



United Nations

**SOUTH SUDAN** 

Building the Future Together

**JPAT**

# Food security and initiatives for resilience in South Sudan

**Joint Policy Advisory Team - Policy brief**

*“The quest for food security can be the common thread that links the different challenges we face and helps build a sustainable future.”*

– **José Graziano da Silva**, United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Director-General

---

**Recommended Citation:** JPAT (2017); “Food security and initiatives for resilience in South Sudan”; Policy Note; South Sudan United Nations Country Team Joint Policy Advisory Team, Juba South Sudan

**For more information contact:** Christian Lotz ([christian.lotz@undp.org](mailto:christian.lotz@undp.org)) or Frederick Mugisha ([frederick.mugisha@undp.org](mailto:frederick.mugisha@undp.org))

---

All image used in this report are ©UNDP

---

## Famine contained, but food security is still a big problem

In May 2017, the Government declared that the famine in two counties of Mayendit and Leer in Central Unity had been contained through scaled up comprehensive humanitarian response<sup>1</sup>. Famine being contained provides false relief but the worsened overall food security and nutrition situation will no more grab the headlines, yet the situation in the country is not any closer to being resolved. New evidence suggests that the share of South Sudanese who reach food crisis and worse, meaning they require immediate food assistance has increased 5 times in five years between 2012 and 2017. The worst affected states are Central Equatoria, Unity, Western Bahr el Ghazal and Warrap that have seen an increase of above 9 times. And those that reach food stress levels and worse have also doubled in the same period.

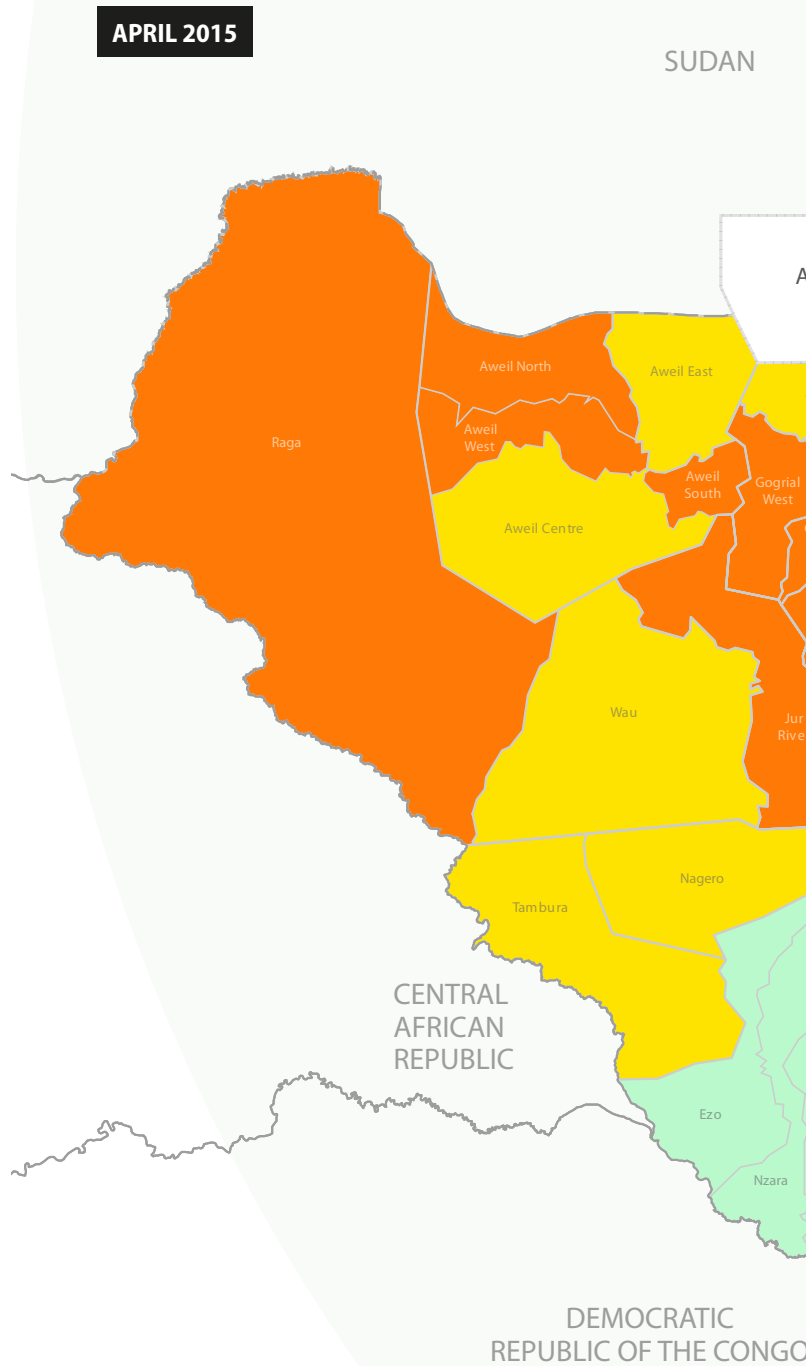
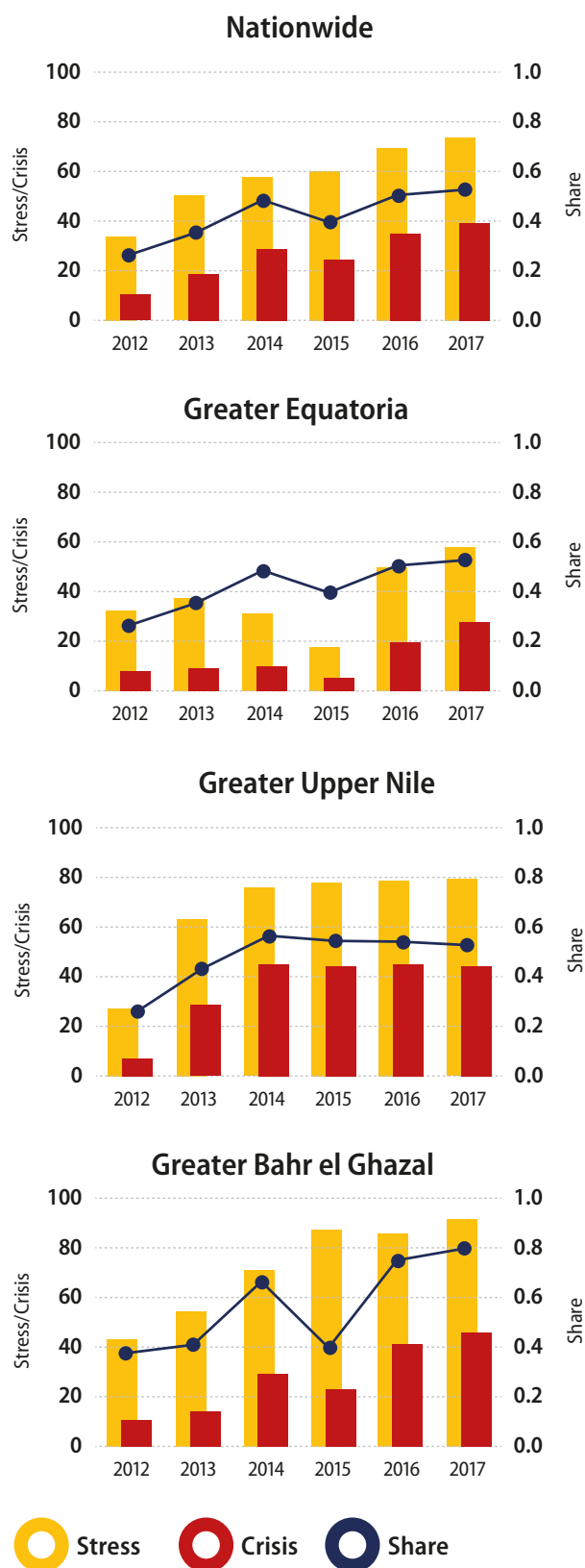
Additionally, acute malnutrition presents a public health emergency in most parts of South Sudan. Out of 16 validated SMART surveys conducted in 2017, 14 show the Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) above the 15% WHO emergency threshold whilst GAM approaching the 30% catastrophic threshold is observed in parts of Unity and Jonglei.<sup>2</sup> Deterioration of acute malnutrition in the lean season is most compelling; a 39% increase in GAM was registered across the Greater Bahr el Ghazal and Equatoria regions in the last two lean seasons.<sup>3</sup> Poor access to services, low coverage of preventive programmes, the dire maternal, infant and young child nutrition and care and resultant disease outbreaks further exacerbate the situation.

