

SOUTH SUDAN



Food Security Monitoring: phone interviews in Greater Upper Nile

KEY MESSAGES





-  Prices of basic food commodities exhibited rising trends in most sites in March 2016, extending similar patterns observed in February 2016.
-  Markets are slowly recovering after the formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity and consequential resumption of relative peace in most areas but are still constrained by low supplies.
-  High food prices coupled with stable wage rates have decimated the purchasing power of most households, making it extremely difficult for them to afford the rising cost food.
-  New displacements were recorded in Akobo while in some areas in Unity and Jonglei, there were reports of increased outflow of returnees from PoCs/ IDP camps back to their homes to restart their livelihoods.

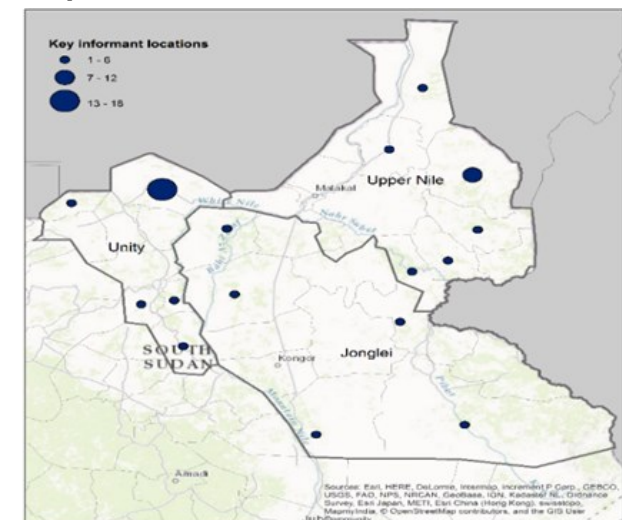


Photo: WFP / Ala Khier

Methodology

In February 2016, WFP SSCO conducted its first remote phone survey (mVAM) data collection in Greater Upper Nile. The survey primarily captured information on market functioning through key informant interviews with community leaders and/or opinion holders in payams with Greater Upper Nile. The data collection was conducted with the help of an in-house call center. Information on food availability and prices, labour wage rate, displacement and road access were obtained from 26 counties in the Greater Upper Nile (eight each in Jonglei and Unity and 10 in Upper Nile) using a simplified market questionnaire. In order to reach out to as many key informants as possible, the phone interviews targeted all mobile providers both GSM and satellite phones (thurayas). It is notable important to note that some counties were completely not reached, primarily due to conflict and insecurity that has rendered phone coverage and general accessibility impossible. Furthermore, the respondents of to phone interviews are not representative of the community and can potentially bias findings. These are major limitations for this survey. The data presented here was collected from a sample of 73 respondents spread over the 24 counties of Greater Upper Nile that responded to the survey.

Map 1: Monitored Locations



FINDINGS

High prices compromising households' purchasing power

Prices of most basic food commodities remained relatively high in March 2016 in all three states, continuing similar trends observed in February 2016. Sugar in particular rose by 40-50 percent across the states in which data was taken from (Table 1). The price of vegetable oil increased significantly in Unity (25 percent) and Upper Nile (43 percent) while remaining relatively stable in Jonglei. The cost of sorghum, a food staple, on the other hand increased in Jonglei (33 percent) and Upper Nile (40 percent) but slightly reduced in Unity. Of all the three states, Upper Nile witnessed the highest price increases for most commodities monitored. Rising prices in Jonglei were triggered by poor food production during the previous agricultural season while in Unity it was due to localized fighting which reduced the volume of trade. The closure of the Renk trading corridor with Sudan cut off river barges from Kosti downstream, resulting in price increases in most markets in Upper Nile as it relies on this supply route.

