



Food and Agriculture Organization  
of the United Nations



# FAO in South Sudan:

Emergency Livelihood Response Programme  
Lessons Learned in 2015

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## Abbreviations and Acronyms

<b>CBAHW</b>	Community-based animal health worker
<b>ELRP</b>	Emergency Livelihood Response Programme (FAO)
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
<b>FSL</b>	Food Security and Livelihoods (Cluster)
<b>HRP</b>	Humanitarian Response Plan
<b>IASC</b>	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
<b>IDP</b>	Internally displaced person
<b>ITF</b>	Input trade fair
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and evaluation
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organization

## Overview

Nearly two years into the crisis<sup>1</sup> in South Sudan, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has achieved remarkable results, faced considerable challenges and built on valuable experiences. This document presents the lessons learned by the Organization, outlines adjustments made as a result to the Emergency Livelihoods Response Programme (ELRP) and operations in 2015 and makes some recommendations to further improve the programme in 2016.

While FAO believes peace will come to South Sudan, the impact of the complex crisis is so widespread that a concerted humanitarian response will be needed into 2016, even if fighting abates and the modalities of the Peace Agreement signed in August 2015 are put in place.

## Emergency Livelihood Response Programme

The first ELRP for South Sudan was drafted in January 2014 following the outbreak of fighting, with the overall goal of contributing to protecting vulnerable crisis-hit populations against hunger, malnutrition and destitution through livelihood assistance to farmers, fishers, pastoralists and other at-risk households in conflict-affected areas. At the same time, the ELRP sought to guard against further declines in food insecurity among “vulnerable but viable” households elsewhere in South Sudan.

The ELRP was initially developed to respond to the effects of the crisis through mid-2014. From the earliest stages, FAO included elements of sustainability and resilience-building where possible; however, the main thrust of its efforts has been fundamentally life-saving. For example, fishing kits provided one day put food on the table the next.

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<sup>1</sup> In January 2014, recognizing the scale, urgency and complexity of the deepening crisis in South Sudan, FAO declared a state of “full Organizational readiness” to strengthen capacities and make internal resources immediately available for the crisis response. As the situation evolved, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) designated the crisis a Level 3 emergency response in February 2014, with FAO declaring an internal Level 3 shortly thereafter. Since then, multiple reviews and discussions have been held in Juba, at agencies’ headquarters, in New York and in major capitals. The Level 3 has now been extended six times, with IASC requests to the Humanitarian Coordinator and Humanitarian Country Team to identify exit strategies. The virtual collapse of the Government, intensified fighting in Greater Upper Nile (restricting humanitarian access and increasing the impact on communities) and a deepening economic crisis have resulted in yet another three-month extension of the system-wide Level 3 until the end of 2015. FAO has also extended the corporate Level 3 status until 11 December.

In October 2014, FAO updated the ELRP to cover the period from January 2014 to December 2015, as well as pre-positioning for 2016<sup>2</sup>. Another ELRP update is now being finalized covering the period from January 2016 to early 2017.

The crisis has become increasingly protracted: FAO has continually adapted its strategy to meet the dynamic needs of the population, implementing a multiple-track approach: response to emergency humanitarian needs through “free” assistance (survival and emergency kits) and supporting food production and food availability where the situation is relatively calm via a more development-oriented programme.

Throughout the crisis, FAO South Sudan has continued to deliver critical food security information and analysis without interruption, as well as co-leading the Food Security and Livelihood (FSL) Cluster with the World Food Programme.

## Mid-Term Review

In 2015, FAO appealed for USD 89 million in South Sudan, including pre-positioning for the 2016 planting season, through the 2015 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP). This was revised downwards to USD 65 million during the HRP mid-year review to more accurately reflect the situation and needs on the ground. Of this, FAO had received USD 27.4 million by September 2015.

FAO engaged in more than 70 partnerships in 2015, with national and international Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), as well as some technical services of the Government. At the same time, FAO has further expanded its own capacities to deliver directly where no partners operate or where partners lack appropriate technical capacities (especially on animal health). Through its own programme and its role as co-lead of the FSL Cluster, FAO has achieved significant and measurable impacts, including improving food availability and mitigating major risks of famine in 2014<sup>3</sup>.