This in part reflects the challenge the nation faces in tackling the goal of ending hunger, achieving food security and improving nutrition while promoting sustainable agriculture (SDG2 – zero hunger)<sup>4</sup>. Of course the challenge is not just that of South Sudan, it is also that of the continent. For instance, there is evidence to suggest that Africa will still lag behind unless it can feed itself with sufficient quantities of food that has adequate nutritional value<sup>5</sup>.

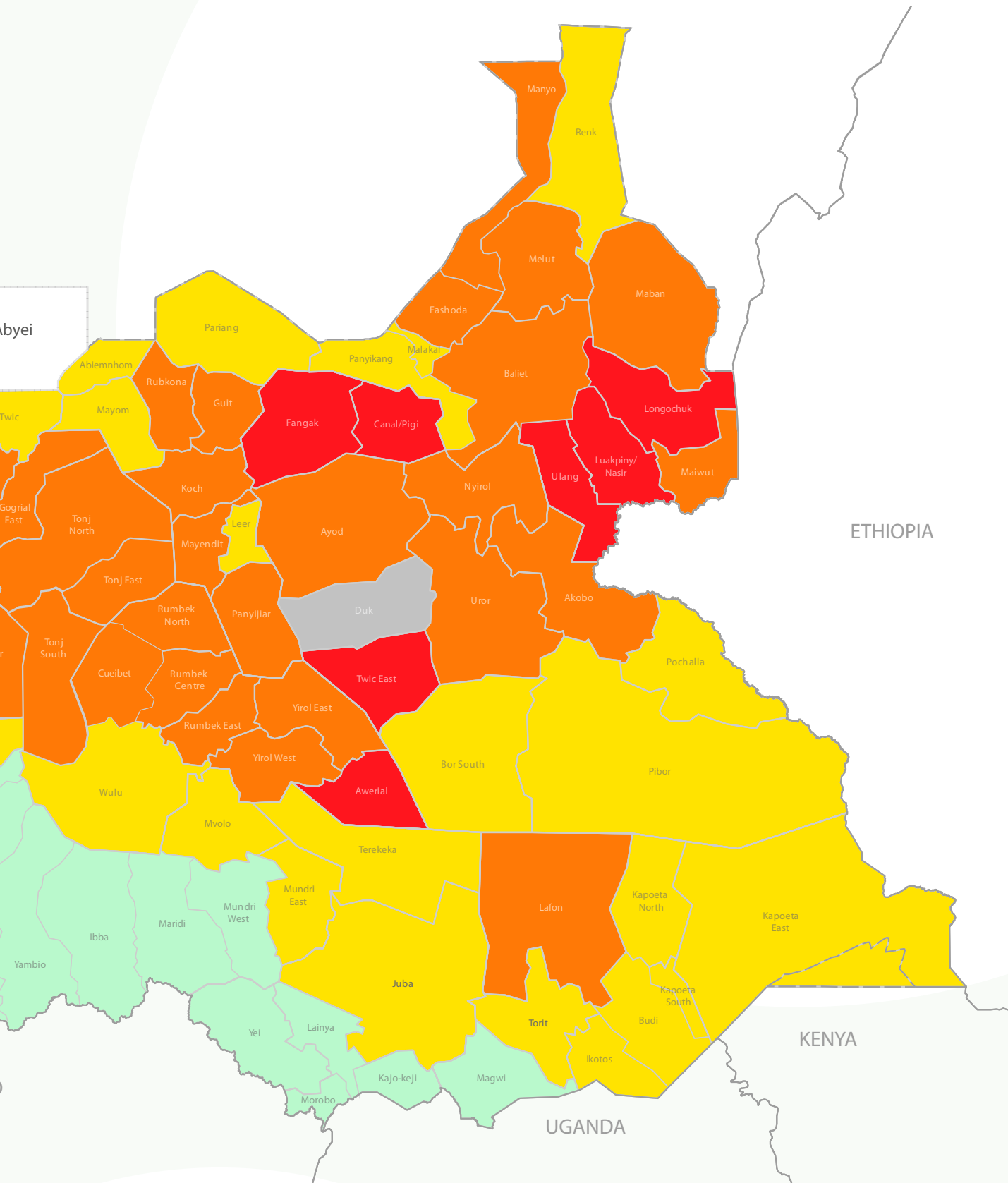
The broader concern, which is the subject of this note, is how best to improve food security and nutrition in the short term and build the resilience to avoid a similar situation in the future. To appreciate the magnitude and extent to such undertaking, it is critical to consider the temporal, spatial, value chain dimensions and how they interact. With respect to temporal analysis, the evidence suggests that the rate at which people in food stress fall into crisis situations has increased from about 20% to 50% between 2012 and 2017 (see Figure 1, page 4) nationwide with differences spatially.

