



Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations



# National agrifood systems and COVID-19 in South Sudan

Effects, policy responses and long-term implications



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This country profile covers responses and effects up to December 2021

## INTRODUCTION

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The COVID-19 pandemic has put significant pressure on health systems all around the world. The drastic measures established to contain its spread are creating serious impediments to economic activity (including agrifood systems) and, consequently, to livelihoods and food security and nutrition.

The COVID-19 outbreak demonstrates both how health and food systems are linked to one another, and how local food systems are linked to global systems. High rates of urbanization and the globalization of trade and travel have contributed to the spread of the virus across countries. Lockdowns and movement restrictions within countries and across borders have disrupted national and local food and agricultural output and input markets and have caused sharp reductions in overall economic activity globally. In poorer countries, disruptions have further exacerbated the fragility of systems (including agrifood systems) and livelihoods.

The Global Report on Food Crises 2021 found that 155 million people in 55 countries and territories are facing acute food insecurity at “crisis” level or higher – a situation that requires urgent action. The report further concluded that over 208 million people were experiencing a “stressed” level of acute food insecurity and bore a high risk of sliding into a “crisis” level if confronted by with additional shocks (FSIN, 2021). The situation is particularly worrisome in light of the evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the situation evolves, the question arises as to how, or whether, food, health and financial and economic systems could become better prepared to prevent similar outbreaks from escalating into a full-blown economic and social crisis.

This report is part of a series of country profiles that describe: (i) policy measures enacted by governments to contain the spread of the virus; (ii) policies and measures to stabilize the functioning of agri-food systems; (iii) potential effects of policies on agri-food systems and vulnerable groups. Finally, the profiles also assess longer-term options for agri-food system policies and investments to make them more resilient.

## BACKGROUND

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South Sudan is the world's newest nation and Africa's 55<sup>th</sup> country following its independence on 9 July 2011. The country faced two major conflicts – in 2013 and 2016 – which undermined the development progress that had been achieved since independence, causing massive displacement, disrupting livelihoods, and creating a humanitarian crisis. In September 2018, the Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS) was signed, and the three-year Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) was formed in February 2020. In 2019, refugees from neighbouring countries started returning as the country enjoyed relative calm. However, since 2020, there has been an increase in subnational and communal violence that risks reversing the gains made since the signing of the peace agreement in 2018.

South Sudan's economy has always been vulnerable to weather extremes, oil price variations and conflict-related shocks. In early 2020, COVID-19 joined this list of shocks to the economy with its negative impacts on oil production, disruption to the supply chain, and interference with the normal functioning of markets and trade. The country's oil production dropped, for example, due to the effect of COVID-19 on global supply chains, the depressed demand for oil and disrupted transportation between Port Sudan and the northern oil fields in the Upper Nile and Unity States (Hickens and Doreen, 2020).

Over time, and particularly following the 2013 conflict, food insecurity has been on an upward trend, with the latest Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) projecting the worst ever lean season, in which an estimated 7.2 million people (60 percent of South Sudan's total population) would be severely food insecure (IPC Phase 3 or worse) between April and July 2021 (IPC, 2021). The IPC analysis took into consideration the impacts of COVID-19 on the food security situation on top of the existing drivers. According to the Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) report, an estimated 8.3 million South Sudanese need multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance in 2021 (OCHA, 2021a).

The World Bank's economic update for South Sudan reports that the health impacts of COVID-19 have been less severe than for its regional peers; however, the economy has suffered from a decline in global oil prices and the reduced global demand for oil due to COVID-19 restrictions, which caused a slowdown of economic activities across the world (World Bank, 2021b). Disruptions in global and regional supply chains also affected South Sudan's markets, leading to high food prices and an increase in food insecurity, particularly among people with a high dependence on markets for food purchases. Another World Bank report – based on surveys monitoring the impacts of COVID-19 on households in South Sudan – found that four in five households reported skipping meals or running out of food – a situation that was consistent in both urban and rural parts of South Sudan, reflecting the severe impacts of the pandemic on ability of households to meet their daily food needs (Finn *et al.*, 2021).

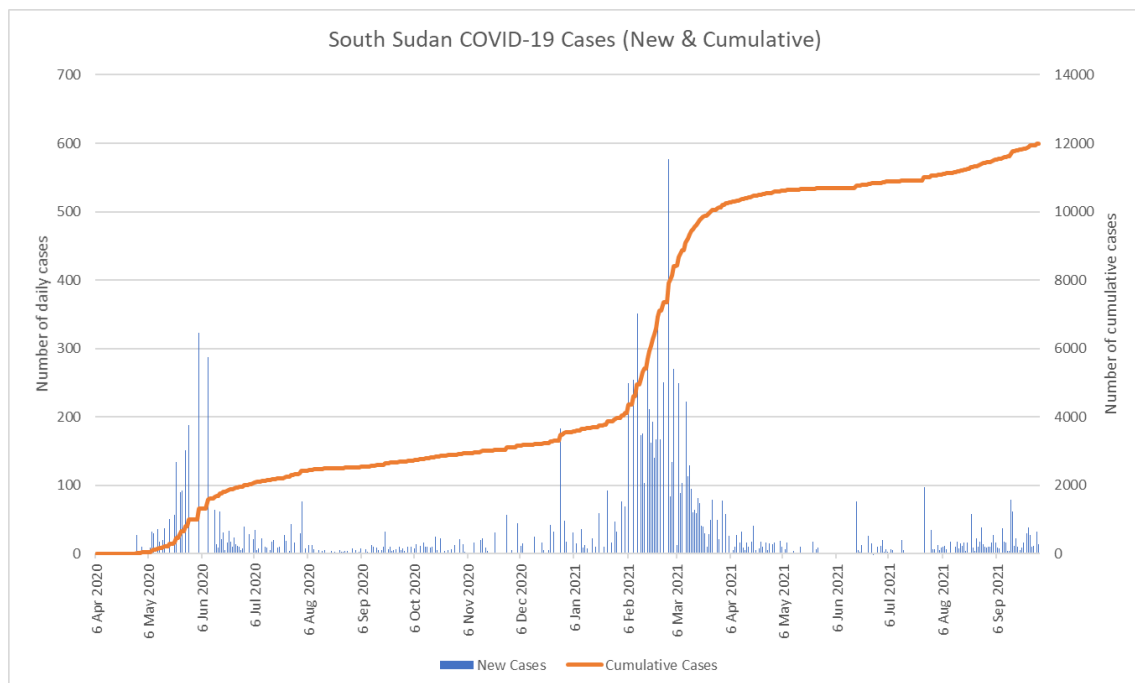
## POLICY MEASURES TO CONTAIN COVID-19

### What major measures have been taken to contain the spread of the virus? How are they evolving?

The first case of COVID-19 was registered in South Sudan on 5 April 2020, and as of 10 December 2021, 12 873 cases had been confirmed, 12 576 cases had recovered, and there had been 133 deaths.<sup>1</sup>

As seen in Figure 1 below, the first wave of the pandemic hit the country between the last week of May and the first week of June 2020, while the second wave of the pandemic occurred in February and March 2021 when the country experienced a spike in the number of daily cases.