## Achievements

FAO has stayed and delivered since the onset of the crisis – from timely food security information and analysis products made available to all stakeholders to delivery of emergency livelihood assistance, and adjustments to its development projects.

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<sup>2</sup> See “FAO Emergency Livelihood Response Programme” October 2014, October 2015.

<sup>3</sup> See September 2014 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Report (<http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-detail-forms/ipcinfo-map-detail/en/c/248105/>).



By mid-October, FAO's key accomplishments for 2015 included:

- **Delivery of emergency livelihood kits to 2.1 million people** (almost 343 000 households), including 177 343 crop kits, 154 798 vegetable kits, 104 096 fishing kits and more than 1 000 community-based animal health worker (CBAHW) kits.
- As of mid-October, **partners reported distributions of 65.5 percent of these kits** to the final beneficiaries.
- **Critical inputs (fishing hooks, monofilament and twine, short-cycle okra seeds) for 19 000 survival kits** have been included along with other life-saving support provided by humanitarian agencies to communities scattered in the bush or on islands.
- **138 325 rapid response kits** (vegetable seeds and fishing kits) were airlifted by helicopter to families in hard-to-reach areas during September and October.
- **Over 5 million animals have been vaccinated and treated** and more than 1 000 CBAHWs have been trained in all ten states and in the Abyei Administrative Area. As part of the cold chain improvement component, 16 electrical refrigerators, 48 vaccine carriers, 48 cold boxes and 100 continuous temperature monitoring devices have been distributed and are operational. In addition, 102 solar direct drives have been purchased and will be delivered before the end of November 2015. To ensure the proper maintenance and operation of the cold chain, 72 cold chain technicians and livestock officers have been trained on cold chain and vaccine management.
- **Provision of timely food security information and analysis:** FAO has continued playing a central role in shaping the narrative of the crisis. Through its food security analysis capacity, development projects, field staff and role in the FSL Cluster, FAO supports the Government and humanitarian community with the IPC analyses, which have been used to inform response planning and advocacy. Further support to data collection and analysis has included FAO's role in the Food Security Monitoring System, Emergency Food Security Assessments, Initial Rapid Needs Assessment, spot-checks and other cluster-level and sector-specific assessments such as planting, pre-harvest, post-harvest and seed availability assessments.
- **FAO audited its South Sudan programme in June and the Organization's Office of Evaluation is currently conducting an in-depth programme analysis.** The audit, the first since the crisis, showed considerable improvements compared with 2012.
- **An impact assessment also took place in 2015**, raising key issues that will help guide FAO's internal analysis to improve its programming in South Sudan. A study on the effects of the crisis on pastoral livelihoods is underway; while a gender study is due to begin soon. All the collected data will be carefully analysed and should provide a more

in-depth understanding of the vulnerabilities created by the crisis, as well as enabling better targeting based on an improved understanding of the dynamics within households. Implementing partners, as well as FAO staff in Juba and field offices, will benefit from this knowledge and apply it in their everyday work.

- **Promising new directions:** two voucher schemes were implemented in Nimule and Warrap, and demonstrated the relevance of this approach to provide nutritious food to vulnerable households, particularly internally displaced persons (IDPs), while supporting local production and economy.
- **Input trade fairs (ITFs) have been organized in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal,** as a way to distribute crop seeds to vulnerable farmers. The ITFs provide farmers with critical inputs in a timely manner and support local seed production, while reflecting their preferences in terms of crop varieties. In addition, ITFs require minimal logistics to transport inputs to the farmers. ITFs will be expanded to other areas during the 2016 emergency campaign.
- **Distribution of fuel-efficient stoves:** within the framework of the Safe Access to Fuel and Energy Initiative, FAO has distributed more than 21 000 fuel-efficient stoves (charcoal and firewood stoves) in Minkaman, Nimule and Bentiu. The stoves help to reduce the need for firewood and charcoal in the short term, thus easing pressure on forests and woodlands close to IDP settlements, while decreasing the pace of deforestation and soil erosion in the medium to long terms. Beneficiaries noted a significant reduction in expenditure on wood fuel energy and distances covered in search of firewood as a result of the distribution of the fuel-efficient stove. At the same time, the stoves help to better protect women and girls against the risk of sexual and gender-based violence associated with collecting firewood. The stoves promoted by FAO are durable, low-cost, highly portable and lightweight to allow for mobility.

