



A woman waits for food in Mingkaman, Lakes state, April 2014. Pablo Tosco/Oxfam.

FROM CRISIS TO CATASTROPHE

South Sudan's man-made crisis – and how the world must act now to prevent catastrophe in 2015

More than two million people are facing severe food insecurity in South Sudan. Famine has been narrowly avoided in 2014. As the dry season begins, the brutal conflict that provoked this disaster is about to get worse. Without an end to the fighting – and unless more aid can be delivered to those who need it – famine remains a serious threat in 2015. By committing to more vigorous diplomacy and swift action, the world has the chance to prevent that.

SUMMARY: DRIVEN TO HUNGER

South Sudan is facing the world's worst food crisis, driven by the conflict that erupted in December 2013. Unless there is an end to the fighting, this food crisis will continue. Without far stronger international pressure, the conflict is unlikely to be resolved. International diplomacy – as well as aid and the protection of civilians on the ground – is urgently needed.

The scale of current suffering in South Sudan is vast; the malnutrition situation has been officially branded as 'dire'.² 1.7 million people³ – one in every seven – have already fled their homes, including over 450,000⁴ who have sought safety in other countries. In some areas, one in three children is malnourished – a level usually seen only during famine.⁵ In others, it is almost one in two, and half of those dying among displaced people are children under five.⁶ By the end of September, experts reported that the food situation 'is much worse compared to a typical year at harvest time'.⁷ In 2015, agencies predict that the situation will worsen significantly. The most recent forecast suggests that the number of severely hungry people will rise by 1 million between January and March 2015, and that by March, around half of the population in the most conflict-affected states of Unity, Upper Nile and Jonglei may be struggling to find enough food, or at risk of starvation.⁸

The disaster in South Sudan is the result of a political dispute between two leaders that has escalated into a conflict engulfing much of the world's newest nation. This conflict is rooted in the unresolved tensions of two decades of civil war in what was Sudan. It is exacerbated by the proliferation of arms and the lack of development in one of the poorest countries in the world. Men, women and children have been targeted because of their ethnicity and forced to flee, often several times. They have lost loved ones, their few belongings, and their livelihoods. South Sudan's high hopes after independence in 2011 are in tatters.

2014

However, 2014 could have been even worse. Many South Sudanese people have once again demonstrated their ability to survive in the most terrible circumstances. The international response – although it has been insufficient – has saved thousands of lives. The aid that has reached people has reversed trends towards famine in some areas.¹⁰ The UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) has, for the first time, opened its compounds to over 100,000 civilians. By doing so it has saved hundreds of lives. The regional body, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), has led negotiations for peace, attempting to ensure an inclusive process. On three occasions it has convinced the warring parties to agree to end hostilities, but the violence on the ground continues.¹¹ Some donor governments have also been generous, with over 60 per cent of aid currently being funded by the US, the UK and the EU alone.¹²

'Before the conflict ... life was good. We cultivated crops and kept cattle, and we had enough to eat... Today I have no cows and no land. I rely on humanitarian organizations. We will only go home when there is peace.'

Gabriel, displaced man, Awerial, Lakes state¹

'Nothing can take me back home, unless peace comes.'

Martha, displaced woman, UN camp, Juba⁹

Despite this, vast suffering continues as the war disrupts trade routes and markets, particularly in Upper Nile, Unity and Jonglei states. Violence has left farmers unable to sow or harvest their crops, fishermen barred from rivers, and herders left destitute as their cattle have been stolen, slaughtered, or sold off at less than their usual value. The sheer number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing violence has placed previously poor but self-sufficient communities under strain as they share what little they have.

'If there is no peace, then we will all die of hunger.'

Simon, displaced man, Ganyiel, Unity state¹³

The violence has often been extreme. Some women have reportedly been 'raped to death'.¹⁴ Both parties to the conflict have committed massacres targeting specific ethnic groups, as in Juba in December 2013 and Bentiu in April 2014.¹⁵ UNICEF estimates that over 9,000 child soldiers have been recruited into armed forces and groups since the fighting broke out.¹⁶ Many people, especially women, face danger when searching for food.

As 36 agencies working in South Sudan, we understand that the conflict and the food crisis are inextricably linked. For this reason, the solution needs to go beyond the provision of more aid (although this is urgently needed), but must ensure an end to violence and a sustainable peace as well. That is the urgent message of this paper – before the crisis gets worse in the coming months.