Figure 1. South Sudan COVID-19 trends in new and cumulative cases



Source: WHO, 2021

Even before the first case was announced, the South Sudan government established the COVID-19 High-Level Task Force (HLTF) on 20 March 2020, which was chaired by the first vice president. The HLTF addressed various aspects of the COVID-19 response: overall coordination and leadership; planning and monitoring; points of entry monitoring; risk communication and community engagement; surveillance, rapid response teams and case investigations; testing laboratories; infection prevention and control measures; case management; and operations support and logistics. Some key decisions taken by the HLTF included border closures, travel restrictions, lockdowns, school closures, and guidelines on physical distancing, among others.

On 17 May 2020, the president appointed a new COVID-19 National Task Force (NTF) to replace the HLTF. The Ministry of Health collaborates with the NTF through the COVID-19 National

<sup>1</sup> For more information and up-to-date statistics on COVID-19 in South Sudan, visit: [https://moh.gov.ss/daily\\_updates.php](https://moh.gov.ss/daily_updates.php). For long-term trend data on COVID-19, including for South Sudan, download the global dataset: <https://covid19.who.int/WHO-COVID-19-global-data.csv>. Figure 1 shows data till the end of September 2021.

Steering Committee (NSC). The main functions of the NSC are to develop and update strategies to address COVID-19. The NSC reviews and endorses guidance documents and standard operating procedures (SOPs); compiles, analyses and disseminates key COVID-19 data to decision-makers and stakeholders, including the NTF; coordinates national COVID-19 operations to ensure coherence and streamlining in line with best practices; and promotes effective linkages and dialogue between national coordination structures in Juba and subnational coordination platforms, including at state and county levels.

The South Sudan COVID-19 Country Preparedness and Response Plan (CPRP) (MoH, 2020) was formulated in late March 2020 – prior to the confirmation of the country’s first COVID-19 case. The plan was set to run for six months (April to September 2020) at a cost of USD 10.9 million. The CPRP was updated in June 2020, after the first COVID-19 case was confirmed, with the coverage period extended to March 2021 and the budget revised to 149.8 million United States dollars (USD). The goal of the CPRP was to enhance South Sudan’s capacity to contain the spread of COVID-19 and to detect and respond to COVID-19 cases with an integrated national strategy with a special focus on vulnerable groups. The overarching aim was prevention and mitigation, with complementary efforts in case management, surveillance and detection, and operational and coordination support (MoH, 2020).

Following the declaration of COVID-19 as a public health emergency, and later as a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), the South Sudan Ministry of Health empowered the Public Health Emergency Operations Centre (PHEOC) to handle testing and case management of COVID-19 and to support the NSC. At the state level, coordination with PHEOC takes advantage of existing structures, which were established to manage the Ebola Virus Disease (EVD). The PHEOC releases daily updates of the status of COVID-19 in the country.

### Curfews and restricted business operating hours

The government instituted several curfews (Radio Tamazuj, 2020) and restrictions targeting business operations across the country.

- Starting on 24 March 2020, a nightly curfew was imposed from 20.00 to 06.00 hours. Restaurants were closed, although they were authorized to provide take away services until 18.00 hours. Shops and businesses selling non-food items (clothes, motor spare parts, utensils, etc.) were ordered to remain closed until further notice.
- On 8 May 2020, the government shortened the nationwide curfew by two hours, changing the time from 22.00 to 06.00 hours. Restaurants and bars were allowed to open during non-curfew hours, provided they strictly adhered to physical distancing requirements. Shops could also open under the same requirements as long as they did not allow more than five customers inside the premises at the same time. It was also announced that boda-boda (motorcycle), rickshaw (tuk-tuk), and taxi transport services could resume on the condition that drivers and passengers wore protective face masks.

### Suspension of international and domestic flights

The government introduced a number of measures related to domestic and international air travel.

- On 15 April 2020, the HLTF announced the indefinite suspension of domestic and international flights into Juba International Airport. An exception was made for cargo flights carrying humanitarian and essential goods, such as food items and beverages.



- On 1 May 2020, the HLTF waived the requirements for COVID-19 testing of aid workers on official travel to states inside of South Sudan. All travellers, however, had to observe a 14-day quarantine on arrival in the country.
- On 11 May 2020, the government announced that domestic and international flights would resume, with inbound travellers required to have a medical certificate indicating they had tested negative for COVID-19 within the last 96 hours. All incoming travellers were required to self-isolate for 14 days after arrival.

### Restrictions on gathering of individuals

Based on testing results, the government announced several measures to control the spread of the virus.

- On 20 March 2020, gatherings of more than five individuals at sports, religious, social and political events were banned for an initial period of six weeks. Upon expiry of the initial ban period, it was extended until further notice.
- In April, the government advised both the public and private sectors to allow their staff to telework to minimize physical contact among employees.
- On 21 October 2020, the government partially lifted the ban on the gathering of individuals, directing that such gatherings must not exceed one hour, should involve at most 50 individuals, and that all participants must adhere to the guidelines specified by the Ministry of Health and WHO regarding physical distancing and masks.
- Starting from 18 December 2020, restrictions on gatherings of individuals were fully lifted, with no limits on the duration of meetings nor on the number of participants. This contributed to an increase of infections in the country.
- Given the rise in positive cases, the government re-introduced measures on 3 February 2021 to ban social gatherings, such as sporting events, religious events, funerals, weddings, and political events, and limit the number of passengers to half the capacity of buses and taxis.

### Closure of schools, colleges, and universities

In considering the closure of learning institutions, the government had to weigh the benefits of limiting the spread of the virus against the negative impacts of the closures, such as the loss of access to school feeding programmes and educational opportunities for. On 20 March 2020, the government ordered the immediate closure of all learning institutions for 30 days. This included private and public pre-schools, primary schools, secondary schools, technical schools, national teacher training institutes and universities, among others.

- On 8 May 2020, the HLTF announced an extension of the closure of learning institutions until further notice while on 22 September 2020, the government announced a phased approach to reopening schools, colleges, and universities with strict observation of the preventive measures. In early May 2021, the South Sudan Ministry of General Education and Instruction announced the reopening of both secondary and primary schools following more than 14 months of COVID-19 restrictions (Radio Tamajuz, 2021).
- The second wave, which lasted from the beginning of February until March 2021, resulted in the near doubling of confirmed cases to about 8 870 and an increase of COVID-19-related deaths to 102. This necessitated the reintroduction of measures such as school closings, (except for exam purposes); working-from-home; the closure of social spaces, such as bars

and nightclubs; limits on the number of passengers in public service vehicles; hygiene and physical distancing measures; mandatory wearing of masks in public; and the requirement that incoming travellers present certification of a negative COVID-19 test conducted not more than 96 hours before arrival (Bebington, 2021). These measures, most of which met with low public compliance, were in effect for an initial month until 3 March 2021 and then extended for an additional month until 3 April 2021, at which point, most were suspended, leaving the requirement of a COVID-19 negative test certificate for incoming travellers still in effect.

## **AGRIFOOD POLICY MEASURES TO RESPOND TO THE EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS**

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### **Main measures directly or indirectly affecting agrifood systems**

From the onset of the pandemic, the agrifood sector was prioritized as essential and was allowed to remain operational during the lockdown, except during the hours of curfew. However, participants in the sector were required to strictly adhere to COVID-19 regulations such as physical distancing, appropriate use of personal protective equipment (PPE), regular temperature checks, and frequent sanitization or washing of hands. The government ensured that logistical activities, such as transportation related to agrifood systems, were uninterrupted to ensure that market supplies would suffer minimal disruptions and price increases would be contained.