FAO's activation of corporate Level 3 Standard Operating Procedures rapidly triggered the mobilization of internal cash resources, deployment of experienced technical staff from around the world, fast-track procedures for procurement, recruitment and technical clearances, and dedicated programmatic and operational support from headquarters. Key capacities were enhanced in 2014, and the structure further strengthened and stabilized throughout 2015, in terms of staff, field offices and logistical capacity. FAO has opened logistical hubs in three locations (Bor, Rumbek and Wau) and reinforced existing ones in Torit and Juba, with ten Mobile Storage Units established, facilitating pre-positioning and enabling implementing partners to collect inputs closer to their final destination, saving time and money.

## Challenges and Constraints

Even at the best of times, implementing programmes is challenging in South Sudan. The crisis added new dimensions to an already very complex operating environment in 2014, which worsened in 2015.

All input distribution in South Sudan relies on the rainy season, which makes an already very limited road system nearly totally impassable. The situation is even more challenging for agricultural and livelihood inputs that have to be delivered to beneficiaries in time for the planting or fishing seasons. Given the limited capacity for road or air transport, some of FAO's crop kits were late in reaching the farmers in 2014.

In 2015, FAO South Sudan established its own air operation, which proved to be **game changing**. Over 1 300 tonnes of inputs were delivered to partners in more than 20 different locations in Greater Upper Nile, through almost 580 flights. Thanks to the air operation, FAO was able to deliver the livelihood inputs to its partners in the most inaccessible areas of the country on time, allowing beneficiaries to plant their crops at the optimal time. Moreover, the air operation proved to be more effective and efficient compared with the use of existing mechanisms. Not only did it allow for a successful campaign, the costs were also less than those experienced in 2014.

### Procurement and pre-positioning

Procurement processes for agricultural inputs should normally start by the end of the preceding year, i.e. the purchase of inputs for the 2016 planting season should begin in late 2015. In order for this to be possible, resource partners must commit funds so that FAO can place purchase orders on time. Thanks to the favourable and early support from resource partners in late 2014, FAO was able to procure, transport and pre-position inputs in time for the 2015 season. Despite these efforts, various issues with international suppliers (delays, poor quality of inputs and lack of import legislation) almost derailed the good planning. Thanks to FAO's capacity to identify alternative sources of seeds and the newly initiated air operation, the Organization was able to overcome these challenges and get inputs to farmers in time.

### Access constraints, insecurity and crime

Operating in South Sudan is challenging at best. Conditions in the field are difficult – recurrent insecurity forces FAO staff and partners to repeatedly relocate, floods make roads impassable, rains render airstrips unusable. Some areas, especially in southern Unity and Upper Nile States,



were no longer reachable by May 2015, temporarily or for a longer time. Plans had to be adapted dozens of times, often at the last minute.

At the same time, insecurity has become increasingly problematic. In Juba, the number of attacks and robberies targeting humanitarian agencies has skyrocketed in recent months. FAO staff have also been impacted.

The unpredictability of funding often prevented FAO from offering longer-term contracts to national and international staff, relying on short-term consultants, which is not an ideal situation. In parallel, the difficult conditions in the country are not conducive to long-term commitment from international staff, with high turnover, stress and burnout continued challenges to human resource management. This has a clear impact on institutional memory and can be extremely disruptive to national staff and national stakeholders.

### Seed recollection

FAO is seeking to considerably reduce its international procurement, particularly for crop seeds, given the many challenges faced in quantity, quality and delays in importing these seeds. Instead, FAO planned to increasingly focus on national purchases. However, local suppliers are not always reliable and they too face challenges associated with logistics, including security, fuel shortages and steep price rises, and the limited banking system, further complicated by exchange rate problems. In 2015, 900 tonnes of seeds were purchased and FAO is currently reviewing the entire process to make it lighter, faster and more effective next year.