2015

The prospects for 2015 look grim. Both sides are fighting for military gains to influence political negotiations, and are willing to continue fighting for a long time to achieve these. Strategic towns in Unity, Upper Nile and Jonglei states have been taken and retaken, showing the tenacity of government and opposition forces alike. Reports are emerging that both sides have taken advantage of the rainy season – which lasts on average from April to October and closes nearly two-thirds of the country's roads and tracks to vehicles – to regroup and plan for renewed fighting. With the onset of the dry season from October onwards, fighting is likely to resume before next year's rainy season begins in April.

'Sometimes I feel so weak I worry I will not have enough milk for the baby. Sometimes I'm so weak I feel like I'm going to collapse.'

Elisabeth, displaced woman, Awerial, Lakes state¹⁷

Many communities have only survived 2014 by using up their resources – selling their assets, or relying on wild fruits and plants, and, as a last resort, killing their livestock. This will make 2015 much more difficult. Even if there is progress in the political negotiations between the conflict parties, this situation – alongside the disruption of markets and trade routes and the sheer number of displaced people in South Sudan – mean that people will struggle to rebuild their lives. Although today many people are scraping by, selling belongings and sharing what little they have, their resources are steadily running out. This leaves them less able to cope during the so-called 'lean season' (a period of routine scarcity between harvests, usually from May to August).

International aid has had a significant and measurable positive impact on people's lives.¹⁸ Food distributions have often made the difference in people being able to eat even one meal a day, while clean water has prevented more serious outbreaks of disease. However, around \$400m

is still needed to support the current food security needs in South Sudan. Almost one-third of South Sudanese are in need of direct food aid, while almost two-thirds are in need of livelihoods support.¹⁹ The UN World Food Programme estimates that \$78m is needed to deliver assistance each month of the rainy season.²⁰

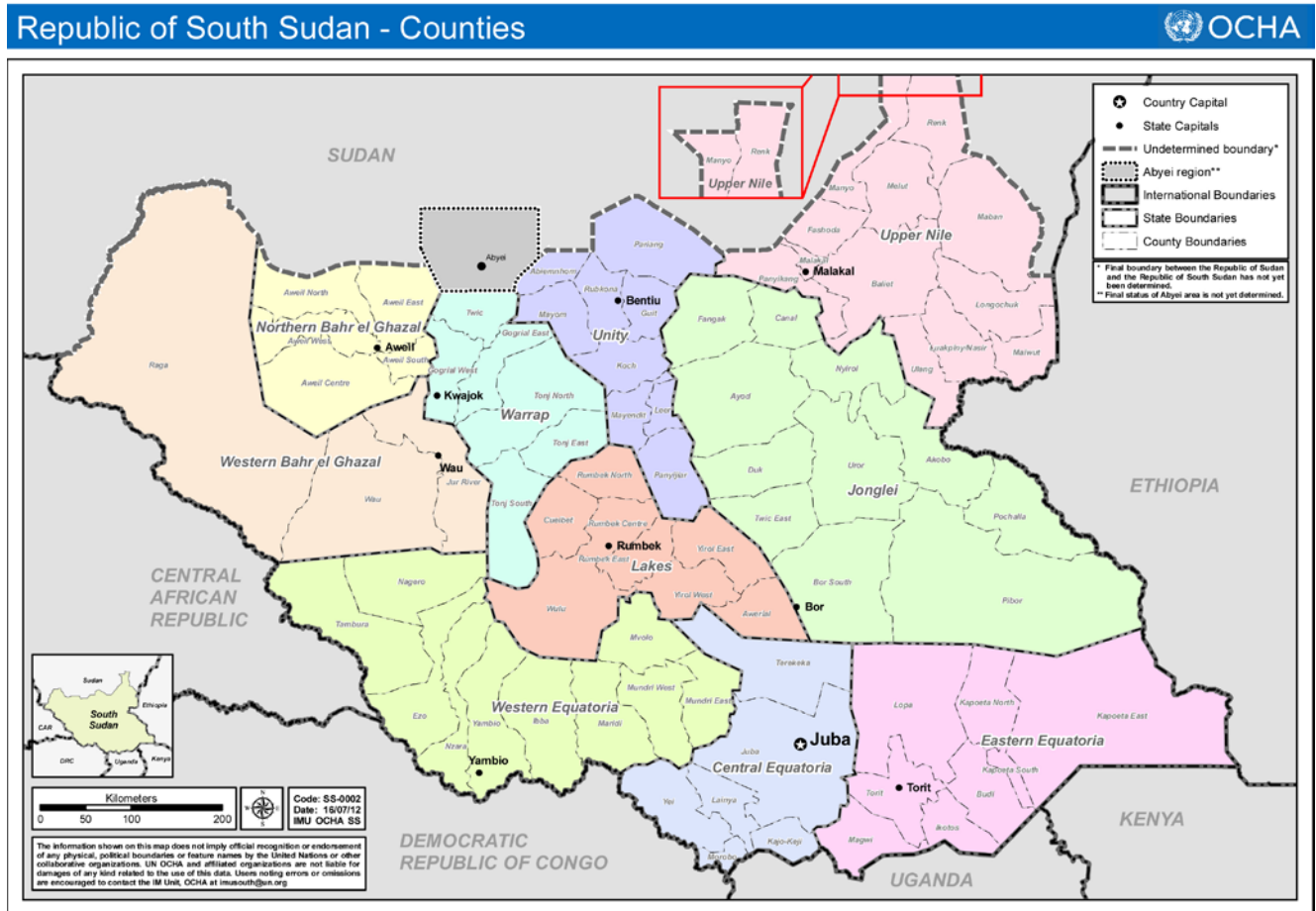
Immediate and sustained action is needed – to scale up aid commitments, and to pursue diplomatic solutions to the conflict. Most aid is being delivered to places which can be reached relatively easily, not necessarily to the places where the most vulnerable people are located. Displaced and vulnerable populations need to be able to receive aid in the places where they are sheltering, including in remote rural areas far from formal camps. Humanitarian agencies must continue to improve the quantity and quality of their aid, reaching these hard-to-access areas as well as doing more in UNMISS bases. The efficiency of aid could be improved through agencies coordinating more effectively with each other, and withdrawing from places with adequate coverage. Consistency in standards and joint commitments to working more closely together would also mean that aid agencies could reach more people with the same amount of resources.