For instance the rate for people in Greater Upper Nile has remained above the 50% mark since the outbreak of conflict in 2013. With respect to spatial analysis, states that were once with minimal food security problems have either turned yellow or red and those that were yellow or amber have largely turned red (see Figure 2). The food value chain goes through production, transportation (to which imports join the local chain), market (exchange), and consumption (physical availability of food at the individual and household level). The disruptions in the value chain explain the worsening situations and these disruptions differ across locations and impact different stages of the value chain (see Figure 3 for illustration). The issues of food security and nutrition also take on a gender dimension. Evidence suggests that children are 4-10 percent more likely to be under-weight in male-headed households than in female-headed households.<sup>6</sup> For instance, 23 percent of female-headed households depend primarily on unreliable or unsustainable income sources compared to 18 percent of male-headed households.<sup>7</sup> Orphaned and other groups of vulnerable children, like girls and demobilized child soldiers, are an especially affected group, due to their lack of sources of livelihoods, knowledge and skills, and thus their dependence on others.

**Figure 1:** Transition from food stress to crisis



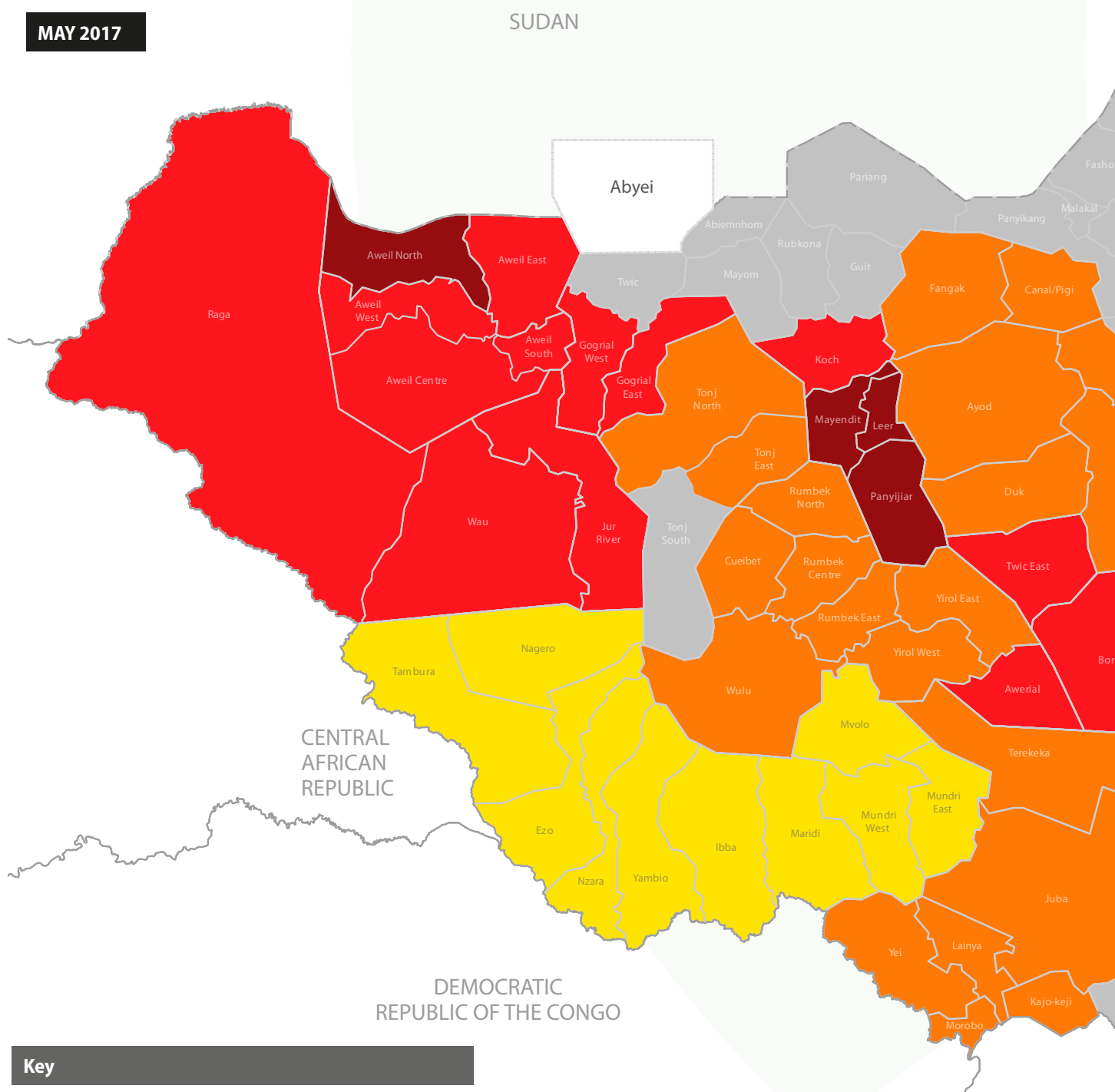
**Figure 2:** Contrast IPC of April 2015 and May 2017 (Projected)



