

## South Kordofan and Blue Nile Coordination Unit Humanitarian Update

January 2017

### Overview

- Projections for the coming lean season suggest food stocks from the ongoing harvest will last through April in South Kordofan and through March in Blue Nile. This leaves a substantial gap as the next harvest would begin, at earliest, in August.
- There remains little to no access to basic pediatric care or medical supplies in both South Kordofan and Blue Nile, putting the child population at elevated risk of death from treatable diseases.
- Schools in Blue Nile were not able to resume in October along their typical calendar. By January only schools in Yabus payam were functioning.
- Tensions remain high in Blue Nile. While active conflict has greatly subsided, mediation between parties to the conflict is needed to ensure stability and provide access for humanitarians.

### Food Security and Agriculture

#### South Kordofan

January and February typically bring the bulk of the far-farm harvest, resulting in the best period in the calendar year for food security. SKBN CU's monitoring from November through January has portrayed a relatively improved food security situation in both the Central Region and Western Jebels of South Kordofan. However, this is a critical time to assess the output of the ongoing harvest and the potential "lean season" in the coming months.

In 2018 the CU notes disparate results of the harvest across South Kordofan. CU monitors report comparatively better performance of crops in the Western Jebels, and in the central region overall better performance in the northern county of Delami. Of particular concern is the comparatively deficient performance of Heiban county, the most densely populated region. The CU has verified substantial amounts of crop failure in this area due to poor climatic conditions and higher rates of fungal and insect related crop damages, though specific harvest figures are not known at this time. This coincides with an already greater rate of food insecurity in the county,<sup>1</sup> likely due to the presence of a substantial number of IDPs from the 2016 conflict.

While the output from the 2017/2018 harvest will almost certainly exceed that of the previous year, there is still cause for concern in South Kordofan. This harvest will certainly fall below the 10-year average harvest for this area and likely create a substantial food gap in the coming months. Based on key informant interviews performed by the CU, it is likely the current harvest's food stocks will not last beyond April. With the following early harvest beginning in August, this will create at least a 3 month food gap.

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<sup>1</sup> 13% of the population was classified as severely food insecure in the October 2017 FSMU Household Assessment, as reported in the October/November 2017: Household Hunger Scale Brief. Accessed at <https://fsmu.org/reports/>

Of specific concern are the IDPs in Heiban county who often lack access to any kind of harvest. With the crops in this region performing comparatively poorer, it is likely that the normal community support to these individuals will be insufficient. More analysis is needed on this community and what prospects they face in 2018.

### Blue Nile

Blue Nile faces numerous challenges to food security in 2018. The conflict, which spanned the region and displaced thousands, will certainly lead to poor food security in the coming lean season. The October assessment reported by FSMU displayed a grim situation for the population even as they enter the far farm harvest season, with 21% of the population reported as severely food insecure.<sup>2</sup> This is very concerning, as this data was collected during the one annual harvest season.

Rains in May through September exceed averages for these months (measured from 2000 to present) while late season (September to November) rains were below average.<sup>3</sup> For many locations, this resulted in favorable growing conditions. In other areas this was manifested as periods of flooding and periods of prolonged dry spells, creating a varied outlook on 2018's harvest. This was particularly true for farm land along the main rivers, typically very productive areas, which were completely washed away by abnormally intense flooding.

The conflict further exacerbated a difficult season by separating substantial portions of the population from their harvest. The conflict began in May and lasted through August, a very important time in the seasonal calendar for cultivation. Even in areas where planting was possible, subsequent conflict and displacement prevented a proper maintenance of crops during the growing season. Many farmers were unable to properly weed or treat for pests, leading to very poor harvest in much of Blue Nile.

The overall food outlook for Blue Nile is grim. Much of the population is likely to run out of food stores in March, potentially triggering a new round of displacements to refugee camps in South Sudan and Ethiopia.

## **Health and Nutrition**

### South Kordofan

There were no major disease outbreaks reported by the local Secretariat of Health in this period. However, access to healthcare remains a serious challenge for the population. Access to trained medical staff is highly limited for most of the population and more medical capacity is sorely needed to address the needs of nearly a million people in the areas.