UNMISS should also do more to implement its mandate to protect civilians, including beyond its bases. To do this, UNMISS could undertake long-range patrols, patrol on foot, and make better use of its civilian resources to identify threats to communities. While UNMISS can never be everywhere, it must prioritize actions that will protect people from violence and help them reach food in safety. More active patrolling to help women reach markets without being attacked or harassed is one such priority.

Altogether, the scale of South Sudan's crisis requires exceptional and expensive measures including airdrops and heavy logistics in the rainy season in particular, as well as far more support to help people build up their assets and support their markets to recover. All donor governments – not just a few – must rise to that challenge. Countries such as Belgium and Austria, which until now have given little, must stop leaving it to a handful of others to be generous. Several donors, such as Qatar, Turkey and Egypt, have made aid pledges for the first time. These countries should now honour their commitments.²¹ All donors must support the neighbouring countries that are hosting South Sudan's refugees, while those countries should keep their borders open to accept refugees.

This crisis will not be ended with more aid alone. The world must protect South Sudan's people from violence, as well as from the threat of famine. Unless the violence ends, the threat of famine will never be far away. The international community should take a far stronger stance towards the leaders of South Sudan. The African Union (AU) should be more involved. The UN Security Council should impose an embargo on the arms and ammunition that are sustaining the conflict, and ensure that it is rigorously enforced. And every political negotiation should focus on the most important priorities: overcoming the obstacles that South Sudan's people face in reaching aid; ending the violence immediately; and searching for a sustainable political solution.

Figure 1: Republic of South Sudan - Counties



Source: United Nations

1 A COUNTRY'S POTENTIAL SHATTERED BY CONFLICT

South Sudan's conflict and food crisis were not inevitable. The world's newest country has enormous potential. Seventy per cent of its land is suitable for agriculture.²² In the 1980s, Sudan exported more food than it imported, much of it produced in the southern states of what is now South Sudan.²³ However, two decades of civil war until 2005 brought destruction and human displacement, disrupted markets and a lack of investment in infrastructure. By 2012, only four per cent of South Sudan's land was being cultivated.²⁴

During the civil war, armed groups used starvation as a weapon of war. According to Human Rights Watch, these included factions led by the future President Kiir and the now former Vice President Machar of South Sudan.²⁵ In 1998, 100,000 people died in Bahr El Ghazal in a famine caused by failing rains compounded by conflict – or more precisely the intentional destruction of agriculture and markets, diversion of food aid, denial of humanitarian access, and armed groups holding the population hostage.²⁶

In 2005, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was meant to end all such atrocities. It ended the north–south war, but left many deep tensions unresolved, including within what became South Sudan. Before and after independence in 2011, the new country's leaders and the international donor community focused on building the new state and its institutions, and repairing relations between South Sudan and Sudan. Far less priority was given to resolving local conflicts, tackling the proliferation of arms, or providing basic services for all of South Sudan's people.²⁷ As a result, some groups felt they lacked a stake in the 'peace' or independence that had been won.