Agrifood systems (especially the more formal parts) could be also affected by the measures taken by the government of South Sudan to address the economic impacts of COVID-19. For example, the Central Bank of South Sudan (CBSS) cut the Central Bank Rate from 15 percent to 10 percent and reduced the Reserve Requirement Ratio from 20 percent to 10 percent between April and July 2020. Both actions were reversed in November 2020 by bringing the rate and the ratio to their previous values. The CBSS also reiterated that the South Sudanese pound (SSP) is the only legal tender for domestic debt payments and encouraged banks to restructure loans if needed (Wudu, 2020).

In formulating the National Preparedness and Response Plan (NPRP, see below), the government acknowledged that South Sudan depends heavily on food imports, which risked being disrupted by the COVID-19 measures implemented by its trade partners. The NPRP also noted that the pandemic would reduce national revenues and depress economic activity, threatening subsistence and putting casual labourers and low-income households at the risk of increased destitution and food insecurity.

The government concluded that points of entry (PoE) should be equipped with essential Infection Prevention and Control /water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and risk communication and community involvement (RCCE)<sup>2</sup> services to ensure that travellers, particularly truck drivers, entering South Sudan to deliver essential food and supplies could easily access handwashing and sanitation facilities. Testing and contact tracing capacity were also enhanced at the PoE to facilitate the smooth flow of essential traffic into and out of the country.

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<sup>2</sup> This tool is designed to support risk communication, community engagement staff and responders working with national health authorities, and other partners to develop, implement and monitor an effective action plan for communicating effectively with the public, engaging with communities, local partners and other stakeholders to help prepare and protect individuals, families and the public's health during early response to COVID-19 ( WHO [https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/risk-communication-and-community-engagement-\(rcce\)-action-plan-guidance](https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/risk-communication-and-community-engagement-(rcce)-action-plan-guidance))

## Funding arrangements and implications

The substantial reduction in foreign exchange earnings caused by the economic disruptions associated with COVID-19<sup>3</sup> raised the likelihood that government expenditure requirements were unlikely to be fully funded. An analysis of government priorities by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) found that the health, social welfare/humanitarian action and education were collectively allocated only 9 percent of the total 2019/20 budget (UNDP, Data-Pop Alliance and ADE, 2020). It was proposed that the health and social welfare sectors should be prioritized and funded by diverting resources from the infrastructure and security sectors.<sup>4</sup>

Some of the measures taken to address funding gaps included the following:

- In March 2020, the South Sudan government prepared an eight-pillar<sup>5</sup> National Preparedness and Response Plan (NPRP) for COVID-19 (MoH, 2020), which was valued at USD 149.84 million. As of December 2020, the plan had been funded at USD 61.99 million (41 percent). The implementation timeframe for the NPRP was April 2020 to March 2021.
- The government allocated additional funding to that under the NPRP through the creation of a COVID-19 fund of USD 8 million, USD 5 million of which was allocated to the Ministry of Health to combat the pandemic. The government redirected a USD 7.6 million grant from the World Bank (World Bank, 2020a; World Bank, 2020b) to UNICEF and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the third-party agencies implementing the grant. The grant was used to purchase items for COVID-19 prevention and treatment.

## Initiatives taken by the humanitarian and development community

The humanitarian community in South Sudan has acknowledged that, in the context of compounding and intensifying vulnerabilities, social protection programmes, including cash transfers and the provision of basic services, must be a central policy response to COVID-19.<sup>6</sup> The government does not have the means to adequately address the needs of its population due to limited financial and human resources. The United Nations has adapted ongoing programmes, refocusing or scaling up some activities and reducing others to limit exposure of the population to the virus. Some initiatives undertaken by the humanitarian and development community to address the pandemic include the following:

- Agencies, such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality, and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), provided technical support to the government and launched primary and secondary educational radio programmes for out-of-school children, including young people in pastoralist communities. Support also included technical and vocational education and training on best practices for agriculture and livestock production together with COVID-19 messaging. This was done in partnership with the Food and

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<sup>3</sup> Between March and July 2020, the average price of a barrel of oil declined from USD 55 to USD 30. This had a major impact on public finances: 90 percent of government revenues come from oil exports, which in turn account for 95 percent of the country's total exports (UNDP, Data-Pop Alliance and ADE, 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Given various constraints and the need to strengthen security in the face of increased subnational and communal violence, this reprioritization did not take place.

<sup>5</sup> The eight pillars are: 1) planning and monitoring; 2) risk communication and community engagement; 3) surveillance, rapid response, and case investigation; 4) points of entry; 5) national laboratories; 6) prevention and control; 7) case management; and 8) operational support and logistics.

<sup>6</sup> The response scale-up is part of the broader intersectoral response planning and resource mobilization detailed in the 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan (OCHA, 2021b).

Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The partners also supported television programmes for pre-primary school pupils, and distance learning for students with access to computers, radios and/or televisions.

- Support from the humanitarian community for life-saving operations continued throughout the pandemic, focusing on priority objectives such as food assistance and WASH; these were identified following the release of IPC findings in December 2018. In addition, the Ministry of Health and partners have provided maternal and child health care services; severe acute malnutrition management; mental health care; support to victims of gender-based violence; vaccine immunization and hygiene services. COVID-19 is a major driver of acute food insecurity in South Sudan, due to its impact on the economy, incomes, food systems and supply chains.
- Through the USD 40 million South Sudan Safety Net Project (UNOPS, 2020), launched in May 2020, the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) will provide direct income support – in the form of rapid cash transfers – over a two-and-a-half-year period to 65 000 low-income households in Juba County (an estimated 429 000 South Sudanese); the project prioritizes people with extreme vulnerabilities, such as the disabled, the elderly, expectant women or those living with HIV/AIDS. Each beneficiary household will receive direct income support equivalent to USD 360 over a nine-month period. The programme was rolled out rapidly to respond to the economic impact of COVID-19 (UNOPS, 2020).
- The World Food Programme (WFP) is assisting South Sudan through its long-running urban safety nets programme, which has been adapted to address the effects of COVID-19. The programme will provide cash transfers to over 16 500 vulnerable urban households to address their short-term food needs, while building their livelihoods and providing life skills training. WFP is also providing take-home rations for school children. UNICEF is combining cash and RCCE messaging about COVID-19 through WFP's safety nets programmes. In 2020, WFP reached 332 702 beneficiaries with its school feeding programme, and 185 000 beneficiaries through its urban COVID-19 response intervention (WFP, 2020).
- FAO's urban backyard and kitchen garden projects, which began in early June 2020 in order to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 on food security, managed to reach close to 55 000 vulnerable urban households in Juba, Nimule, Wau, Aweil, Yambio, Maban and Torit by 30 September 2021 with inputs for vegetable production and farming equipment such as assorted vegetable seeds, hoes, rakes, watering cans and solar irrigation pumps. The project aimed to provide food security and livelihood support to vulnerable urban populations affected by market shocks; to reduce the risks of COVID-19 transmission in markets;<sup>7</sup> to support the food value chain; and to protect the income generation capacity of vulnerable women traders through cash for restocking. The project also created synergies with interventions implemented by other partners, including the safety net programme implemented by WFP and UNICEF in target urban centres.
- UN Women continues to train women in South Sudan on business management and on diversifying their businesses to create products that can continue to sell even in the context of COVID-19. It is assisting 52 all-women tailoring groups to produce and sell masks to generate income to meet their households' food needs.