**Key**

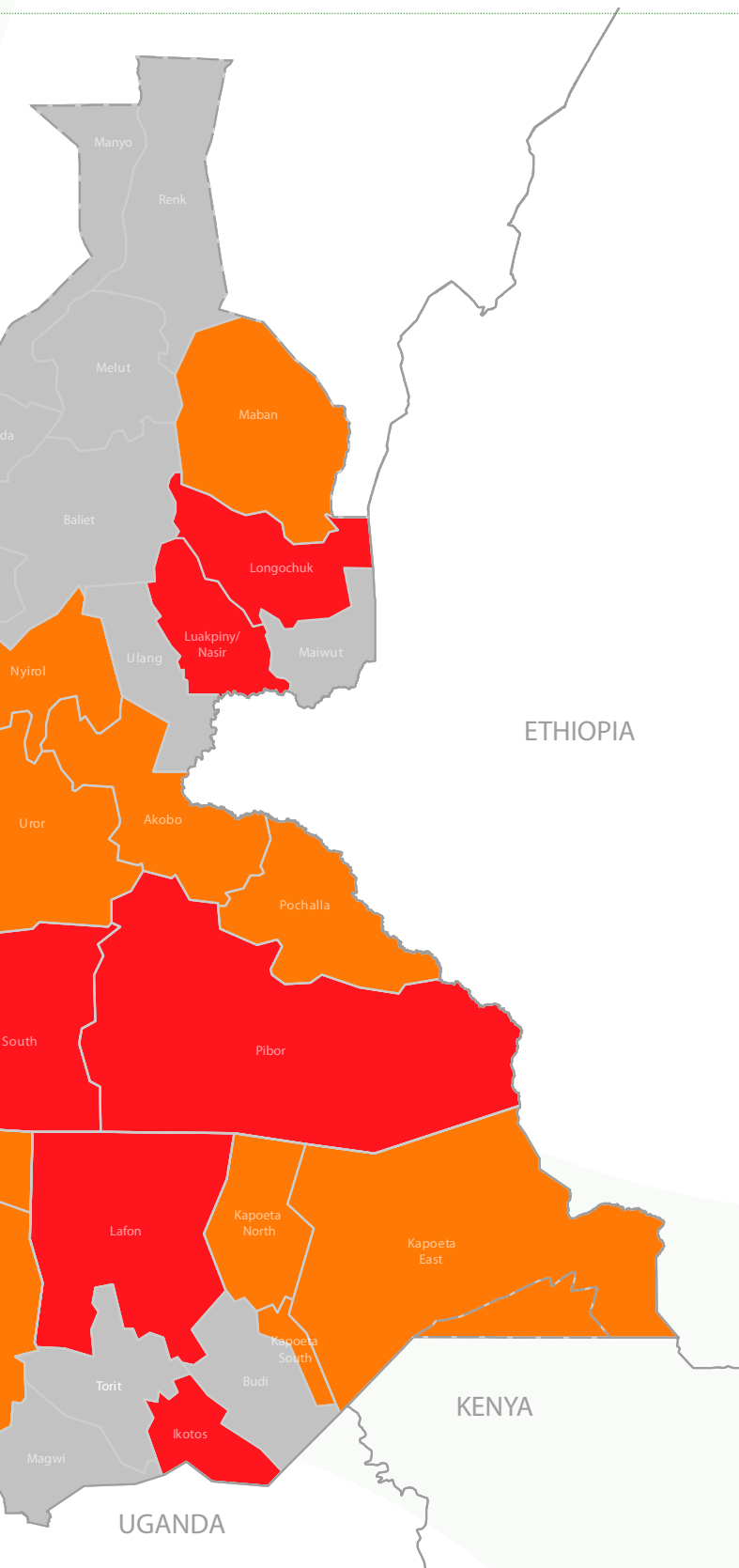
- Humanitarian catastrophe
- Emergency
- Crisis
- Stressed
- Minimal