In 2011, South Sudan was still one of the poorest nations in the world. The battle against poverty and food insecurity was always going to be immensely difficult and long. South Sudan's new government did not prioritize much-needed investment in agriculture, infrastructure (such as roads and storage facilities), and basic services. In 2013, it spent only six per cent of its budget on health and education, and just 0.7 per cent on agriculture. It spent 55 per cent on security and law enforcement.²⁹ Despite this, 2013 saw the highest agricultural production for some years, though more than a third of the population still did not have enough to eat. Indeed, before conflict erupted in December 2013, South Sudan was making progress – albeit fragile and uneven – against hunger. In 2012, crop production in the traditional sector was six per cent above the five-year average, while it was 22 per cent above this average in 2013.³⁰

'Without proper funding to the Ministry of Agriculture, we are not going to eradicate hunger and poverty.'

Beda Machar Deng, Minister of Agriculture²⁸

In 2014, however, the conflict has thrown this progress into reverse.³¹ Although the Government has budgeted 367m South Sudanese Pounds [SSP] (\$120m)³², three percent of planned expenditure, for agriculture in 2014/15, in contrast, almost SSP 4bn (\$1.3bn) is budgeted for security.³³ At the same time, South Sudan has remained heavily dependent on oil revenues. In 2014/15 these are expected to account for 77 per cent of government revenues,³⁴ which makes government spending vulnerable to any decrease in oil production.

Box 1: Arms and ammunition fuelling the conflict

We know very little about the budget or weapons supply of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement in Opposition (SPLM-IO).³⁵ In June 2014, however, the South Sudanese government announced that spending on the military would be 35 per cent of its total budget.³⁶ In July, the news agency Bloomberg reported an arms sale of \$38m from China, and claimed that the government had spent \$1bn on weapons since the start of the conflict.³⁷ There is also evidence of government spending on defence outside of South Sudan's national budget, amongst other financial irregularities.³⁸

Whilst China has halted all further arms transfers³⁹ and the European Union has placed an embargo on all arms and ammunition going to South Sudan, the UN Security Council, African Union and IGAD have yet to do so.

2 THE HUNGER CRISIS IN 2014

Since December 2013, the war has disrupted planting, trade routes and markets, particularly in the three most conflict-affected states of Upper Nile, Unity and Jonglei. Violence has left farmers unable to sow or harvest their crops. Fishermen have been barred from accessing rivers. Many herders have become destitute as their cattle – which often act as insurance to help people through hard times – have been stolen, slaughtered, or sold off at less than their usual value. The sheer number of IDPs fleeing violence has placed previously poor but self-sufficient communities under strain as they share what little they have.

As a result, malnutrition has reached alarming levels. At the end of September, international experts branded the malnutrition situation until the end of 2014 as 'dire'.⁴² Even in the relative security and accessibility of the UNMISS-secured camp in Bentiu, the NGO Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) has reported that at least three children under the age of five are dying every day from malnutrition.⁴³ In some areas of Unity state, almost one in three children screened between April and July 2014 was suffering from global acute malnutrition.⁴⁴ According to the World Health Organization (WHO), this is the main cause of death among children under five in all the camps for people displaced by the fighting.⁴⁵

Meanwhile, people in large areas of the rest of the country are also struggling to find enough food to eat, as they do every year – even though they are not being directly affected by the conflict.⁴⁶

Box 2: Rachel, displaced woman, 38, Awerial, Lakes state⁴⁷

'We heard shooting all around us one night and we ran to the river. Two of my children died in the crossing. It is good here because there is help. But the food is not enough – only the sorghum lasts longer than a week, and we don't have enough money to grind it, so we eat it as it comes.

'I'm worried about the future. Before the conflict we had cows and I could feed the children. Today I need money. We can't move to the new site where there is a bit of land to cultivate because I cannot clear it. Strong people are going home to prepare the land there. I cannot.'

In Ulang, Upper Nile state, 35 per cent of households did not plant last season due to the conflict and lack of seeds. Those that planted have reduced the areas under cultivation. Production in 2015 is expected to decline by up to 50 per cent.⁴⁰

Malnutrition has long-term negative impacts on children's brain and nerve development and functioning, including on their mental and physical ability and how they learn social interaction.