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<sup>7</sup> The project achieved this by supporting disinfection operations in markets in the urban areas.

## Funding for the humanitarian and development community

The pandemic has increased the humanitarian needs of South Sudan. The country's Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP), which was finalized towards the end of 2019 (before the pandemic began) was costed at USD 1.54 billion. The addition of COVID-19 response activities and requirements necessitated the revision of the budget to USD 1.9 billion. The COVID-related actions added to the HRP budget were based on the following objectives:

- reduce morbidity and mortality, as well as suffering from protection threats and incidents,<sup>8</sup> of the most vulnerable populations in areas experiencing severe need;
- facilitate safe, equitable and dignified access to critical humanitarian services (health, sanitation food, etc.) to enable particularly vulnerable populations to meet their basic needs;
- enable vulnerable people to recover from the crisis, seek solutions to displacement, and build resilience to acute shocks and chronic stresses through targeted programming to support coping capacities and livelihoods in priority areas.

As of mid-December 2020, progress with funding stood at 57 percent, with most of the clusters (education, food security and livelihoods, health, education and WASH) having received some contributions. The United States government was the leading donor, contributing 58.8 percent of the total funds.

The following figure summarizes the funding situation for relevant clusters and sectors.<sup>9</sup>

Cluster	Required (thousand USD)	Funded (thousand USD)	Coverage (percentage)	Funding gap (thousand USD)
Food security and livelihoods	174 702	15 943	9.1	158 759
Health	91 369	22 753	24.9	68 616
WASH	43 449	10 898	25.0	32 551
Refugee response	23 245	1 000	4.3	22 245
Education	13 379	1 293	9.7	12 086
Logistics	8 360	1 200	14.4	7 160
Shelter and non-food items	7 452	315	4.2	7 137
Gender-based violence	6 554	3 213	49.0	3 341
Nutrition	6 227	535	8.6	5 692
Child protection	4 000	543	13.6	3 457
Coordination and common services	2 385	694	29.1	1 691
Protection	1 155	1 036	89.7	119
Mine action	520	0	0	520
Camp coordination and management	230	181	78.7	49
Not specified	-	30 697	-	-
Shared funds across clusters	-	17 012	-	-

<sup>8</sup> 'Associated threats and incidences' entail ensuring that the rights of affected persons and the obligations of duty bearers under international law are understood, respected, protected, and fulfilled without discrimination. Protection threats and incidence include instances of violence, abuse, exploitation, or exclusion of persons from receiving basic services.

<sup>9</sup> In a cluster, many stakeholders coming together to form a coordination platform to address a specific need/gap. (e.g., camp management, FSL Cluster for coordinating FSL matters), whereas a sector is more thematic (e.g., education, health, nutrition etc.).

## IMMEDIATE EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS ON VULNERABLE PEOPLE AND THE AGRIFOOD SYSTEM

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While the direct health-related effects of COVID-19 in South Sudan have been less severe than were initially predicted, the pandemic has nevertheless affected the population and increased its vulnerability. This has been manifested in increased food insecurity, disrupted livelihoods and interferences in the delivery of humanitarian assistance, among others.

### Food security and nutrition: latest data and projections

According to IPC findings, from May-July 2020, 55 percent of the population was in crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above), characterized by acute food insecurity, with 15 percent in a state of emergency (IPC Phase 4) (WFP, 2021a; IPC, 2020). Some 33 counties were classified as being in emergency conditions, 37 in crisis and eight under stress (IPC Phase 2). The states with the highest levels of acute food insecurity were Jonglei, Unity, Upper Nile, Lakes, Warrap and Northern Bahr el Ghazal (IPC, February 2020). This was a slight improvement in the total number of people requiring urgent food and livelihood assistance compared to the May-June 2019 peak (7 million) (IPC, May 2019). While the number of people classified as living in crisis (IPC Phase 3) decreased marginally, from 4.7 million in May-July 2020 to 4.2 million in October-November, the number in emergency (IPC Phase 4) increased sharply, from 1.7 million to 2 million, and the number in catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) increased from zero to 92 000, for a total of 6.3 million people – 53 percent of the analysed population – in crisis or worse (IPC 2020)

These numbers indicate a marked deterioration compared to the same period in 2019 (September– December), when 4.5 million people were facing crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above), representing 38 percent of the analysed population (IPC, August 2019). During the October analysis, evidence suggested that acute food insecurity might be severe enough to classify six counties (Pibor, Akobo, Aweil South, Tonj East, Tonj North, and Tonj South) as being in a state of catastrophe (IPC Phase 5). Since consensus could not be reached on these classifications, an external quality review was requested by the government. On reviewing the available evidence, the team assessed that populations in all six counties were in catastrophe; and some indicators surpassed famine thresholds in areas of Pibor (IPC Phase 5 Famine), which activated a famine review for the county. With evidence unavailable for some key indicators needed to determine a state of famine, the review team determined that parts of western Pibor were suffering from famine-like conditions.

At the peak of the 2021 lean season – April-July 2021 – the number of acutely food-insecure people in crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above) is projected to rise to almost 7.24 million, an increase of nearly 11 percent. This corresponds to 60 percent of the South Sudanese population. Among them, 2.4 million people will face emergency conditions (IPC Phase 4), and a further 108 000 people are expected to face catastrophic acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 5) in the Jonglei and Pibor administrative areas, Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Warrap. The western payams<sup>10</sup> of Pibor county are expected to remain in IPC Phase 5 (Famine-likely), while Kizongora and Maruwa payams in the eastern part of Pibor are projected to be at risk of famine (IPC 2020).

These alarmingly high levels of acute food insecurity are driven by a confluence of factors that vary by region, including conflict and/or flood-related low crop production, earlier than-normal

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<sup>10</sup> A payam is the second-lowest administrative division, below county, in South Sudan.

depletion of harvest stocks, high food prices, degraded road conditions that affect market access and functionality, currency devaluation and diminished household purchasing power, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on supply chain systems, markets, household livelihoods and incomes (IPC, 2020).

Domestic cereal production, despite some increases in 2019 and 2020, will continue to not meet the country's needs. At about 465 000 tonnes, the country's projected cereal deficit for 2021 remains substantial and is 4 percent below the 2020 deficit (FAO, 2021a).

Cereal deficits are being addressed through food imports. According to the FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM)<sup>11</sup> report and the Food Security and Nutrition Working Group (FSNWG) market analysis, informal maize imports from Uganda to South Sudan declined by about 75 percent between the first and second quarters of 2020 because of COVID-19 restrictive measures, resuming their upward trend in the third and fourth quarters as traders adapted to the restrictions and some of the measures were removed.

It is estimated that 1.4 million children under five years are expected to suffer from acute malnutrition in 2021. This analysis is based on same-season historical data from the Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring System (FSNMS), SMART nutrition surveys, and 2020 admission trends to local health centres. An estimated 313 400 children are likely to suffer from severe acute malnutrition (SAM) in 2021, putting them at risk of death if lifesaving assistance is unable to reach them due to lockdown and movement restrictions. In addition, it has been estimated that about 1.08 million children will likely suffer from moderate acute malnutrition (MAM) in 2021, a caseload that could increase if the pandemic continues unabated.