Table 1: Trend in basic food prices

States	Food Commodities	Price (SSP) Feb. 2016	Price (SSP) March 2016	% Change from February to March
Unity	Sorghum (Malwa)	43	40	-6%
	Sugar (kg)	36	50	41%
	Vegetable Oil (lt)	40	50	25%
Jonglei	Sorghum (Malwa)	38	50	33%
	Sugar (kg)	30	45	50%
	Vegetable Oil (lt)	42.5	43	1%
Upper Nile	Sorghum (Malwa)	25	35	40%
	Sugar (kg)	30	42	40%
	Vegetable Oil (lt)	30	43	43%

Source: WFP mVAM Survey, April 2016



Market functionality still constrained by low supplies, high prices and conflict

More than 85 percent of the respondents indicated that maize grain, pulses and vegetables were completely lacking in markets, due to low levels of production and difficulties in moving commodities (high cost of importation, transport and insecurity challenges and high trade risks). Food shortages in the markets and high prices made it extremely difficult for many households, particularly those with large families, to afford food. Cases of malnutrition in children were reported by respondents in the Nyal and Nyeel payams (Payinyjar County, Unity State). Physical access to markets is normally a major challenge for many people in the country- mainly due to long distances, high cost of transportation and insecurity. Of the areas monitored, markets were furthest from households in Unity State. For instance, the closest functional markets is Biu and Aliiny payams (Pariang County – Unity State) and in Nyal payam (Payinyjar County – Unity State) are on average 36, 24 and 12km, respectively, far from the respondent's village.



Photo: WFP / Jaqueline Dent



Terms of Trade (ToT) improved slightly in Unity and stabilised in Jonglei and Upper Nile

As Figures 1&2 show, purchasing power (measured by ToT) increased in Unity in March 2016 compared to the previous month but was relatively stable or slightly reduced in Jonglei and Upper Nile. Labour to sorghum ToT doubled in Unity, declined slightly in Jonglei and remained invariant in Upper Nile month-on-month. Similar trends were discernible for labour to sugar/vegetable oil ToT.

A slight reduction in sorghum price coupled with increased casual labour wage rates in Unity allowed households to afford 2kg of cereal in March 2016, up from 1kg a month earlier.

In Upper Nile State, the purchasing power remained unchanged in March as the increase in the daily wage rate was offset by a faster growth in the prices of food commodities. In Jonglei, the daily wage rate remained stable at SSP 50 and prices of sorghum and sugar rose by 33-50 percent, reducing the terms of trade.

Figure 1: ToT labour to Sorghum

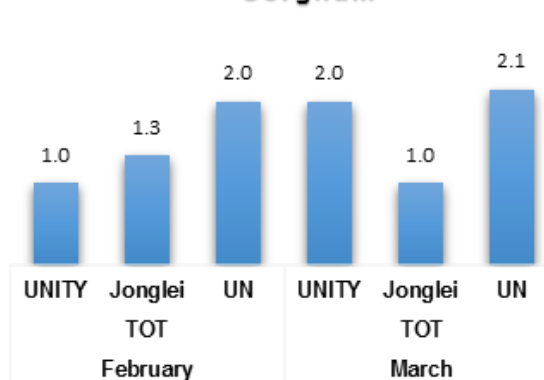
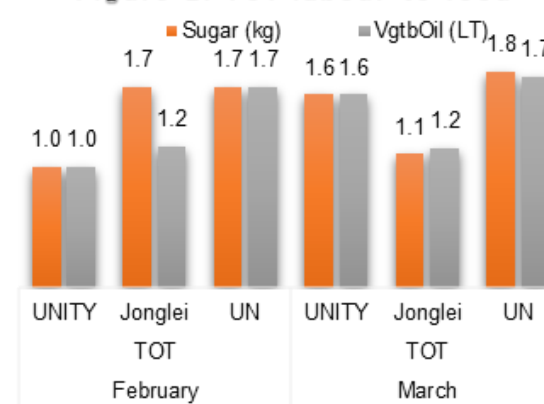