Malnourished children are less likely to resist infections, are 13 per cent less likely to be in the right school year for their age, and on average go on to earn 20 per cent less as adults than well-nourished children.⁴¹

MARKET CHAOS

The conflict has not only reduced food production: it has also shattered market and trade networks. Traditionally, South Sudanese families depend on local markets to buy food in between harvests, particularly during the 'lean season' between May and August when stocks from the previous harvest have been exhausted. Dinka and Nuer, as well as Darfuri, traders cross the state boundaries between Lakes, Upper Nile, Jonglei, Unity and the Greater Equatoria regions freely, bridging socio-ethnic differences through commercial transactions. Local chiefs and traders of all ethnicities work together.

When the conflict broke out in December 2013, however, market networks froze. Marketplaces were looted and burned. Traders, alongside their families and the communities they served, have gone into hiding. They are no longer able to purchase from other markets in the country and region, and trade routes along roads and rivers are unsafe. Many traders have had their stock looted and have scaled back their trade, often restricting it to family networks. Others have simply gone out of business. In some areas, the danger of being targeted due to their ethnicity means that traders do not attempt to do business. Local market systems have been crippled.⁵⁰

Without regular supplies, prices for basic food items, such as sorghum and sugar, have soared, while family and household purchasing power is incredibly low. Many people have fled towards the relative safety of central market towns, swelling the urban population and putting further strain on increasingly scarce resources.

'Many local traders have been killed. Ganyiel is safe but if we go outside to trade, we might be targeted and killed.'

John, trader, Ganyiel, Unity state⁴⁸

In January 2014, people escaping the conflict in the town of Bor, Jonglei state, were being charged between \$40 and \$130 per person to cross the Nile on overcrowded barges. Just over half the population of 12 million live below the poverty line of \$1.25 a day.⁴⁹

Box 3: Soaring prices, eroded assets and shattered markets

- In June 2014, in Panjiyar County in southern Unity state, basic food and commodity prices soared four times higher than they had been in December 2013. A 50kg bag of sorghum, which previously cost SSP 150 (\$48), now cost SSP 560 (\$181). Conversely, a cow that a family might have sold for SSP 1,200 (\$387) raised only a third of its usual price, at SSP 450 (\$145).⁵¹
- By July, nominal prices for sorghum in some areas were almost three times their five-year (2009–13) average, and almost double the prices of June 2013.⁵² In September in Ulang county, Upper Nile state, 1kg of sorghum costs 4–5 times more than normal. Milk and other livestock products have become scarce as people hide animals in swamps far from their homes.⁵³
- Women in Jonglei explained that before the conflict women were able to earn SSP 70–100 (\$23–32) a day from making tea. Now they earn just SSP 10 (\$3) because supplies are so expensive and no one has any spare money to spend. They have to gather firewood instead now, which is more dangerous.⁵⁴

STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE

People’s first resort in times of crisis is what they and their neighbours can do to help themselves. Some households are forced to beg, borrow, and sell or slaughter their livestock in order to find enough to eat. While families cope in normal years by fishing, picking wild plants and fruits or getting blood and milk from livestock, more people are now adopting these survival mechanisms earlier. Some households are now supporting up to 25 people,⁵⁶ and some women say that young men have joined armed groups to take the pressure off their families.⁵⁷

An Oxfam survey in Jonglei indicated that around 60 per cent of households had had their livelihoods destroyed by the conflict.⁵⁵