### Composition of the emergency livelihood kits

Feedback from beneficiaries last year indicated the importance of better adapting the kits to the country's different agro-ecological zones. Many beneficiaries also expressed preference for different types of hand tools. FAO therefore adapted the kits in 2015, and will include further improvements and diversity in 2016.

### Field presence, monitoring capacity and access

In terms of monitoring capacity, FAO now has a field monitoring and evaluation (M&E) specialist in each state. This allows FAO to closely follow the project activities, ensuring better support to and closer coordination with implementing partners.

Field presence and monitoring capacity is often challenged by the rapidly evolving security situation on the ground, and the difficulties in reaching some communities. The fighting in

southern Unity forced hundreds of thousands of people to run for their lives and take refuge in the marshes, in the bush or on islands. Women and children have sought shelter and protection in Bentiu Protection of Civilians Camp. Supporting them and assessing their needs has been nearly impossible, and FAO is extremely preoccupied by their condition.

### Partner availability and capacity

Effective and widespread national humanitarian coverage remains impossible in South Sudan. Poor access, fighting, logistics, insufficient funding and lack of technical staff mean that more qualified implementing partners are needed. This is especially the case in the livestock sector, which has resulted in FAO directly implementing activities in many areas.

In order to cover the wide range of reachable at-risk communities in the country, FAO has had to engage a large number of partners (currently over 70 NGO – national and international - implementing partners under more than 100 contracts). Identifying, selecting, monitoring and supporting qualified partners are labour- and time-intensive processes, with varied results. The first phase of the FAO impact assessment noted that implementing partners often struggle with effective targeting, being on the ground enough to ensure training, and effective monitoring and delivery. Partners are also affected by staff turnover, insecurity and lack of qualified staff, which is to be expected. Implementing partners also lamented the limited support received from FAO. The assessment team noted that partners had an insufficient understanding of the vulnerabilities of the beneficiaries, as well as a weak grasp of gender issues.

