clean water by foot to considerably distant highlands. Because most highlands are rarely settled owing primarily to this underlying lack of clean water, supplying these locations with boreholes seems sensible.

### Long-term

- **Families who have lost loved ones as public servants, particularly in the military,**

**deserve a special welfare consideration.** South Sudan does not currently disburse pensions and insurance compensations for these families.

- **South Sudan needs to adopt 'climate-smart agriculture' in order to mitigate climate-induced food shortage and improve food production.** Climate change affects quantity and quality of food produced. This requires measured resilience and adaptation<sup>2</sup>. The adaptive strategy should be innovative and “integrates climate and development goals together and explicitly targets the objectives and not the mechanisms to achieve them” (Rosenstock et al 2016). Ensuring resilience to climate change demands regularly collecting and analyzing quality data to inform agricultural activities.
- **Institute low cost direct loans for poor households to boost household-based enterprises.** Government subsidies for basic but few food items, high taxation rates, and the deregulation of markets supposedly permit wealthy traders to purchase and monopolize the basic food commodities market, increasing prices at unprecedented rates during the seasons of scarcity. The targeted loans are expected to minimize this exploitation, broaden the market, and promote economic independence for such households.
- **Achieving food security in South Sudan demands establishing a contextually grounded conceptual framework.** This framework should focus on increasing productivity, enhancing agricultural production as an engine to create employment, reduce poverty, and increase value-additions.
- **A proper use of livestock could alleviate food insecurity.** South Sudan’s livestock population stands at 36,222,802, with 24 percent in Warrap and Northern Bahr el Ghazal alone (FAO 2009). However, there is an under-use of these important resources. Commercializing aspects of this industry could increase incomes and improve people’s standards of living. As a long-term strategy, this may require specialized skills training programs for farmers across the nation.

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<sup>2</sup>Without adaptation, predicted changes in temperature, precipitation, seasonality and the frequency and severity of extreme events have the potential to decrease crop and livestock production significantly in the near future and disrupt supply chains.

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## About Sudd Institute

The Sudd Institute is an independent research organization that conducts and facilitates policy relevant research and training to inform public policy and practice, to create opportunities for discussion and debate, and to improve analytical capacity in South Sudan. The Sudd Institute’s intention is to significantly improve the quality, impact, and accountability of local, national, and international policy- and decision-making in South Sudan in order to promote a more peaceful, just and prosperous society.

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