

Worrying levels of food insecurity despite the harvest season

Key points:



Over 80 percent of households in Torit have inadequate food consumption for the second consecutive month, and more than two thirds have depleted their savings and productive assets



Urban households across surveyed areas report relatively poorer food consumption and higher levels of negative food-based coping than surveyed households in rural areas



High food prices and limited farming activities are exacerbating food insecurity and preventing households access to varied diet.



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Situation update

Conflict and economic crisis continue to have a severe impact on food security in South Sudan. According to the nationwide Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring bulletin conducted in July-August 2017, about 76 percent of the population were facing moderate to severe food insecurity during the time of the survey. Moreover, in September 2017, the [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification \(IPC\) analysis](#) found that 6 million people (56 percent of the population) were severely food insecure, of which 40,000 were estimated to be facing *Catastrophe* (IPC Phase 5) conditions and 2 million were facing *Emergency* (IPC Phase 4) conditions.

The IPC projections for October-December indicate that the number of severely food insecure people will decrease to 4.8 million due to some seasonal improvement expected with the ongoing harvest. By early 2018, the food security outcomes are expected to deteriorate and the number of severely food-insecure people is estimated to increase to 5.1 million (48 percent of the population) given the persistence of conflict and poor economic conditions. Humanitarian access will remain crucial to stabilizing the food security situation and preventing further deterioration. Access to affected populations remains a challenge because of insecurity.



Poor food consumption in Torit and Magwi

Food insecurity is of serious concern in Eastern Equatoria, where conflict and fall armyworm infestations have hampered agriculture production and livelihoods. In Magwi, food consumption worsened between September and October across surveyed households, as the proportion of households with inadequate (poor or borderline) food consumption rose. In Torit, the prevalence of inadequate food consumption remained very high, with more than 80 percent of respondents reporting inadequate consumption. These mVAM findings corroborate with the latest IPC findings, which classify Torit and Magwi at *Crisis* (IPC Phase 3) level. Dire food insecurity was also reported in Juba-Munuki and Yambio, where over 50 percent of households have inadequate food consumption.

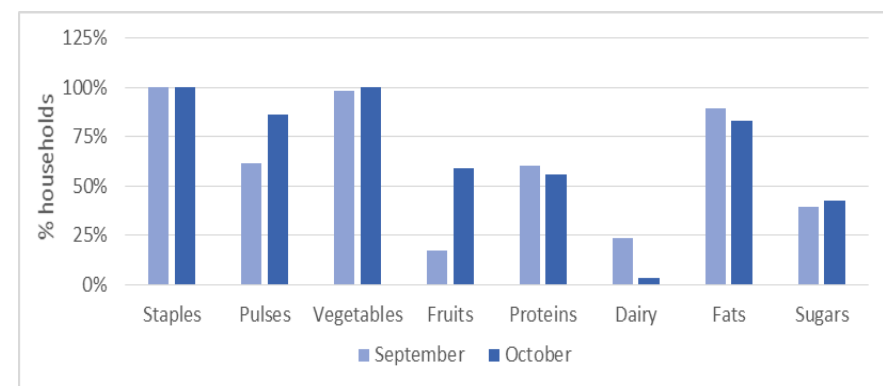


Household diet mainly consists of staples and vegetables

The mVAM October data suggest that the prevalence of inadequate food consumption remained high among households as seen in the previous round, with slight seasonal improvement noted in Western Equatoria. Overall, as shown in Figure 1, the consumption of different food groups varied little between September and October, except for fruits, pulses and dairy products. Almost all households appeared to consume no dairy products and fewer proteins in October, conversely more households appear to be consuming fruit (once a week) and pulses compared with the previous round. This trend most likely reflects the seasonal availability of local foods due to the harvest. However, farming activities and land access have been affected by the conflict, resulting in below-average post-harvest yields that are only expected to increase food availability temporarily for a minority of households who were able to cultivate. Indeed, households continue to report frequent use of negative coping strategies.

Data also suggest that rural households have relatively better food consumption, as indicated by their slightly higher consumption of proteins and pulses compared with their urban counterparts. Correspondingly, a slightly higher share of urban households (97.6 percent) reported resorting to negative coping strategies more frequently than households living in rural areas (93.3 percent).