Figure 2: ToT labour to food



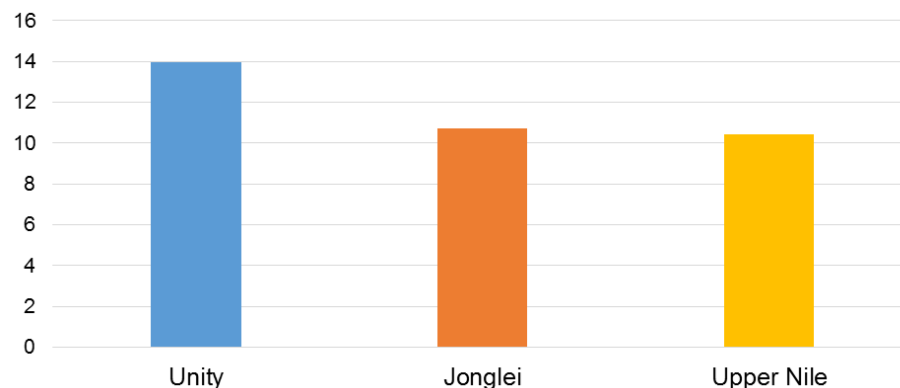
Source: WFP mVAM Survey, April 2016



Cost of food basket is highest in Unity

To determinate the cost of purchasing food for an adequate diet, the cost of a daily standard food basket was calculated. The standard food basket includes 500 grams (g) of cereals, 50g of pulses, 30 milliliter (ml) of vegetable oil and 5g of salt which provides 2,100 kilo calories per person, the minimum daily recommended energy requirement. The analysis (Figure 3) indicates a slight variation in the cost of a standard food basket across the three States, with the highest in Unity (SSP 14) which is around 30 percent more than in Jonglei (SSP 11) and Upper Nile (SSP 10).

Figure 3: Cost of food basket, March 2016



Source: WFP mVAM Survey, April 2016



Displacement

Respondents for the survey were asked about any incident of displacement in the area where they live. The following counties indicated displacements: Twic East and Bor South in Jonglei; Maban and Malakal in Upper Nile and Pariang, Guit and Abiemnhom in Unity State. These counties report the highest proportion (more than 50%) of their population as internally displaced persons (IDPs). The respondents indicate that IDPs have moved to inland villages, swamps and other areas within and outside their area of origin. In addition, these counties also report that some of their populations sought refuge in either Sudan or Ethiopia. It is reported that IDPs rarely move to their displacement locations with any food stock, and rely primarily on humanitarian support in addition to collection of wild fruits.



Perceptions of food security

At the end of the phone survey, every respondent was given the opportunity to share a comment through an open-ended question that read, *“Would you like to share any additional information regarding the food security situation in your community?”* The feedback was captured in a word cloud. This illustrates terms most commonly found in responses and the size of the words represent their frequency. As was the case in the first round (February 2016), “market” was the most frequently mentioned word by respondents. Nearly all of the open ended responses were related to food shortage, high prices and lack of functional markets due to high insecurity. Respondents also described a lack of access to safe drinking water as some villages have only one borehole which is inadequate for human/ livestock water needs. The word cloud indicates that the food situation worsened in March as many households could not afford to buy food from the market.

Figure 4: Word cloud



In the words of the respondents:

“Situation is worse, expensive foods and the community doesn’t have money, restaurants are close due to lack of money and no food commodity”- Male Respondents from Pariang (Unity)

“IDPs are integrated among the host community, food situation is really bad, prices are high in the market, and traders cannot even travel to buy food commodities because of no money. so Community are suffering” - Male respondents from Nyirol (Jonglei)

“Households livelihood sources were interrupted due to the insecurity.” - Male respondents from Maban (Upper Nile).

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mVAM resources:

Website: http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/
 Blog: mVAM.org
 Toolkit : <http://resources.vam.wfp.org/mVAM>



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