### Information management

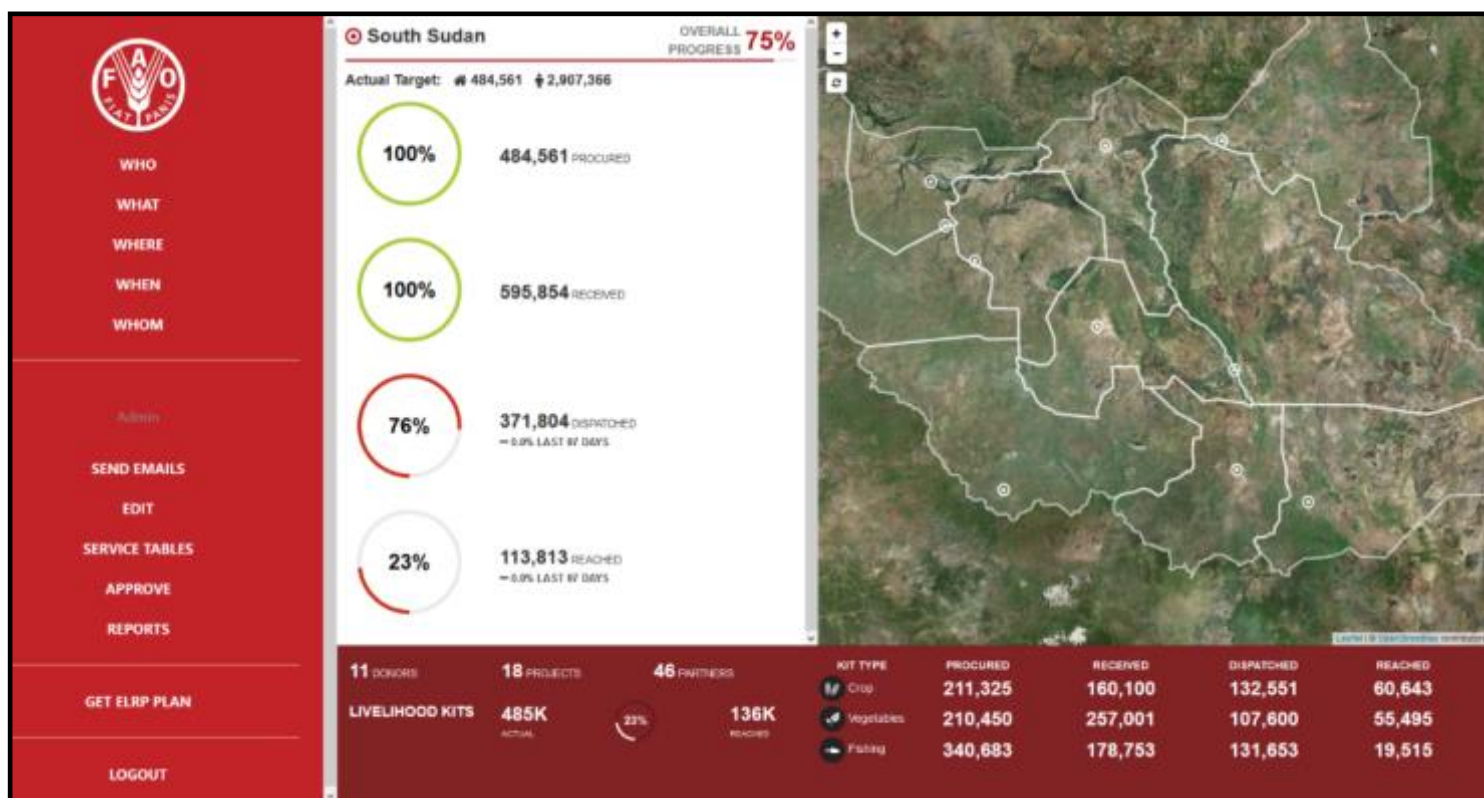
In April 2014, an assessment of the Level 3 commodity tracking and reporting system determined that FAO's pre-crisis information management systems were not adequately robust for such complex programme implementation. Since June 2014, FAO has recruited a full-time information manager to establish a strong information management system to meet the requirements of internal FAO (headquarters and national) and external (cluster, donors, implementing partners) stakeholders.

This has been achieved through the creation of a system that links information from the planning stage down to the final beneficiary. Tools have been built allowing partners to fill in goods received and goods distributed in real time through mobile and web applications. All FAO warehouses are connected to the central servers, providing information in real time about goods entering and exiting the warehouse.

## FAO's information system tracks inputs from planning to receipt by beneficiary



The information management system is linked to FAO's corporate databases, such as the procurement database. Timely reporting is done through standardized tables and a web-based dashboard.



The enhanced database structure allows the system to track five processes (planning, procurement, receiving, dispatch and distribution) by 5Ws metrics (who, what, where, when, whom) for each input (crop and vegetable seeds, tools, fishing items) distributed to beneficiaries. Partners have reported 65.5 percent actual distribution compared with using proxy data in 2014. More importantly, during the 2015 operation, the L3 Emergency Response Manager was able to make sound, evidence-based decisions such as altering the logistic plan from a road to fixed-wing transportation and implement a rapid response helicopter operation. Furthermore, the system is starting a culture change acknowledging the importance of and enhancing the availability of accurate, transparent and timely information for accountable implementation.

## Recommendations

Two years into the crisis, FAO is in a better position to reflect on its approach and the team has already reoriented and adapted all facets of the emergency response operation multiple times to improve targeting, delivery, policies and procedures. The main recommendations to be taken into account for 2016 planning and operations are outlined in the following section.

### Continuity of leadership

FAO's response to this Level 3 emergency has demonstrated that strong, continuous leadership is essential in such a crisis and should be ensured. A full-time, fully dedicated FAO Representative is critical to the successful functioning of the programme.

### Staff security and wellbeing

FAO's security team (one international and three national officers) continued to support the operation, having to intervene multiple times in issues related to (the ever-increasing) crime and traffic incidents. Call tree, fire alarm practice and multiple training sessions were organized for FAO staff and consultants in the Juba and field offices. In addition, the purchase of security equipment continues, with the objective of reaching 100 percent coverage in 2016.