MAY 2017



**Key**

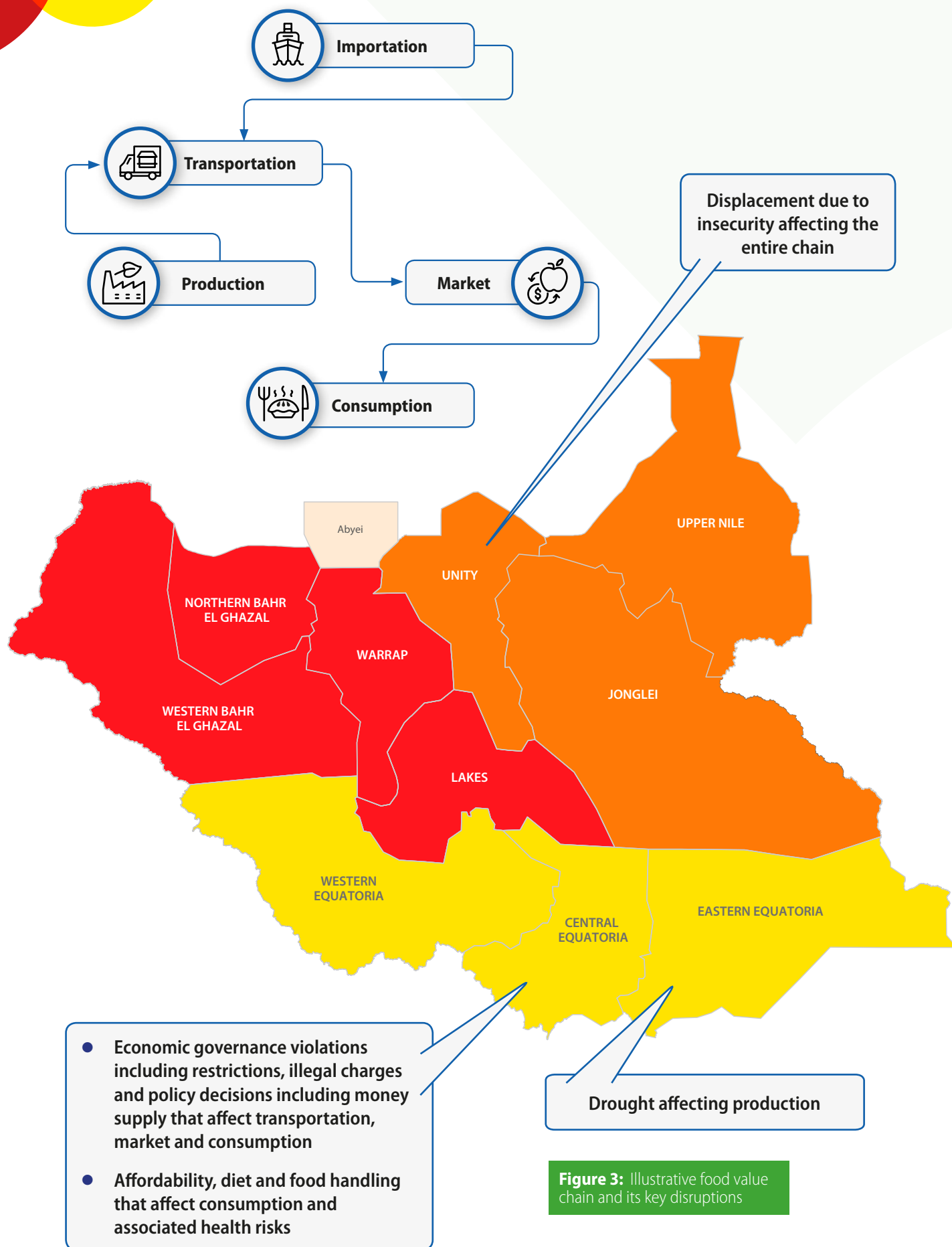
- Humanitarian catastrophe
- Emergency
- Crisis
- Stressed
- Minimal



## Factors Driving Food Insecurity

Factors driving food insecurity in South Sudan are multiple and differ across geography as well as the stages of the value chain. These include shocks and disruptions caused by displacement due to insecurity affecting mainly production but also the rest of the chain; droughts due to climate variability and change affecting production; economic governance violations including restrictions, illegal charges, and policy decisions limiting access to markets and consumption; affordability, diet and food handling that affect consumption and associated health risks. The resilience<sup>8</sup> of communities to withstand these disruptions is also compromised as their productive assets, health, nutrition, education and other basic services have been interrupted by the same factors that drive food insecurity. In some parts of the country, livestock a source of food security is also a medium for sustaining conflicts through cattle raiding.

**Source:** Various integrated food security phase classification (IPC) reports for South Sudan





## Production

Food production is the first stage of the value chain, and the levels of food production have continued to decline, affecting negatively subsequent stages of the value chain. In 6 of the former 10 states, displacement and lack of access to farmland due to conflict and insecurity is the greatest impediment. Almost half of the population is displaced either internally, many living in protection of civilian sites, or externally as refugees. That means that half of the labor required to produce food for own consumption and for the market is unavailable.