A deterioration in the acute malnutrition situation is expected during the lean season due to increased morbidity, high food insecurity, and poor feeding practices for infants and young children. The major factors contributing to acute malnutrition include high prevalence of disease (affecting up to 36 percent of children under five years old), poor quality and diversity of diets,<sup>12</sup> and the elevated levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 and above), which have been worse than in the previous year in most counties. COVID-19 control measures temporarily led to the suspension of mass screening campaigns for malnutrition and the administration of anthropometric measurements because of fears of spreading the virus. This affected early detection and the provision of life-saving support to children with acute malnutrition.

### Immediate impact of the crisis and the response measures on agrifood systems

In 2020, the South Sudan cereal deficit (i.e., domestic production shortfall) was an estimated 483 000 metric tonnes. In 2021, the cereal deficit fell to an estimated 465 000 metric tonnes. Such food gaps are usually covered by imports from neighbouring countries, such as Uganda, or other global markets. However, as reported above, imports were negatively impacted by the measures introduced to address the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to an increase in food prices.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> In South Sudan, the CFSAM exercise is conducted by FAO and WFP in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS)

<sup>12</sup> For children aged 6-23 months, the minimum acceptable diet was 7 percent while the minimum dietary diversity stands at 15 percent. The median values for SUN countries are 13 percent and 23 percent respectively for the two indicators. For more detail: <https://scalingupnutrition.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/South-Sudan-2019-MEAL-dashboard-Sep2019.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> According to the 2020 agricultural season CFSAM report released in May 2021 (FAO, 2021a), sorghum, maize, and wheat prices in December 2020 increased threefold compared to the previous year, while imported wheat prices were five times their previous year values.

The following challenges confront the agriculture sector because of COVID-19 measures:

- South Sudan's agriculture sector is labour intensive. Since the COVID-19 outbreak coincided with the beginning of the agriculture season, there were fears that the lockdown would affect the availability of labour, which in turn would have had an impact on agricultural production. To counter this, the humanitarian community, through the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (MAFS) advocated for agricultural activities to be exempted from the response measures put into place to contain and control the pandemic.
- Urban households were encouraged and supported to increase vegetable production to counter the impacts of mobility restrictions and the disruption of markets (FAO, 2021b) and to increase household access to nutritious foods and income from the sale of surplus vegetables.
- Trade between South Sudan and Uganda, particularly for staple foods, was affected by movement restrictions in 2020, with reductions in trade volumes observed as well as increases in prices of staples in Juba markets (FSNWG, 2020).
- The currency depreciation experienced in the last quarter of 2020 continued to drive up food prices in the markets, even as most of the country engaged in harvesting of crops. Starting from May 2021, the South Sudanese pound gained value against the United States Dollar, which resulted in some reduction of food prices in the markets.<sup>14</sup> In general, it is difficult to disentangle the effects of COVID-19 on prices from those of production shocks and movements in the local currency.

### **Immediate impacts of the response measures on livelihoods.**

Remittances provide an important source of external financing for South Sudan, averaging 35 percent of GDP (Bousquet, Ratha and Rutkowski, 2020). The World Bank predicted that the economic crisis brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic would cause a global decline in remittance flows of 7 percent in 2020, and South Sudan would not be spared. The reduction in this vital source of income will reduce the purchasing power of affected households, with poorer households at a higher risk of increased food insecurity and malnutrition.

Efforts to address the 2020 cereal deficit of 482 000 MT were thwarted by COVID-19-driven cereal hoarding in neighbouring countries that usually export their surplus cereals to South Sudan. Continuing shocks, such as floods, pest infestations and inter-communal violence, reduced production and further increased cereal prices, with a negative impact on populations that largely depend on markets for cereal purchases. The effects of COVID-19 on global, regional, and local supply chains exacerbated the situation, especially for market-dependent populations that saw their purchasing power diminish in the face of increased food prices and the loss of income from livelihoods affected by the pandemic. Furthermore, delays experienced by traders at the border points, and accompanying high transportation costs, were passed on to the consumer in the form of increased food prices.

South Sudan's economy relies heavily on oil exports. The pandemic's impact on the oil industry led to the depreciation of the South Sudanese pound, an overall reduction in hard currency, and a decrease in imports – especially of food. This further increased the cost of the food basket, amplifying the share of food expenditure among households that were already poor and leaving them few to no resources to address non-food expenditures. The ensuing drop in household

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<sup>14</sup> For more details and price analysis, please visit the market data section of the CLIMIS portal (CLIMIS, 2021).



purchasing power is likely to further increase poverty levels, further deepening vulnerability, and susceptibility to food insecurity and malnutrition.

According to the World Bank (World Bank, 2020c), the strong economic growth of 9.3 percent in real terms in FY2019/2020 (before the pandemic) is likely to contract by 3.4 percent in FY 2020/2021. The decline is due to a confluence of factors: more intense conflicts, reductions in oil prices, locust infestation and floods. The COVID-19 restrictions have halted investments in the oil sector and the imports of machinery. The contraction has affected incomes and access to food, particularly among vulnerable groups.

FAO conducted an assessment specifically aimed at understanding the impact of COVID-19 on agriculture, livelihoods, and markets (FAO, 2020a). A key finding was that agricultural activities have been impacted by reduced access to inputs and markets. COVID-19 and related measures have caused major changes in food availability and access and have disrupted livelihoods because the quarantine and movement restrictions restrict people from working outside of their localities. As a result, food insecurity and other vulnerabilities have increased among a large proportion of the population, and prolonged unemployment has become the norm as businesses remain closed or operate at lesser capacity, while movement restrictions limit or prohibit access to alternative livelihood activities. Interviewed households indicated that they have or intend to employ measures to cope with the crisis, including reducing non-food expenditures, selling productive assets (e.g., tools, land, equipment) and accepting high risk, socially degrading or exploitative temporary jobs.

In May 2021, FAO conducted a second survey<sup>15</sup> to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected agricultural livelihoods and food security. In a household survey, 46 percent of respondents reported experiencing high food prices in the markets and 60 percent reported a decrease in their income sources. Due to COVID-19 measures, 55 percent of agricultural extension officers reported a decrease in income compared to last year, with a majority indicating that the pandemic had disrupted their work. Most households that applied for credit (58 percent) did so to purchase food.

## Vulnerable groups

Vulnerable population groups have been affected by COVID-19 in different ways.

### Rural households

According to the World Bank (2020d), about 80 percent of South Sudan's population resides in rural areas, and an estimated 82 percent of the overall population is considered poor (World Bank, 2021a). FAO (2021d) estimates that 95 percent of South Sudanese depend on farming, fishing or herding to meet their food and income needs. Agriculture-based livelihoods, including casual labour, were affected by restrictions of movements as well as market closures and economic downturn.

According to preliminary results of the 26<sup>th</sup> round of the Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring System (FSNMS) survey conducted in August/September 2020 among rural households, an estimated 43 percent of households reported suffering shocks due to COVID-19 restrictions.<sup>16</sup> Among the shocks reported were unusually high food prices (33 percent), loss of income by household members (21 percent), reduced employment for household members (10 percent),

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<sup>15</sup> The survey included 3 709 household interviews; 350 interviews with agricultural extension officers; 240 interviews with agro-input traders; and 269 interviews with food traders.