FAO security should expand activities to cover operations in the field, participate in Security Risk Assessments and contribute even more to FAO's field operations.

The United Nations Development Programme stress counselor has offered support through a half-day/week presence in FAO's office in Juba, which should continue through 2016.

### Resource availability and timing

Early contributions from resource partners are of utmost importance to facilitate procurement and pre-positioning of time-critical agricultural inputs in order to overcome logistics constraints, meet cropping deadlines and provide quality seeds (e.g. for the 2016 planting season). FAO will continue to advocate with resource partners on the need for early funding support.

### Pre-positioning

Timely contributions allowed the logistics and procurement teams to strengthen field offices and build warehouse capacity, while FAO's air operations ensured that crop and vegetable seeds, fishing and veterinary kits were in beneficiaries' hands in time. This model should be extended as needed in 2016, depending on the changing context, access and security situation.

## Input availability

FAO will work with seed producers, farmers' groups, cooperatives and other stakeholders to build their capacity to produce larger quantities of quality seed for recollection or ITFs. This includes formal and informal seed production and multiplication initiatives, provision of seed cleaning equipment and advance sourcing of inputs from well-performing partners. This would also increase the resilience of the farmers, and support local markets.

FAO is already analysing issues faced during the 2015 local seed recovery schemes. For example, quality and quantity did not always meet the required standards, and the suppliers faced significant logistical challenges. FAO will procure substantially more crop seeds in-country. However, there needs to be a better screening of the suppliers, as well as a streamlining of the purchase modalities, especially payments.

The availability of required commodities on the international market should be confirmed *prior* to finalizing procurement plans as much as possible. The FAO Representations in the region<sup>4</sup>, coordinated by the FAO headquarters Procurement Unit, should further develop a common approach and avoid competition for inputs in a tight market. Such coordination could involve physical warehouse inspections of all suppliers to check available quantities and quality in advance of FAO South Sudan confirming orders, analysis of quantities needed by different country offices, cross-checking amounts really available, etc. Coordinating with NGO partners or the International Committee of the Red Cross, who are purchasing similar inputs for South Sudan, could be supported by the FSL Cluster.

A buffer stock should be procured again in excess of the planned quantities to enable FAO to respond to unplanned needs/requirements beyond planned targets. (This could be included in Central Emergency Response Fund or Common Humanitarian fund projects.)

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<sup>4</sup> The FAO Representations in Kenya and Uganda have been particularly supportive to FAO South Sudan throughout the crisis.

## Emergency livelihood kits

The FAO impact assessment noted that crop seed kits were not always appropriate as:

- the kit requires further adaptation to the local agro-ecological zones;
- some beneficiaries did not receive the whole amount in quantity or number of varieties; and
- in places where insecurity is high and men are defending the community, recruited to armed forces or away, reaching distant fields can be a significant constraint to production. When women, the elderly or teens are responsible for planting, they cannot always manage a large area and often feel safer with vegetable or fishing kits, as vegetables and fish can be produced, consumed or sold relatively rapidly.

While the fishing and vegetable kits are very important and well regarded, a general loss of knowledge on how best to use them has been observed among beneficiaries. This issue should be discussed with beneficiaries and implementing partners so that relevant technical training or leaflets can be provided where and when possible. Some of the vegetable varieties are new and must be better presented to recipients (such as through farmer field schools, demonstration plots, extension, monitoring visits and nutrition training).

## Partner capacity and availability

FAO should enhance its capacity to assess its partners with the objective of working with a smaller number of higher performing partners. Where there are no credible partners, FAO should continue undertaking direct implementation.

In 2015, FAO trained partners on M&E, accountability to affected populations and reporting, as well as on various technical issues. By analysing partners' 2015 performance, FAO could further address gaps in their knowledge and adapt 2016 training sessions accordingly.

## Understanding of vulnerabilities and targeting

County-level targeting is determined at Juba level by the FAO office and the FSL Cluster, based on the IPC reports and various assessments carried out by Cluster partners in the different areas of the country. In 2016, FAO plans to more systematically use seed security assessments to inform the decision-making related to county-level targeting for seed assistance, as farmers may have different sources of seeds beyond humanitarian assistance.