In addition, traditional farming practices that do not favor high production levels, as well as disruptions and shocks have caused significant negative effects. The low productivity, with cereal (sorghum and maize) production averaging 1,100 MT/ha, means even in a good year the country has a national cereal deficit of nearly 250,000MT. As a direct result of the conflict, there was a significant increase in the deficit in cereals to 500,000MT.<sup>9</sup> South Sudan is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate variability and change that has been characterized by for instance recurrent floods in Jonglei, and droughts in parts of Eastern Equatoria. Climate and weather conditions through extreme events such as frequent dry spells and droughts, floods and heat waves are closely linked to crop failure and destruction of key livelihood assets contributing to food insecurity.

Agriculture inputs have been negatively influenced by major economic governance violations affecting the physical delivery of humanitarian inputs, public finance management and market operations. There has largely been no public investment in the agricultural sector as public expenditure is skewed towards salaries and operations.<sup>10</sup>

## Transportation

Transportation to the market is the second stage that is also fed by food imports. Insecurity has affected the transportation of food irrespective of whether it is imported or produced within South Sudan especially on the main supply routes affecting movement of humanitarian assistance and commercial goods.

Road and river infrastructure is difficult – with approx. 200km of tarmac road, with the rest being *marram* roads that are susceptible to changing weather conditions. This continues to restrict movement of food commodities as well as other goods into the inland markets. The high transport costs are passed onto the consumer, translating into high food prices.

A significant proportion of the population relies on food assistance whose delivery is constrained largely due to economic governance violations. These include restrictions, illegal charges, seizure of goods and assets, harassment and other operational restrictions meant to deter or derail delivery. This is compounded by the absence of an effective rule of law infrastructure to serve as a deterrence to illegal activities. Other economic governance violation such as the management of the fiscal and monetary regimes as well as the market indirectly impact on transportation.

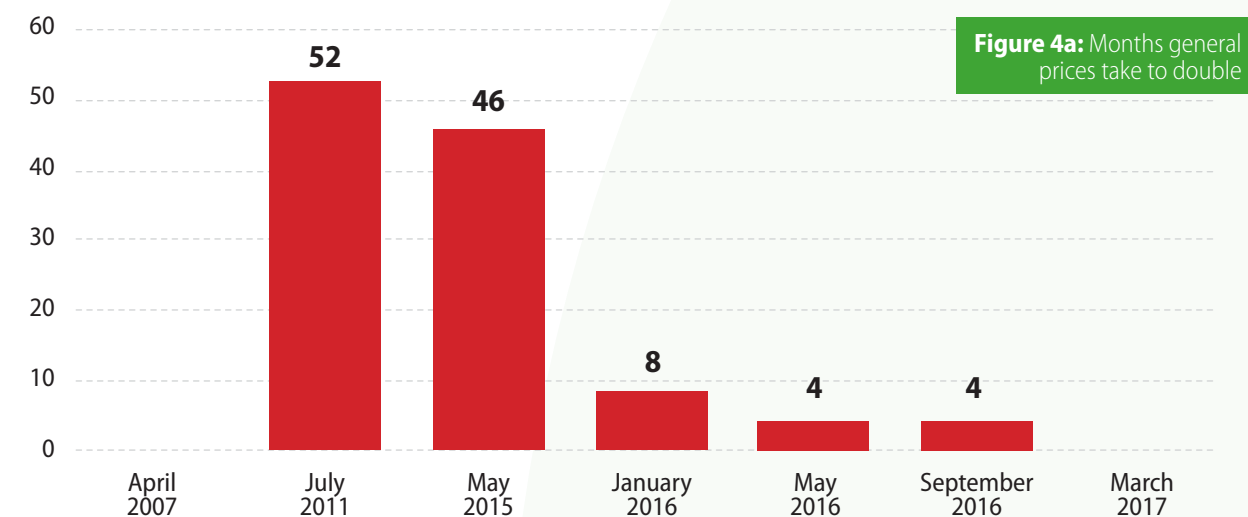
## Importation

In a situation of reduced food production, food imports especially with the view to connect to regional food networks would play a critical role in ensuring food availability.<sup>11</sup> Food imports face the same restrictions once they enter the food value chain (see Figure 3) at the point of in-country transportation. In addition, they face customs restrictions or delays.