<sup>16</sup> Data collection was primarily conducted in August and September 2020. The FSNMS Round 26 report has not yet been published.

and atypically high costs of fuel, transport, and other non-food items (11 percent). All these shocks contribute to increased food insecurity at the household level.

### Urban households

According to price trends for staples in most urban markets in South Sudan, food prices are higher compared to the same time last year and the three-year average.<sup>17</sup> The effects of the pandemic have been particularly acute in urban areas, which are more susceptible to the spread of the virus because of population density and poor access to water and sanitation services. Urban areas also have more people engaged in day-to-day livelihood activities, such as petty trade as well as some formal employment, all of which were affected by closures or reduced hours because of the COVID-19 measures.

### Students in primary and secondary schools, colleges, and universities

COVID-19 has interrupted the education of approximately 2 million South Sudanese children as primary and secondary schools remained closed till 03 May 2021. This restriction could affect human capital development in the long term. This is in addition to the at least 2.2 million children already reported as not receiving an education (UNESCO, 2018). A huge proportion of students benefit from school feeding programmes, which have been disrupted by school closings. In 2020, before the COVID-19 related lockdown, WFP was assisting 511 000 children across 1 100 schools in the country's ten states. Following the lockdown, WFP has provided take-home Rations to 23 000 children in the most-food insecure counties to mitigate the pandemic's impact on their health and nutrition (WFP, 2020b).

COVID-19 also impeded delivery of health and nutrition services to children aged between six and 59 months. Medical personnel were concerned about contracting COVID-19 due to the unavailability of medical supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE), such as gloves, gowns, masks, etc. Movement and other restrictions disrupted programmes for immunization, growth monitoring, antenatal care, delivery and postnatal care for pregnant women, and community-based health and nutrition service delivery. This heightened the risk of death for more than 292 000 children, who were likely to suffer from severe acute malnutrition in 2020.

### Girls and women

The pandemic has put women and girls at a higher risk of gender-based violence, child labour, and exploitation due to increased economic stress on families. Stay at-home orders and movement restrictions are major contributors to this increased risk, which has also led to a spike in child marriages (Witter, 2020).

### Disabled persons

South Sudan's caseload of people with disabilities is likely as high as the global estimate of 15 percent of the population (Rohwerder, 2018). Most people with disabilities are unemployed and lack adequate social safety nets and food security schemes. Barriers to employment include the accessibility of the working environment and the attitudes of employers and colleagues. People with disabilities have limited access to humanitarian assistance, especially if they are not living in protection of civilian sites. However, even those living in camps are unable to access a lot of the mainstream support provided in these camps.

Evidence from the 26<sup>th</sup> round of the Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring Survey (FSNMS) has shown that households with disabled people are more vulnerable to food insecurity. With COVID-

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<sup>17</sup> For example, in Juba, a Malwa (3.5 kg) of white maize grain retailed at 55 percent more in July 2021 than in the same period in 2020; furthermore, in July 2021, the same commodity retailed at 104 percent more than the 3-year average (CLIMIS, 2021).

19 affecting most households' access to income, the vulnerability to food insecurity and malnutrition in these households is only expected to increase.

### Young people

A 2017 study on youth and livelihoods in South Sudan (Price and Onerrrt, 2017) found that an estimated 30 percent of young people (15-35 years) identified themselves as inactive i.e., not engaged in any economic activity, educational activity or actively looking for a job. South Sudan generally lacks adequate educational and economic opportunities for young people, and this has resulted in most of the youth being uneducated, unskilled, and underutilized in terms of their capabilities, with the result that most are either unemployed or employed in the informal sectors.

Following the confirmation of the first COVID-19 case on 5 April 2020 and the restrictions adopted by the government to prevent the spread of the virus, young people who were engaged in the informal sector<sup>18</sup> either lost their jobs or saw them reduced to part-time or received reduced compensation.

### Refugees, returnees, and internally displaced people (IDPs)

According to the World Bank, refugees are 38 percentage points poorer than host communities, while IDPs and rural hosts are nearly equally poor. Among refugees, poverty incidence in households headed by women is slightly higher than in those headed by men; among IDPs, poverty rates vary across camps, with Bentiu Protection of Civilians (POC) site having the highest poverty rates (96 percent), while the Bor POC has the lowest poverty rates (76 percent) (World Bank, 2020f).

Returnees face challenges restarting their lives, including few employment opportunities, especially for unskilled labour. They lack inadequate basic services and lack of access to credit, land and agricultural inputs (Bailey and Harragin, 2009). Many returnees also settle in urban areas and appear to have lost their rural livelihood skills.

Living conditions in refugee camps are often characterized by overcrowding and a lack of decent shelter, conditions that, along with a lack of PPEs, increase the susceptibility of inhabitants to disease, including COVID-19. In April 2021, WFP announced that they would cut food rations for refugees and IDPs (WFP, 2021b) because of funding shortfalls as donors grappled with the economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic (Asala, 2021). Some 440 000 internally displaced people in Bentiu, Bor, Juba, Malakal, Mingkaman and Wau have been affected by reductions in food rations, as have been nearly 260 000 refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia and the Sudan, who rely on WFP assistance to meet most of their food needs.

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<sup>18</sup> Some informal sectors affected by COVID-19 include transport (boda-bodas, rickshaws etc.), road-side eateries, casual labour in markets, etc.

## FOOD FOR REFLECTION: LONG-TERM POLICY IMPLICATIONS

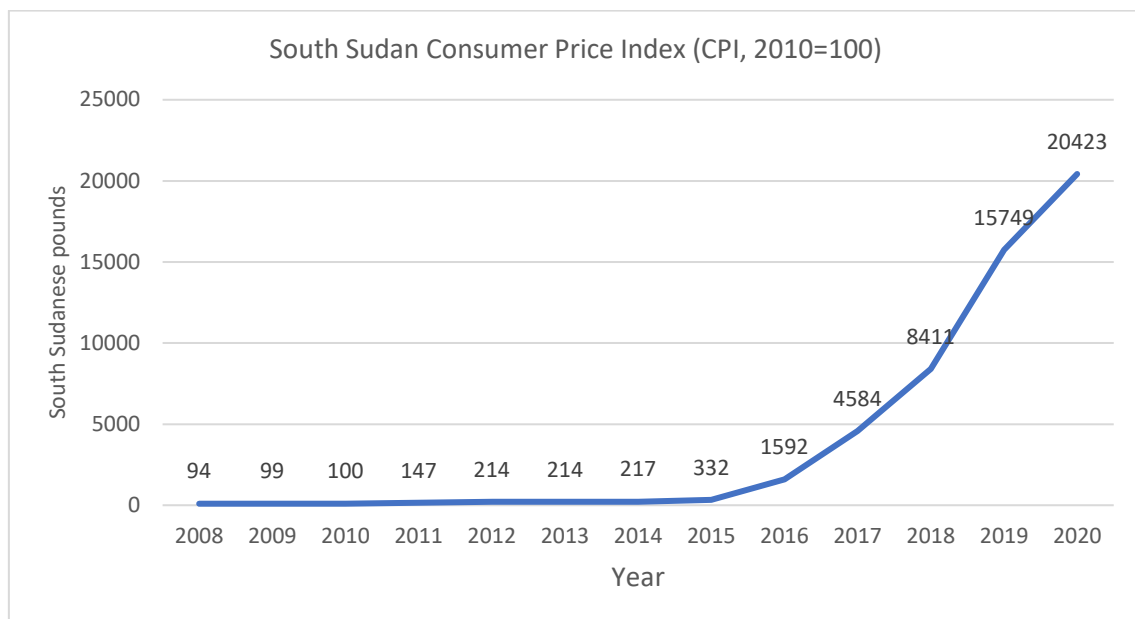
The COVID-19 pandemic struck South Sudan at a time of maximum vulnerability. As the youngest country in the world, South Sudan has neither had the time nor the opportunity to develop institutions for defining and managing policies: barely three years into its independence, civil war broke out in December 2013 and, since then, the country has lacked stability, with dire consequences for a population that is considered one of the poorest in the world.