Fig. 1: Share households consuming items from different food groups at least once a week, September and October 2017



Source: mVAM, October and September 2017

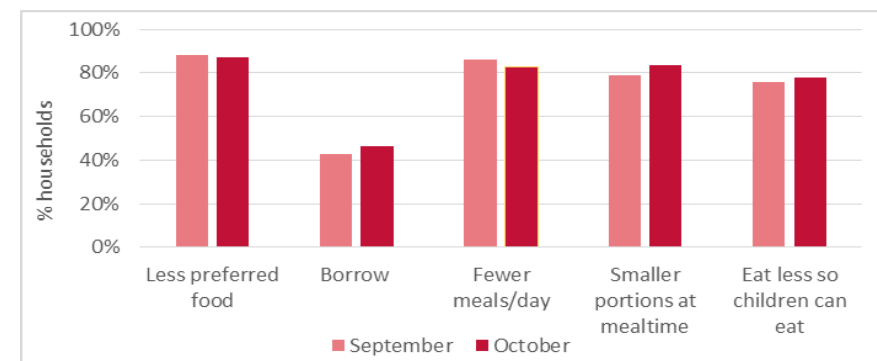


High levels of negative coping behaviour

In October, the use of negative coping strategies continued to be widespread, with nearly all surveyed households using at least one food-based coping strategy in the seven days before the survey. As illustrated in Figure 2, over 80 percent of households are eating less food and choosing cheaper and/or less preferred food as a mean of coping with a lack of food or money to buy food. Approximately 50 percent of households are resorting to borrowing food, but this is still one of the least-employed strategies.

Households in Magwi reported having used their productive assets and/or savings more frequently over the previous 30 days to cope with a lack of food or money to buy food. Additionally, over 70 percent of households in Torit and over 60 percent in Juba-Munuki and Yambio have already depleted their savings and/or productive assets and therefore can no longer employ these livelihood-based coping mechanisms should they face further shocks.

Fig. 2: Percentage of households using negative food-based coping strategies at least once a week, September and October 2017



Source: Source: mVAM, October and September 2017



Income levels fall for most households compared to last year

At the end of the survey, households were asked to report on the food security situation in their communities. Households who were able to cultivate mentioned having some food available. However, households reported that food prices in markets are very high, making it difficult to access a varied diet. Indeed, the coping strategy most frequently employed by households in October was relying on less expensive/preferred food (see Figure 2). Numerous households stated that they were not able to access their farms because of insecurity and are therefore struggling to meet their households' food needs. Households were also concerned about the lack of job opportunities and delays in salary payments.

Methodology

mVAM conducted its third round of household food security monitoring in South Sudan through live call interviews. Data collection started in early October 2017 and continued for four weeks. WFP's in-house call centre collected data from a random sample of 213 households in 7 counties (Tambura, Nzara, Ezo, Yambio, Torit, Magwi and Juba-Munuki), mostly representing urban areas in the Equatoria region, with around 30 completed surveys per county. Calls covered all mobile phone operators. The surveys were conducted in English, Arabic and other local languages including Nuer and Dinka. Participants were selected from a database of household phone numbers collected by WFP. Given network constraints, a snowball sampling approach was used to reach a larger sample size, with households recruiting other households to participate.

Respondents were asked questions on food consumption, negative coping behaviours, hunger scale and demographic information as well as an open-ended question about food security in their community. Responses are likely to be biased toward better-off households living in urban areas where there is adequate mobile phone coverage and better access to electricity and phone-charging services. Conflict and insecurity have made some areas inaccessible by telephone. This introduces an element of bias in the survey that we account for when interpreting the data. This bulletin reports indicative patterns and trends rather than precise estimates.

In the words of the respondents

- *"It's difficult; food prices are too high and people sometimes have nothing to eat" - Female respondent from Juba County*
- *"The situation is bad. Many people lost their harvest due to insecurity [as they] and were unable to access their farms" - Male respondent from Ezo County*
- *"The harvest is what most people are relying on right now, as market prices are too high" - Male respondent from Nzara County*
- *"The food situation is bad is due to the crisis. Many people were unable to cultivate. The food market prices are too expensive for people to afford, and many people have not received salaries in the last months" - Male respondent from Tambura County*



For further information

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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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