SOUTH SUDAN

Food Security Monitoring: phone interviews in Greater Upper Nile

KEY MESSAGES

Higher prices for food commodities and a reduced purchasing power were reported in Unity and Jonglei States;

The highest proportion of internally displaced persons was registered in the counties of Twic East and Bor South (Jonglei), Maban and Malakal (Upper Nile) and Pariang, Guit and Abiemnhom (Unity);

Respondents in Upper Nile have a more negative perception of their food security than those in Unity and Jonglei: food shortages, high prices and inadequate supplies are the main concerns among respondents.

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.
FINDINGS

Food prices

As Table 1 shows, prices of basic food commodities are relatively high in Unity and Jonglei states; a malwa of maize grain and a malwa of sorghum sell for South Sudan Pounds (SSP) 50 and SSP 38 respectively in Jonglei, while they are sold for SSP 60 and SSP 43 respectively in Unity. On the contrary, prices of these two food commodities are more than 40 percent lower in Upper Nile (SSP 23 for maize grain and SSP 25 for sorghum) than Jonglei and Unity.

The high prices in Jonglei are most likely linked to the declining trade within the Akobo corridor in addition to and the fact that only a few markets are currently operational. In particular, people in the Kuach-Deng payam (Ayod County) and Waat payam (Nyirol County) reported that there is no food in the market, leading villagers/traders to travel to villages that are several miles away to access food. On top of this, their purchasing power was reduced because there are fewer income opportunities than normal. The high prices in Unity results from the active conflict that has completely cut-off trade routes and reduced the volume of trade. It has also disrupted livelihood sources including limiting crop production in the Pariang, Mayendit and Panyijar counties.

The key informant data also shows that markets are very far from the respondents’ locations in Unity and Upper Nile. The closest functional markets in Pariang, Aliiny and Nyeel Payams (Pariang County) in Unity State are 15 km to 25 km away from the respondents’ village while in Paluoch Payam (Melut County) in Upper Nile State, the closest market is 36 km.

There was minimal variability in the prices of sugar and vegetable oil across the three states. Indeed, 1 kg of sugar costs SSP 36 in Unity and SSP 30 in both Jonglei and Upper Nile. Similarly, a litre of vegetable oil sells at SSP 43 in Jonglei, SSP 40 in Unity and SSP 30 in Upper Nile.

The sale of small ruminants like goats is very offers a significant livelihood opportunity in most parts of Greater Upper Nile. The cost of a medium-sized goat is more expensive in Jonglei (SSP 700) than in Upper Nile and Unity, both selling a medium sized goat at SSP 600.

Table 1: Food prices in the three conflicted states of Greater Upper Nile (In SSP)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Unity</th>
<th>Jonglei</th>
<th>Upper Nile</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sorghum (1 Malwa)</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maize Grain (1 Malwa)</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugar (1 KG)</td>
<td>35.5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetable Oil (1 LT)</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goat</td>
<td>600</td>
<td>700</td>
<td>600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: WFP mVAM Survey, March 2016

1 About 3.5kg equivalent measurement of cereal
More than 40% of respondents in Greater Upper Nile reported a shortage of staple food commodities like sorghum, maize grain, vegetables etc. in the markets—largely due to the low levels of local production, increased cost of imports, insecurity and closure of the major transport corridors. In particular, respondents indicated that the food supply in the markets was mainly affected by the closure or low operation of the following trade route corridors: Bentiu-Pariang, Bentiu-Leer, Bentiu-Yida and Ganyiel-Panyijar in Unity and Akobo in Jonglei.

Figure 1 shows the daily labour wage in Greater Upper Nile. The daily wage rate is SSP 50 in both Jonglei and Upper Nile while Unity showed slightly lower daily wage rate of SSP 45—attributed to a lack of job opportunities (forces of demand and supply in the labour market).

### Purchasing power - Terms of trade (ToT)

Terms of trade (ToT) determines purchasing power and illustrates the quantity of a certain food commodity that individuals can barter for a day’s worth of manual labour. In particular, low wage levels amidst alongside increasingly higher food prices leads has led to reduced purchasing power. The assessment indicates that though Jonglei and Upper Nile have similar daily wage rates, the former has a lower purchasing power as it has significantly higher food prices. For example, while people in Upper Nile are currently able to buy more than two malwas of sorghum or maize grain or more than 1.5 litre of vegetable oil with a daily wage rate, people in Jonglei only can buy one malwa of sorghum or maize grain or 1 litre of vegetable oil for with their daily labour rate.

### 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.
Community perceptions of WFP: Word Cloud

At the end of the call, respondents were given an opportunity to share a comment on any topical issue related to WFP through an open-ended feedback question. The comments/feedback provided by respondents is captured in a word cloud (Figure 3) that depicts the most commonly reported comments/issues where the size of the word reflects its frequency. The most reported issues are: shortage of food, high and unstable prices, expensive cost of living and inadequate market supply of commodities—all related to the high occurrence of insecurity and the prevailing economic crisis.

Perception of food security in Greater Upper Nile

To estimate the respondent’s perception of food security in Greater Upper Nile, a sentiment analysis algorithm was used. For a given sentence it measures how positive or negative the statement is on a scale of -1 to +1. As Figure 4 shows, respondents in all three states have a negative view on their communities’ food security situation. In particular, it appears that respondents in Upper Nile have a more negative perception of respondents than those in Jonglei and Unity.

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/](http://vam.wfp.org/sites/mvam_monitoring/)
Blog: [mVAM.org](http://mVAM.org)
Toolkit: [http://resources.vam.wfp.org/mVAM](http://resources.vam.wfp.org/mVAM)