



The food and livelihood security implication of influx of returnees to South Sudan

Current challenge and the way forward

2. Overview

The return of hundreds of thousands of South Sudanese in anticipation of independence of Southern Sudan affect the food and livelihood security situation of both the resident community and the returnees. This massive influx has caused severe shortages of food and social services that include water, shelter, and health care. Access to affordable food is proving difficult for returnees and the resident community. As demand for resources increase, the prices of food commodities such as cereals have risen sharply.

People are already feeling the strain as the social services are failing to cope with the influx. The situation has been more exacerbated due to the recent border blockade imposed by the north Sudan Government that resulted in high increase of fuel price and disruption of movement of commodities from neighboring countries as well as within Southern Sudan. This has further strained the availability and access of food and nonfood commodities

This policy brief assesses the food security implications related to the influx of returnees and highlights policy directions that need to be considered by the government and development partners in the short and medium term in order to address the challenges being faced by the returnees.

2. Food security challenges

The cumulative figure of returnees at the end of May 2011 was 302,700 people (OCHA Humanitarian update, 2nd June 2011) and more returnees are expected to arrive before and after 9 July 2011, the date when South Sudan will officially declare its independence from the North. The States which received vast majority of the returnees were Unity, Northern Bahri El Ghazal, Upper Nile, and Warrap States respectively (see Figure 1). Increased number of returnees resulted in increasing market prices of food as the returnees depend entirely on market for their food with little support from the relatives. This may compel the vulnerable groups to sell their assets brought from Northern Sudan or elsewhere for accessing food from food the markets.

Figure 1: Percentage of number of returns by States

No.	States	% of arrivals by States
1	Unity	23
2	NBEG	21
3	Upper Nile	16
4	Warrap	12
5	CES	11
6	Jonglei	7
7	WBEG	5
8	Lakes	5

Source: the percentage is calculated based on the number of returns indicated UN OCHA first quarter 2011 report ,

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According to WFP's recent assessment report that covers Western Bahr El Ghazal, Northern Bahr El Ghazal, Unity, Jonglei, Warrap and Central Equatoria, concerns regarding the food security of returnees during the lean season (May to July) are growing. The assessment revealed that 18 per cent (48,000) of all returnees are severely food insecure (compared to 6 per cent of residents) and another 43 per cent (114,000) are moderately food insecure (compared to 28 per cent of residents)¹.

Similar assessment conducted by CHF in Central and Eastern equatorial States revealed that food insecurity is the most consistently expressed need amongst both returnees and host communities. The report further described that influx of returnees has dramatically increased the price of goods in the market and reduced the availability of key food items. Where households already spend the majority of their limited income on food purchase and agricultural inputs for crop production, increasing prices and supply shortages imply potential food insecurity in coming months².

As more returnees continue to arrive, they increasingly strain the access to resources among the host communities and in some cases causing tensions, such as in Twic and Melut counties³. A January/February assessment by Mercy Corps in Aweil East County (Northern Bahr El Gazal State), Twic County (Warrap State), Mayom County and Bentiu (Unity State) and Renk, Melut and Akoka Counties (Upper Nile State) indicate numerous challenges faced by returnees, including lack of transportation to final destinations; ad hoc and unclear land policies; localized conflicts; complete dependence on short-term food and non-food assistance; insufficient basic services; and weak livelihood systems and opportunities for quick re-integration and establishment of livelihoods. Coping strategies used by returnees include a range of petty trade activities such as selling tea, brewing, brick making, grass and firewood sales, especially in Northern Bahr El Gazal state. Many of these opportunities do not exist in other parts of Upper Nile (Renk) and Jonglei⁴.

3. Food aid assistance and livelihood support options

After returnees are registered and verified, the World Food Programme (WFP) provides them with an initial three-month supply of food assistance. Since December 2010, WFP has been feeding more than 70,000 returnees⁵. The duration of assistance is based on the presumption that within three months returnees will be able to reintegrate and feed themselves; in practice, however, returnees do not necessarily know how to farm or are not interested in farming after living in urban environments for decades. Even those who want to farm need agricultural land which is not readily available or requires them to acquire permission from a local chief first⁶.

¹ WFP, Emergency Food Security Assessment for Returnees (South Sudan), May 2011.

² CHF International, South Sudan Returnees and Host Community Assessment Report, June 2011.

³ FEWS NET, Sudan Food Security Outlook, Feb –June 2011

⁴ IBID 3, page 3

⁵ IBID 2, page 4

⁶ IDMC and NRC: http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/F_R_63.pdf

The WFP report⁷ indicated that main community priorities identified in the focus group discussions were food assistance (62 percent), drinking water and health services (32 percent). In addition to other social needs, communities also expressed interest in learning new skills or improve on already acquired skills more especially in carpentry and sewing, followed by handicrafts, bee keeping, metal work and masonry. There was also interest on various levels of skills around agriculture (vegetable gardening) and fishing-this includes actual fishing practices and making fishing nets.

Returnees from Darfur generally have more experience with farming, as it was their livelihood while there. However, they need access to local markets where they can sell their agricultural products and buy others. Returnees from Khartoum, on the other hand, spent decades in urban settings where they often worked as casual labourers. These returnees want to stay in towns and to do so need appropriate livelihoods support.⁸

The WFP report revealed that fish constitutes an important protein source and as well as income for many communities living near fishing grounds. The report indicated that 93 percents of the surveyed communities have accessible fishing grounds, mostly river water (82 percent) or swamp (52 percent). Fishing as a possible new income source was also one of the areas of interest for several communities. There was also interest to learn how to make fishing tools, such as nets as lack of fishing gear was reported by some communities.

4. Conclusion and recommendations

As discussed above there are various issues that need to be addressed by the Government of South Sudan and development partners in order to tackle the problems that returnees are facing. Designing and implementing strategies that could alleviate the food insecurity problems of returnees in short and long-term basis are crucially important. The following issues in this regards require special considerations.

- Returnees should be seen as bringing valuable skills to South Sudan labour market. Thus, appropriate action should be taken to get maximum use of these skills and knowledge through creating policy environment that will encourage the returnees to engage in productive income generating activities. This can be done through provision of grants and micro- credit schemes.
- Land allocation is crucial for returnees to be able to integrate or reintegrate in host communities and to start livelihood activities. The GoSS should have a clear national policy on land allocation to returnees. It is also important that States have clear policy guideline for allocation of urban and rural land to returnees in order to facilitate speedy integration.
- The current short term (3 month) initial food assistance scheme needs to be reconsidered to extend food assistance to returnees beyond the three-month assistance

⁷ IBID 1, page18

⁸ IBID 3, page 4

- Ministry of Agricultural and Forestry in collaboration with UN agencies and Non-governmental organisations need to take immediate action in providing agricultural inputs that include seeds and farm implements for returnees who want to engage in farming. Furthermore, provision of fishing equipment and veterinary supplies will be necessary.
- Capacity building activities for those who want to engage in farming is critically important to start farming activities. Ministry of Agricultural and Forestry in collaboration with development partners need to give due attention in providing agricultural advisory (extension) service to the returnees engaged in farming.
- Government and development partners need to take action to ensure returnees' access to markets, for instance by improving roads to market centers.
- Non-farming livelihood interventions that include micro-finance programmes need to be incorporated into the returnees support programmes in order to address the skilled and urban based returnees who wish to engage in non-agricultural livelihood support activities.
- Urgent measures need to be taken to stabilize food commodity price in areas of greater returnee concentration. This may include humanitarian assistance to vulnerable population, improving fuel supply and support to the private sector such as credit and tax relief to increase the supply of food in the market.