



Food Security in South Sudan

Paul A. Dorosh

20 February 2017

For various reasons, South Sudan faces serious problems of food insecurity. What are the possible solutions to this issue?

South Sudan faces serious problems of food insecurity due to low per capita levels of domestic food production, periodic droughts, widespread poverty, political unrest, and, since late 2013, renewed armed conflict between the central government and rebel forces led by former vice-President Riek Machar. Moreover, large fiscal deficits and expansionary monetary policy have led to high rates of inflation, balance of payments deficits and a sharp depreciation of the South Sudanese pound. This in turn has resulted in an economic crisis that has further worsened household welfare. In this context, enhancing food security (physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food for all people at all times) will require a multi-faceted set of public and private investments, sound policies and targeted interventions for especially vulnerable households.

South Sudan's Food Insecurity

Much of South Sudan receives little rainfall and only 5 percent of the arable land is currently cultivated. Nonetheless, the country has significant potential for increased cereal production, especially in the southern regions with the highest annual rainfall. Sorghum and maize account for most of the country's domestically produced cereal, but there is little marketable surplus due to small farm size, low productivity and weak market incentives for sales.

Accurate data on crop area and production for South Sudan are scarce, and there is considerable uncertainty in the estimates, particularly since the renewal of armed conflict. According to annual FAO/WFP [supply estimates](#),

Latest

An Update on the Security Policy Change Programme

Chances for Peace in the Third Decade

A Story of ORG: Oliver Ramsbotham

A Story of ORG: Gabrielle Rifkind

Most read

The Role of Youth in Peacebuilding: Challenges and Opportunities

Making Bad Economies: The Poverty of Mexican Drug

food production increased rapidly in recent years, from 660 thousand tons in 2009/10 to nearly 900 thousand tons in 2014/15, an average growth rate of 9.6 percent per year, due mainly to expansion of area harvested by 5.5 percent per year.

Figure 1—South Sudan Cereal Production, 2009/10 – 2014/15

sudan-figure-1

Source: Based on FAO/WFP data.

Alternative estimates of production derived from the household consumption data (2009 NBHS) suggest cereal production was 21 percent higher than the 2008/90 FAO/WFP estimate. Estimates of trade flows derived from the 2009 National Baseline Household Survey consumption figures, suggest that imports were a major source of supply just prior to Independence, reaching perhaps 700 thousand tons in that year.

Independence and the nearly complete disruption of trade with northern Sudan resulted in a major shift in the composition of cereal imports between 2009 and 2013, however. In 2009, cereal imports (mainly sorghum) totaled about 700 thousand tons, mostly from northern Sudan. By 2013, cereal imports had risen to nearly one million tons, with sorghum imports following from about 450 thousand tons to 320 thousand tons, while maize imports rose to 580 thousand tons, with imports of rice and wheat each totaling about 200 thousand tons.

Table 1—South Sudan Estimated Cereal Production, Consumption and Imports ('000 tons), 2009 and 2013



Cartels


ORG's Vision

Remote Warfare: Lessons Learned from Contemporary Theatres

Source: Adapted from Table 2 in Dorosh et al., 2016.

Perhaps not surprisingly given the large private sector import flows, maize and sorghum prices in South Sudan are closely linked with prices in northern Uganda.

Figure 2—South Sudan: Domestic and Import Parity Prices of Maize, 2008-15

 Notes: The exchange rate of the South Sudanese Pound (SSP) to the US Dollar in January, 2015 was 2.95. Source: Adapted from Figure 3 (Dorosh et al., 2016).

Notes: The exchange rate of the South Sudanese Pound (SSP) to the US Dollar in January, 2015 was 2.95.

Source: Adapted from Figure 3 (Dorosh et al., 2016).

Consumption of maize was nearly to that of sorghum (75.1 and 78.7 kgs/capita per year, respectively), as per capita maize consumption rose by 113 percent, while per capita sorghum consumption fell by 33 percent. Rice and wheat consumption also increased sharply, from 3.2 and 2.3 kgs/capita per year, respectively, in 2009 to 21.4 and 16.8 kgs/capita per year in 2013 – a 574 percent increase in per capita rice consumption and a 647 percent increase in per capita wheat consumption. The 2009 NHBS data, still the only source for detailed information on consumption patterns in South Sudan, show significant variation in consumption patterns across households. Throughout South Sudan, sorghum and maize are generally the major cereals consumed. Sorghum is the predominant cereal in rural areas, particularly in the north, while in Juba, maize and wheat are more widely consumed.

Figure 3—South Sudan Average Monthly Kilogram Cereal Consumption Per Person

south-sudan-figure-3

Source: Calculated using data from South Sudan National Baseline Household Survey, 2009.

Livestock are also a major source of income and food consumption in South Sudan, as well as a store of wealth, but the data on livestock are even more uncertain than the cereal data. Nationally, there were an estimated 11.74 million cattle in 2009, an average of 1.34 animals per person. Ownership is higher in the northern regions than in the south (1.58 and 0.88 animals per person, respectively). In 2013, approximately 45 percent of the population lived in households that consumed dairy products; consumption per capita in the northern regions is twice that of the south.

Looking ahead


oxfam-south-sudan

Image credit: [Oxfam International](#).

In the medium term, increasing production of both crops and livestock is essential for food security in South Sudan, not only to reduce reliance on imports, but also to raise incomes of farmers. Rapid expansion of agricultural extension services, provision of improved seeds and increased fertilizer availability have led to large increases in agricultural production in neighboring Ethiopia, and have the potential to do likewise in South Sudan. Complementary investments in rural roads and other road infrastructure are also required, along with funds for maintenance.

In the short term, though, food aid and targeted relief programs are badly needed to reduce the high levels of malnutrition in for the country as currently 31 percent of children under five are stunted and 23 percent are wasted. A national food security reserve system that ultimately would be supplied by domestic procurement of cereals was also proposed before the recent unrest, but such a system may take years to develop.

In addition, maintaining incentives for the private sector import trade is essential to boost availability of cereals and minimize large spikes in prices. This would require a return to macro-economic stability in terms of both domestic inflation and exchange rates, as well as availability of foreign exchange. Keeping border controls and tariffs on cereal imports to a minimum could also help minimize transactions costs. Finally, none of these policies and investments will be effective in substantially improving food security without an end to armed conflict. Food security is possible for the people of South Sudan, but only with a restoration of peace, major new investments and sound government policies.

Paul A. Dorosh is the Division Director of IFPRI's Development Strategy and Governance Division. His previous positions include IFPRI Senior Research Fellow and Program Leader of the Ethiopia Strategy Support Program in Addis Ababa (2008-2010), Senior Economist at the World Bank (2003-2008), senior research fellow with IFPRI in Dhaka, Bangladesh (1997-2001) and Associate Professor at Cornell University (1994-97). He holds a Ph.D. in Applied Economics from the Food Research Institute, Stanford University and a B.A. in Applied Mathematics from Harvard University, and has published research on agricultural markets, food policy, international trade, economy-wide modeling and the rural-urban transformation.

Share this page



Contact

Unit 503
101 Clerkenwell Road London
EC1R 5BX
Charity no. 299436
Company no. 2260840

Email us

020 3559 6745

Follow us



Useful links

- [Login](#)
- [Contact us](#)
- [Sitemap](#)
- [Accessibility](#)
- [Terms & Conditions](#)
- [Privacy policy](#)