### Sources of uncertainty and vulnerability

Food insecurity in South Sudan is driven by political instability, climatic shocks, such as floods and droughts, an unstable macroeconomic environment, low crop and livestock production, and destructive crop pests such as fall armyworm and desert locusts, among others. COVID-19 added to the complexity of the crises plaguing the country.

The oil-driven economy of South Sudan was affected by the drop in global demand for oil for the better part of 2020. This has resulted in the depreciation of the currency to record levels, which led to price increases and the erosion of household purchasing power, limiting access to food, healthcare and other basic services.

Figure 3. South Sudan's consumer price index (CPI) trends, 2010-2020



### Financial sector

During the pandemic, humanitarian actors increased the use of cash-based assistance in order to limit physical contact with beneficiaries. The lower overhead costs of implementation are likely to encourage greater adoption of this modality in future, which would make more funds available for actual interventions targeted at supporting the agrifood sector and improving food security outcomes in South Sudan.

The pandemic has provided an opportunity for mobile money to gain a foothold in South Sudan. M-Gurush and Nilepay are two mobile money platforms that gained traction during the pandemic; they were used to implement physical distancing measures imposed by the government and aimed to lower transaction costs while increasing access to financial services. However, their

impact was minimal because access to electricity and technological devices in the country is low, with the number of mobile connections in South Sudan equivalent to 23.1 percent of the population (DataReportal, 2021).

Only about 13 percent of South Sudanese have a bank account, an indicator of their limited access to financial services (World Bank, 2020f). This must be addressed before mobile money and remote banking services can be adopted widely. This affects agricultural livelihoods because farming households without access to finance cannot afford labourers, quality seeds, mechanization or agricultural advisory services – all of which are key to increased agricultural and production. This has to be addressed before mobile money and remote banking services can be adopted widely

### Food systems

According to an FAO and Save the Children study on food systems and healthy diets in South Sudan, food supply chains, food environments, and consumer behaviour are the three core elements that determine the ability of a food system to guarantee food security and nutrition consistently and sustainably.

South Sudan has a great deal of untapped agricultural potential, especially in crop and livestock production and fisheries, but it remains a low-input and low-output country with underdeveloped supply chains. The scope and diversity of production across the various sectors is low, mostly due to insecurity, insufficient agricultural investment by the government and private sector, poor access to production inputs and services, and recently, disruptions caused by shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Limited government research and an underdeveloped seed sector mean that the country cannot take advantage of its huge potential for crop diversification or adopt technologies, such as biofortification, that could help South Sudan's food systems to meet its food and nutrition needs. The COVID-19 pandemic has shone a light on the importance of formulating and implementing policies to strengthen the country's food systems.

South Sudan already has many policies and strategies aimed at improving agricultural production, but implementation is a challenge due to capacity and resource constraints. For example, the government has been slow to address land tenure issues, which has created uncertainty and has limited investment by farmers and other agricultural investors.

Agricultural input and output markets do not perform optimally due to challenges associated with insecurity, poor market integration, poor road networks and the economic crisis, among others. Agroprocessing is also underdeveloped because of low investment, an unfavourable trade environment and the high cost of power, which forces the sector to rely on traditional methods that result in food quality and food safety issues. To address food supply chain challenges, the government should:

- increase the annual budgetary allocation to the agricultural sector and use the funds to address current capacity and resource constraints;
- create an environment that favours private sector investment in the agricultural sector and related value chains;
- commit to reducing postharvest losses, encourage the adoption of modern food storage technologies, and enhance regulatory frameworks on food quality and safety in the food supply chains;
- invest in an improved transport and electricity infrastructure that enables cost-effective movement of produce from surplus to deficit production areas, enhance farm

mechanization, support agroprocessing, improve cold chain storage facilities, and diversify production by expanding input and output markets;

- address land tenure issues by implementing a robust land policy that gives investors confidence to participate in, or scale up, agricultural activities.

The food environment, which includes the physical, economic, policy and socio-cultural conditions that shape people's dietary choices and nutritional status, is critical to a country's food systems. The optimal performance of the food environment in South Sudan is impeded by weak political, economic and security institutional arrangements, which negatively impact food production and food markets. To address the food environment constraints, the government should:

- continue to enhance peace through conflict resolution and prevention mechanisms to create an enabling environment for increased food availability and access;
- promote the sustainable use and management of natural resources while engaging in disaster risk reduction efforts to reduce the impact of hazards on food availability and access;
- set priorities for access to limited foreign exchange resources with food importers having priority access;
- promote stable prices and exchange rates. As it stands, erratic policies promote exchange rate instability and price volatility.
- invest in improving the country's road infrastructure to allow the optimal movement of food from major supply nodes to areas of need. This will also require encouraging the uptake of river transport as an alternative and affordable option where applicable.

### Digital agriculture

Digital approaches are changing agrifood systems. These involve digital technologies, including the internet; mobile technologies, devices, and apps; data analytics; artificial intelligence; and digitally delivered services. Using digital technologies at different stages of the agrifood value chain, e.g., mechanization to reduce demand for manual labour, remote sensing data for crop monitoring, and the provision of timely data to farmers and consumers can increase efficiencies across the value chain.

In South Sudan, stakeholders have already started exploring how to use digital technologies to support the agriculture sector. For example, the Alliance for Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA) has partnered with Digital Green<sup>19</sup> to roll out a digital platform to improve livelihoods in rural communities across South Sudan by sharing knowledge on improved agricultural practices, livelihoods, health, and nutrition. A pilot project involved the local production of videos on groundnut harvesting and maize row planting that will be taken to the rural areas and used to train farmers there on improved farming practices (Kilimo News, 2019).

There are multiple opportunities for the government to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of policies and programmes by using digital technologies for data collection, analysis, and evidence-based decision-making. For example, using drones would enable agricultural experts to monitor farming practices and determine how whether comply with existing environmental

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<sup>19</sup> Digital Green is a global development organization that empowers smallholder farmers to lift themselves out of poverty by harnessing the collective power of technology and grassroots-level partnerships.

policies – with the government taking corrective action as necessary. This would ensure that the agrifood systems are more resilient and sustainable in the long term.

Digital technologies can also support trade in agriculture and food products by connecting farmers to new markets and increasing pricing transparency with the assistance of companies such as m-Farm, which connects smallholder African farmers with urban and export markets via SMS and a web-enabled marketplace (Solon, 2013). The cargo clearance delays observed at the Nimule border point at the height of the pandemic highlights the need for systems that facilitate faster and more efficient clearance procedures for products such as perishable foods.