Pediatric care in particular is substantially lacking throughout the region. As reported in August of 2017, access to basic pediatric medicines or nutritional commodity was only 22% for the Central Region and 0% for the Western Jebels. The CU is not aware of any changes to these metrics over the last 6 months and anticipates the child population still faces substantial disadvantages in their access to health care.

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<sup>2</sup>FSMU October/November 2017: Household Hunger Scale Brief. Accessed at <https://fsmu.org/reports/>

<sup>3</sup>FSMU November 2017: Harvest Season Brief Accessed at <https://fsmu.org/reports/>

## Blue Nile

In 2017 there were a reported 21 functioning health clinics in Blue Nile, the latest report from CU monitors suggests only 11 of these clinics are now functioning. Lack of access to drugs and qualified clinicians are the main reason for clinics reporting not being able to see patients. For more serious cases, tribal tensions along the South Sudan-Sudan border make it difficult to access the only regional hospital, which is in the Maban refugee camps.

## **Animal Health**

### South Kordofan and Blue Nile

Reports from CU monitors suggest there are no major breakouts of disease or other new issues in this period. Typically, October through February are the best months for grazing animals and that seems to be the case this year. No quantitative assessment of the impact of the conflict on livestock has been undertaken to date, so it is unknown how much this important livelihood has been affected.

This season is also the best time of year to vaccinate animals against common diseases, but access to these supplies is highly limited. This will put herds in elevated risk of disease and death in the coming rainy season.

## **Water**

### South Kordofan

The population continues to move towards reliance on shallow hand dug wells as the dry season continues. These sources are often shared by humans and animals and pose a high probability of contamination.

No major updates in this period. Due to a lack of infrastructure and supplies, water-borne illness still threatens a community without sufficient access to healthcare. More boreholes or treated water distribution centers are badly needed.

### Blue Nile

A report from the Koma Ganza, an area on the southern bank of the Yabus river, suggests there are no functioning boreholes or improved water sources at all. This geographically isolated region has seen less infrastructure development than the already poorly developed SPLM-N controlled region of Blue Nile, and the people living here face substantial challenges. Water is primarily drawn from rivers or shallow hand-dug wells. With no access to improved water sources and highly limited access to health care, this population is at a high risk of preventable diseases.

## **Education**

### South Kordofan

Education is generally progressing in line with expectation from the previous five years, with most schools currently functioning. There remains little support to this important sector and classes often take place without access to trained teachers, sufficient school supplies, or buildings for the students.

### Blue Nile

Education in the Blue Nile continues to be severely compromised due to insecurity, lack of resources and the endurance of the humanitarian crisis. The school year still has not started despite being scheduled to begin in October 2017. The 35 bush primary schools in the area lack basic education material and qualified teachers and only five were opened as of this report date. By January 2018 only schools in Yabus Payam were open. In Chali Alfil and Wadaka Payams the community is still constructing new primary schools and is expected to open middle February 2018. More education opportunities for the children in the area are desperately needed, more so in the current situation where the conflict has the potential to affect boys of potential military stature.

## **Protection and security situation update**

### South Kordofan

Relative calm continues in South Kordofan, despite the prolonged period without a mutually agreed cessation of hostilities. The most notable incident was a fire in Umm Dorein County on Sunday 28 Jan 2018 in which 42 houses burnt down in which one women died and two women and one man sustained serious injuries. Substantial property, including critical food supplies, were also lost.

In the Western Jebels the security situation is reported as calm with a decrease in security incidents and farmers and cattle herders in all counties have improved access to their farms

### Blue Nile

The internal SPLA-N conflict in Blue Nile has generally ceased by October and relatively free movement of civilians and goods was observed within the area. This fortunately coincides with the improved accessibility of roads in the current dry season. In January 2018 safety and security is perceived as normal and calm with no incidents reported by CU monitors.

However, tension remains high as the two SPLA-N factions maintain different camps and have shown few signs of reconciliation. No high-level mediation has yet taken place and there are very few ongoing grassroots initiatives to bring these communities together. Urgent efforts are needed to bring a permanent end to this conflict and to ensure safe access of humanitarian assistance to all areas. The conflict has already left a long-term effect in the area, and the possibility of a resumption of conflict remains a fear for the population of these areas. While both sides to the conflict express their intention not to resume fighting, there are no mutually agreed cessations of hostility.