

Food security crisis in Blue Nile: 30,000 people at risk of a localised famine

Lack of rains, after sporadic falls in May 2015, have provoked the substantial disruption of maize and short-term sorghum cultivation in the payam of Wadaka and Chali (Kurmuk county) in Blue Nile. As a result, **around 30,000 people living in those areas are at risk of a localised famine.** Deaths due to malnutrition and sickness from eating inappropriate wild foods have already been reported from the Koma Ganza area, where around 15,000 people live in critical humanitarian conditions.¹ With a population of approximately 67,000, the affected communities represent more than half of the population living in the county.

According to the communities, this is the driest season of the last five years. Third party analysis of satellite data indicates that: *'In Kurmuk county, vegetative conditions and moisture levels are considerably below normal throughout much of the county in September, at a time of year when conditions are normally at their peak. Planting of the main staple crop, sorghum, typically runs through July and early August. For many farmers, persistently poor conditions in Kurmuk suggest little chance to establish a crop from this point forward.'*² For the time being, rains in nearby Yabus payam have allowed people to cultivate.

Because of the protracted conflict in Blue Nile (and South Kordofan), the coping strategies of the population in these areas are already exhausted. Any remaining productive assets, animals and items, are being sold. Very few people can still afford to buy food. Regular market monitoring indicates that staple food prices have been increasing at an above average rate since last April. Sorghum prices have more than doubled from SSP (South Sudan pound) 8.31/malwa (3 Kg) in April to SSP 19.72/malwa in August. Prices of maize and beans have more than doubled over the period as well.³ Prices in the affected areas have further increased in the past week, up to SSP 50/malwa in Wadaka, SSP 35/40 in Chali and SSP 40 in Tanfona. This latest spike in prices is due to the overwhelming demand in the face of limited supply according to local monitors. People are now mainly eating roots and wild fruits.

Sporadic rains started in Wadaka and Chali payam last week. If consistent, they should allow for the long-term sorghum to be harvested in January-February 2016. Nonetheless, **immediate assistance should be provided to these populations to contain the hunger gap** of the next four months.

Reports from the ground indicate that people might move to the refugee camps in South Sudan, if they do not receive any food supply in the next weeks. Moving to the refugee camps is the last option for these communities, who are mainly farmers, and have resisted four years of insecurity and restrictions. Refugee camps in Maban are also reporting heightened insecurity levels in the past weeks. A further exodus will also have huge political, security and financial implications on current humanitarian operations in South Sudan.

¹ SKBNCU Flash update #9 - 17 August 2015

² Food Security Monitoring in Blue Nile, Central South Kordofan and Western Jebel: A Comparative Report from August 2015 Monitoring

³ Ibid