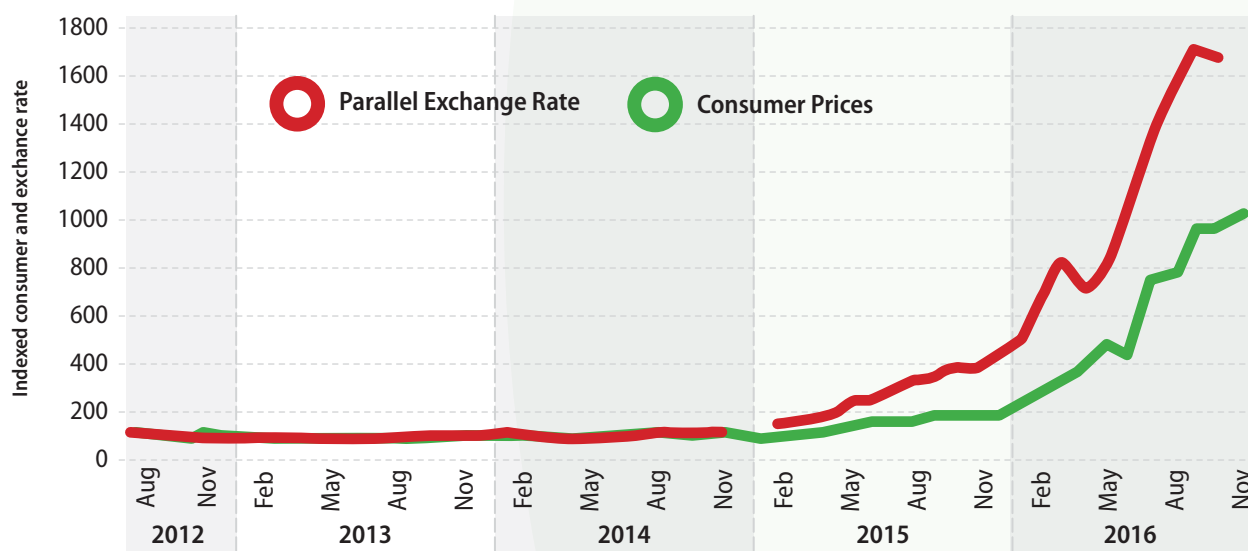
## Markets

Due to the challenges at the production, transportation and importation stages, food is in short supply in the markets. A combination of the costs of transportation and shortage of food commodities result in price increase. For instance, between February and September 2016 commodity prices doubled every four months. This is in sharp contrast to the period prior to May 2015 when prices doubled every fifty months on average (see Figure

4a). Although prices have not yet doubled since Sept 2016, the prices continue to increase. In addition, deteriorating purchasing power compounds the effects of limited or no access to food. Markets continue to shrink due to the economic and security crisis in most of the country's big regional markets and little attempt has been done to access regional or cross border markets to alleviate the pressure on existing markets.



**Figure 4a:** Months general prices take to double



**Figure 4b:** Consumer prices and exchange rate

The price increase has also been fueled by the foreign exchange rate that has seen the South Sudan Pound lose against the dollar in a similar fashion (see Figure 4b). Reduced food access and availability due to increased food prices, has been demonstrated to lead to communities resorting to risky/ unsustainable coping practices.

### Consumption

The country has no food reserves and depends on food imports to fill the gaps. The capacity of individual households to store food is limited, and displacement means that even those who had reserves in traditional granaries are not able to access them or was looted.

In addition, food safety due to poor hygiene practices in post-harvest handling, preparation, and storage is both a health risk and makes it impossible for locally produced foods to be competitive in the market place.

Finally, there has been a significant reduction in household purchasing power due to falling real incomes. The fall in real incomes is primarily due to the national currency losing ground against the United States Dollar and the increase in commodity prices. The combined effect of a weakened currency and increased prices, is that the amount of food that can be purchased for a given income level in February 2017 is only 1.7% of that in March 2016. Rising prices limit food access by reducing the amount and quality of food consumed at the household level. Those with salaried income were most affected because they largely depend on the market for food.<sup>12</sup>

### Theories of change leading towards resilience in South Sudan

Conflict and consequent displacement are the main drivers of acute and urgent food insecurity, resulting in devastating effects on livelihoods and the nutrition situation. It has severely weakened coping mechanisms and the resilience of communities to withstand shocks. Since the conflict started in December 2013, food insecurity hotspots have proliferated and systematically followed violence – with a 3-month delay in most cases before the effects became manifest. In conflict areas, humanitarian assistance has become peoples' main source of food, and it is now insufficient to meet all their needs, mainly due to severe restrictions on humanitarian access and the expanding size of the population in need. Markets are also severely restricted due to economic governance violations.

A cessation of hostilities will have an immediate positive effect on food security. Sustained peace will provide a basis for strengthened resilience and food security over the longer term, as increased security of peoples' lives and property and the return of the displaced citizens will allow for increased and more stable food production.

In non-conflict areas and areas suffering from climate shocks, economic governance violations due to the dramatic economic downturn are the main explanation of food insecurity, and improvements will require building of resilience by ensuring access to critical assets and services at the community level, elimination of economic governance violations, leveraging climate resilient technology, enabling the movement of food (including for assistance) and strengthening the effective functioning of food markets.

## Policy Recommendations

### **MOST CRITICAL**

The most critical and urgent policy recommendation is to stop the fighting/armed violence and end insecurity, and allow South Sudanese to gradually resume the production of their own food. Ending conflict and insecurity will enable the safe movement of food for the markets as well as for relief efforts. Food security is, therefore, intimately linked with the mediation efforts of the UN and other actors in South Sudan and with peace dialogue. In the short run, it is also vital to provide robust security along the major supply routes for importation of food items to ensure supply in the markets.

### **SECONDLY...**

An important and equally urgent policy recommendation will be to engage Government to address economic governance violations to facilitate the movement of food into the markets as well as food assistance to communities in need. These economic governance violations include borrowing from the central bank that directly increases commodity prices, restrictions of movement, non-tariff barriers such as illegal charges that have increased for every kilometer travelled and non-harmonized tariffs that create barriers for traders in existing market places. To address this will require policy dialogue and technical policy support in a range of technical areas related to fiscal space, taxation and macroeconomic stability.



## THIRD...

Strengthened resilience at the community level by ensuring equal access by both men and women to critical assets and social protection measures can help strengthen food security and ensure more stable and predictable supplies of food. Policy support must include continued analysis of critical assets for resilience under different conditions and in different parts of the country. These include access to basic productive assets and social services, and setting targets for aid that leave no one behind, including women and female headed households. We also must acknowledge the differentiated needs of youth, those that have been displaced and separated from their families, notably children, and those living with disabilities as well as those classified as vulnerable.