Village- and *payam*-level targeting is mainly agreed at state level through coordination between FAO and other stakeholders. Often, targeting of *payams* and villages is limited by access.



Household-level targeting does not follow specific criteria that defines vulnerability, based instead on general definitions of limited access to food and agricultural inputs and depletion of physical assets for agricultural activities. The targeting of households is challenged by the many sources of vulnerability for the households and widespread loss of livelihood assets. More often, the implementing partners use a targeting strategy linked to the capacity of recipient households (skills-based targeting), as likely better use of the kits leads to better outcomes, with benefits indirectly expanding to the rest of the community (i.e. through increased local availability of food). However this targeting strategy implies higher risks of excluding the most vulnerable households.

FAO plans to carry out training sessions and workshops with its implementing partners to develop a better understanding of vulnerabilities using the sustainable livelihoods framework approach. This will help partners to define more specific criteria for the selection of households to be supported.

### Quality and delivery control

FAO has notably increased its capacity to monitor inputs from the time they leave FAO's warehouses to their actual use by beneficiaries.

Detailed reports from partners regarding losses experienced during transportation, storage or airdrops should be required from all partners in order to enable FAO to be fully accountable to both beneficiaries and resource partners.

Introduced in 2014, FAO has expanded the use of mobile phones in 2015 to ensure a more efficient M&E system in terms of data collection, processing and analysis and greater accountability (GPS localization and pictures of the households interviewed for monitoring purpose). In 2016, FAO plans to support, on a small scale, the best performing partners for the use of mobile phone in monitoring activities.

## Information management

FAO should further enhance the information management system by:

- expanding and incorporating the tracking and reporting to other activities, specifically livestock, ITFs, voucher schemes and seed recollection;
- implementing mobile applications for inventory control of all FAO warehouses;
- harmonizing definitions, procedures and information sharing with stakeholders (FAO headquarters, resource partners, implementing partners, FSL Cluster, Government);
- training implementing partners on best practice tracking and reporting;
- applying “Open Data” principles to external stakeholders with access to non-confidential information; and
- creating a learning and knowledge forum to collect and analyse information to maximize its utility.

## Resilience

Over the last two years, the crisis in South Sudan has become deeper and more complex. Fighting, displacement and an economic downturn have affected the country’s entire population to some extent. While committed to responding to urgent humanitarian needs, FAO is also devoting considerable attention to understanding these mechanisms and providing relevant and sustainable solutions. Various assessments have flagged changing household dynamics, a loss of technical knowledge across the board, extremely high post-harvest losses and the need for better conservation and processing of production, identified as crucial by households, communities and partners. In 2016, FAO’s activities will include a set of responses aimed at addressing these issues in order to enable beneficiaries to enhance their resilience and capacity to rebound after shocks.

Depending on prevailing conditions, this could translate into the following actions:

- **conservation and processing:** training and technical support to ensure that cereal and vegetable crops, as well as fish, are better cleaned, stored, dried or transported to markets;
- **storage:** basic training to improve capacity and practices;
- **managing post-harvest losses:** nutrition training and provision of basic equipment;
- **adequate training for implementing partners and communities** to enable them to make the most of the inputs received in terms of production, as well as their use and sale; and
- **marketing:** the market and trade structure has collapsed in South Sudan, severely restricting the accessibility and availability of basic necessities. While FAO is not in a position to rebuild everything, increasing access and availability and supporting income-generating activities, as well as addressing value chains should have an overall positive impact.

## Conclusions

Despite numerous and immense challenges and thanks to the generous support from resource partners, FAO South Sudan and its implementing partners have been able to provide over 2.1 million vulnerable South Sudanese with survival and emergency livelihood support in 2015. Looking ahead to 2016 and beyond, FAO is regularly adapting its response and improving the quality of assistance provided to affected beneficiaries. Based on lessons learned over the past months, FAO has already taken action to improve both its own and partners' performance in order to better support affected populations and make the most effective and efficient use of resource partner contributions.