Technological advances can support the goal of achieving more resilient, productive, and sustainable agriculture and food systems that better meet consumer needs. These benefits are realized directly when the technologies are adopted by actors in the sector and indirectly when the digital technologies are used by governments to deliver better policies.

### Humanitarian-development peace (HDP) nexus and agrifood systems

The IASC background paper on the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (IASC, 2016) says that “the international community has a responsibility to work together across silos and at the Humanitarian-Development-Peace nexus in addressing the drivers of violent conflict, delivering humanitarian assistance and developing institutions, resilience and capacities simultaneously in a complementary and synergetic way in order to end humanitarian needs, in a context-specific manner that safeguards humanitarian principles.”

South Sudan is plagued by a multitude of different crises and shocks that make the Humanitarian Development Peace (HDP) nexus (also called the triple nexus) an ideal approach to addressing the complex nature of the country’s challenges (Quack and Südff, 2020). Conflict plays a major role in South Sudan, thus necessitating the engagement of peace actors to create an environment where humanitarian actors can address the needs of the most vulnerable and investors have the confidence to engage in development initiatives. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2019), the HDP nexus requires strong collaboration and coordination among development cooperation, humanitarian and peacebuilding actors.

The 2021 Global Report on Food Crises acknowledges that world hunger is increasingly being driven by violent conflict, climate change and economic shocks exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (FSIN, 2021). The HDP nexus provides the conditions and structures that are necessary for a comprehensive and inclusive approach to improving the resilience of food systems. Initiatives under the nexus will support the realization of joint commitments aimed at strengthening collaboration for anticipation, prevention, early action, response, and recovery. Nexus-based solutions will not only make food systems more conflict-resilient but will also strengthen food systems such that they enhance the prospects for peace (Food Systems Community, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic underscores the importance of the HDP nexus in addressing poverty, hunger, and underdevelopment in South Sudan. The absence of one of the 3 key elements of the HDP means that the country cannot achieve sustainable progress against any of the factors that negatively affect the country and its agrifood systems. For example, the impact of low oil revenues on the economy shows the need for fiscal policies that protect the economy in the face of such shocks. The hoarding of cereals by neighbouring countries has shown the need for strategic grain reserves (SGR) to address food emergencies and ensure food availability; this can only happen when agrifood systems are robust, resilient, and sustainable.

## INFORMATION AND GOVERNANCE

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### Political reforms and government effectiveness

The health and socio-economic effects of COVID-19 have so far had limited impacts on governance in South Sudan, although that could change if the pandemic worsens over time. Already, the implementation of the 186 steps of the September 2018 peace agreement has been considerably slowed by the pandemic.

The biggest impact on government has been the reduced income from oil exports, which means that the delivery of services, such as health and agricultural extension, is likely to be disrupted when the government is unable to pay salaries. Budgetary allocation to the agricultural and related sectors, such as infrastructure development, food quality and safety, food storage, will also be affected as the limited funding will be redirected to other more pressing demands, such as security. This is likely to further depress the performance of the agricultural sector, prolonging the trend of net cereal deficits.

Economic slowdown and physical distancing measures are likely to affect government effectiveness in the delivery of essential services (e.g., health services), the justice system, etc. which are essential to protect the farming population from the adverse effects of COVID-19 that would affect availability of farmland and labour, since mechanization in South Sudan is extremely limited.

During lockdowns in most states, nonessential government workers worked remotely or were placed on administrative leave, with the result that most public services were temporarily halted or severely restricted. Consequently, sectors such as agriculture that require extension services were affected by the slow or non-delivery of services. Community animal health workers were affected by interstate lockdown measures that limited their ability to support pastoralists. Farmers and herders also reported that the social interaction disruptions caused by the pandemic greatly affected their activities, which are usually undertaken communally (Gony, Gai and Humphrey, 2021).

The economic impact of COVID-19 will continue to constrain government effectiveness. Pandemic-related restrictions, the global economic slowdown, and increased expenditure on health and socio-economic responses to COVID-19 will exacerbate existing crises, reducing government revenues and constraining available resources. Public service delivery and the salaries of public and private workers will continue to be adversely affected.

All of these consequences could threaten the stability of South Sudan as it attempts to enact much-needed political reforms and deliver on its transition agenda.

### Information for monitoring

South Sudan continues to be a country of concern given the multiple shocks driving food insecurity and vulnerability in the country. According to the Global Report on Food Crises 2021 (FAO, 2021c), the food crisis in South Sudan is among the worst in the world, with COVID-19 exacerbating the situation. The report also identifies the country's urban slum population as increasingly vulnerable due to COVID-19 related income losses.

Humanitarian actors are on the forefront of supporting efforts to track the effects of COVID-19 on all sectors e.g., health, food security and livelihoods, gender, protection and WASH, among others. To this end, several small and targeted surveys have been undertaken to understand the impact of the pandemic on specific topic subjects and locations, as have larger and nationwide



surveys, such as the FSNMS, which aim to understand the national and county-level impacts of the pandemic.

As mentioned previously, FAO conducted an assessment in 2020 to determine the impact of COVID-19 on agriculture, livelihoods, and markets (FAO, 2020). In May 2021, a second FAO survey set out to understand how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected agricultural livelihoods and food security (FAO, 2020b). The results of these surveys are reported in earlier sections.

Much of the data collection and analysis in South Sudan is done by non-governmental actors with the support of the appropriate government ministries. For example, the FSNMS survey was a multiagency (UN and NGOs) project supported by the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security and the Ministry of Health. SMART<sup>20</sup> surveys are led by the Nutrition Information Working Group (NIWG), which is co-chaired by the Ministry of Health and UNICEF. Until the government can build adequate technical capacity and avail financial resources to support the information generation process, the current modality of support from nongovernmental actors shall continue.

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<sup>20</sup> Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transitions.

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The **Food and Nutrition Security Impact, Resilience, Sustainability and Transformation programme (FIRST)** is a strategic partnership between the European Union and FAO. Through a network of policy officers embedded in government bodies, it works hand in hand with over 22 countries on setting the right conditions to promote both public and private investments in sustainable agriculture and creating an enabling environment for these investments to contribute to achieving food security and nutrition.

Launched by the European Union, FAO and the World Food Programme at the 2016 World Humanitarian Summit, the **Global Network against Food Crises** is an alliance of humanitarian and development actors united by the commitment to tackle the root causes of food crises and promote sustainable solutions to eradicate hunger and malnutrition through leveraging analysis and knowledge sharing, strengthened coordination in supporting evidence-based policy responses and collective efforts across the Humanitarian, Development and Peace (HDP) nexus.

A joint effort between FIRST with the Global Network has produced assessments on policy responses related to COVID-19 and their impact on agrifood systems in 13 countries. In particular, FIRST brought policy analysis capacities to support the programming priorities of FAO's Office of Emergencies and Resilience (OER) and the Global Network in these countries; FAO's OER and the Global Network provided quantitative assessments of the impacts of the pandemic on food security and nutrition.

This document was produced by the FAO representation in South Sudan in close collaboration with relevant stakeholders. The process was led by **Michael Deng Dhieu**, with contributions from **Nicholas Kerandi**, Technical Advisor, the FIRST management team and the Technical Support Unit of the Global Network against Food Crisis.