## FOURTH...

Enhance policies on improved production methods and technologies that address and enhance the resilience of local and traditional food systems and biodiversity, with a focus on hygiene practices in post-harvest handling, preservation, as well as storage will be crucial for reviving the agricultural sector in the medium to long term. Although these efforts will require increased stability and funding to accelerate, policy dialogue should begin now.



## FIFTH...

Strengthen climate and agricultural services by creating a link between climate information service and agricultural and livestock sector to decrease the vulnerability and risk within the value chain, such as food production and transportation. When possible, improve data collection, analysis and use, reduce the damages caused by natural hazards like floods and drought by enhancing early warning and early action.

## SIXTH...

Strengthening the nutrition response to address the multi-sectoral causes of malnutrition is paramount; nutrition preventive programmes are critical and need to necessarily be integrated into the routine treatment programmes to reduce incidence of acute malnutrition among new cases while preventing the reoccurrence in old cases. Initiatives that ensure nutrition sensitive approaches at all stages of the programming cycle will boost the effectiveness of interventions and support efforts to build community resilience

## SEVENTH...

Establish a systematic approach to establish multi-sectoral structures – “whole-of-society” at all level to address the complex underlying causes across relevant sectors. This implies building a bridge between the humanitarian and development actors and reinforcing existing coordination and response mechanisms.

## The Way Forward

The ultimate goal is to inform joint action and enable the multi-sectoral action to food security and nutrition. The next step is therefore for the Programme Management Team through the outcome groups to develop pathways to food security. The five outcome groups' focus is reliance of communities, social services, peace and governance, and local economies. Each will be facilitated through a theory of change exercise to identify its unique contribution in the pathway to ensuring food security.

## About JPAT

The Joint Policy Advisory Team (JPAT) serves as an internal group of policy advisors, focusing on providing the UNCT in South Sudan with innovative, coherent, and evidence-based research and advice on strategic and emerging policy issues in South Sudan, outlining the implications for the UNCT as a whole. As such, the JPAT supports the UNCT in developing common positions, inputs, and substantive messaging in relation to major national issues related to development, recovery and peacebuilding, working to support and enhance the effectiveness and coherence of UNCT policy engagement, advocacy, strategic communications and programmes. It is based on the recognition that solid policy analysis is a prerequisite for joint strategies and programmes, and for effective delivery of support to national partners.



JPAT

### Joint Policy Analysis Team

**Claire Lyster** – International Office of Migration || **Moses Mutebi Nganda** – World Health Organization ||

**Emmett Mollahi Watson** – United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women ||

**Lillian Mokgosi** – World Food Programme || **Pierre Fallavier** – United Nations Children Fund ||

**Rowland Cole** – United Nations Development Programme || **Biplove Choudhary** – United Nations Development Programme || **Subagadis Yohannes Hagos** – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ||

**Shrikant Deshpande** – United Nations Mission in South Sudan || **Christian Lotz** – United Nations Coordination Office || **Frederick Mugisha** – United Nations Development Programme || **Eliaba Damundu** – United Nations

Children Fund || **Joy Luba Lomole Waya** – World Health Organization || **Katy Snowball** – International Organization for Migration || **Sy Sanya** – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ||

**Erminio Sacco** – Food and Agriculture Organization || **James Bwirani** – Food and Agriculture Organization ||

**Francis Tukwasibwe** – United Nations Population Fund || **Millar Mark Peter** – International Organization for Migration || **Ikelokuc Christopher Okelo** – United Nations Mission in South Sudan

## Endnotes

- 1 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, The Republic Of South Sudan, Current Period Classified: May 2017, Projection Period for Most Likely Scenarios: June-July 2017
- 2 County level SMART survey findings that validated by the Nutrition Information Working Group. <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/south-sudan/document/smart-surveys-database-2017>
- 3 Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring System (FSNMS); comparing global acute malnutrition of former states of FSNMS rounds conducted in July 2015 and June 2016
- 4 United Nations General Assembly (2015) "Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development"; Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015; 21 October 2015; New York
- 5 UNDP (2012) Africa Human Development Report 2012 "Towards a Food Secure Future", United Nations Development Programme
- 6 Harttgen, Kenneth, Stephan Klasen, and Sebastian Vollmer. 2012. "Economic Growth and Child Undernutrition in Africa." Working Paper 2012-013. United Nations Development Programme, Regional Bureau for Africa, New York. Cited in Africa Human Development Report 2012 "Towards a Food Secure Future", United Nations Development Programme
- 7 <http://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/ena/wfp284803.pdf?iframe>; Oxfam (2013) found that poverty levels in female-headed households were 57 percent, compared to 48 percent in male-headed households.
- 8 Resilience Context Analysis Resilience to shocks that impact food security and nutrition in South Sudan, November 2015, United Nations and Partners.
- 9 FAO, WFP (2016) "Special report - the joint South Sudan FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission Report"; April 2016
- 10 National Budgets, Ministry of Finance and Planning, Juba, South Sudan
- 11 World Bank (2017) "Reducing Poverty Through Improved Agro-Logistics in a Fragile Country"; Findings from a Trader Survey in South Sudan; GP Poverty & Equity, Africa; June, 2017
- 12 World Bank (2017) "Poverty, Livelihoods, and Perceptions in a High Inflation Environment Findings from the 2015-2016 waves of the High Frequency South Sudan Survey; Global Poverty and Equity Practice, World Bank

United Nations  
**SOUTH SUDAN**   
Building the Future Together

**JPAT**