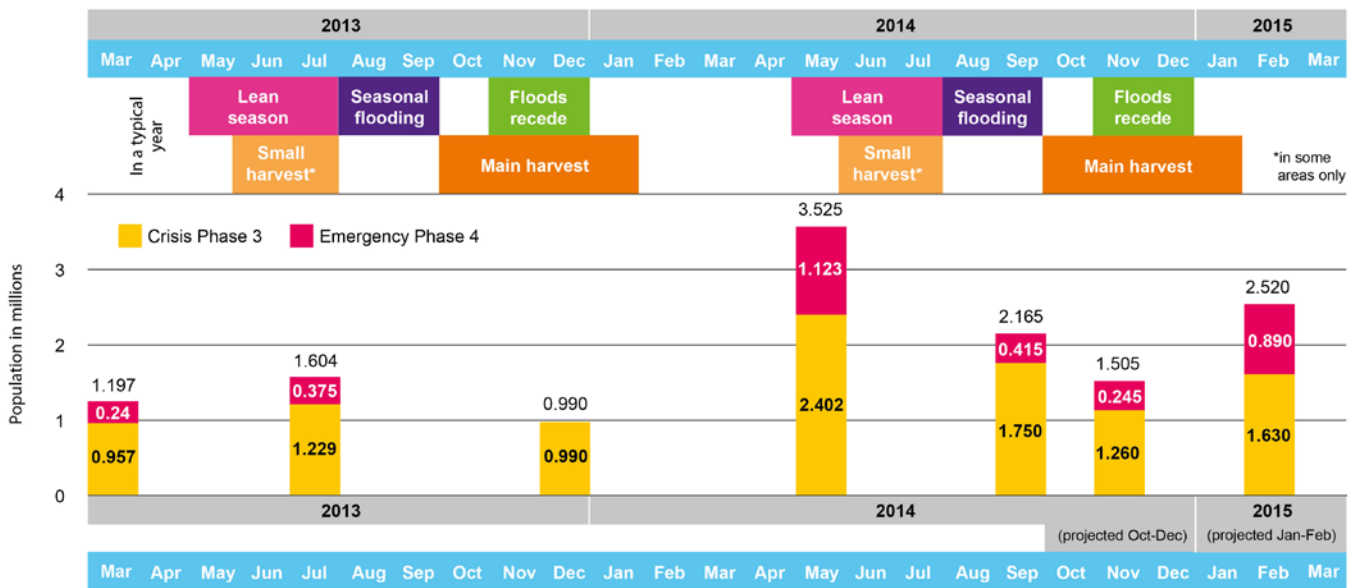
Already in July of this year, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), a tool used by a global partnership of government, UN and NGO experts to measure food insecurity, indicated extremely poor forecasts for the next harvest and food security in 2015,⁵⁸ and warned that ongoing market disruption is also expected. By the end of September, it reported that the food situation ‘is much worse compared to a typical year at harvest time’ with 1.5 million people projected to remain⁵⁹ in categories three and four of food need, representing acute and emergency conditions, as explained in Table 1. A million more people are projected to fall into these categories between January and March, as shown in Figure 2.⁶⁰

Table 1: Phases of food classification explained⁶¹

IPC 1	Generally Food Secure	When all people have enough food for an active and healthy life.
IPC 2	Food Insecure	When people have trouble meeting their basic food needs.
IPC 3	Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis	When people are struggling to find enough to eat, there are high levels of acute malnutrition, and people are forced to sell essential possessions.
IPC 4	Humanitarian Emergency	When people are on the brink of famine or verge of starvation. They cannot find enough food and lose their means of earning a living. There are high levels of acute malnutrition and more people die than is normal.
IPC 5	Famine/Humanitarian Catastrophe	When people have no food and there is mass starvation, death and destitution.

People have not planted far from their houses this season because they say they are afraid, thus limiting potential harvests.⁶² Many people are surviving this season by selling livestock and other assets and borrowing from their neighbours. These households will struggle to get through another ‘lean season’ between harvests – a stretch that experts predict is likely to start far earlier than usual in 2015.⁶³ Even before that, however, as the dry season approaches, renewed fighting is likely to exacerbate the food crisis,⁶⁴ displacement, and the protection threats people face.

Figure 2: People struggling to find enough to eat or on the verge of starvation 2013–2014



Note: The chart above indicates that in 2014 food insecurity in South Sudan was considerably worse than in 2013. It also shows how people’s access to food tends to fluctuate with annual harvests and ‘lean seasons’. Experts say that the food security situation in September 2014 is much worse than in other years, and project that between January and March 2015 the number of people facing severe hunger will increase by more than a million.⁶⁵

Source: Based on data from IPC (September 2014) ‘Communication Summary’, http://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_SouthSudan_Sept%202014_Communication_Summary.pdf and FEWS NET (2013) ‘South Sudan Seasonal Calendar’, <http://www.fews.net/east-africa/south-sudan/seasonal-calendar/december-2013>

DAILY VIOLENCE

Ethnically-targeted massacres and killings have not been the only consequence of this conflict. Unpaid soldiers and civil servants – and general desperation among all members of the population – create conditions ripe for violence, exploitation and abuse. Arbitrary taxation imposed by armed men, illegal barriers on trade routes, sexual exploitation, rape, and forced recruitment to armed groups are all day-to-day realities.⁶⁶

Violence outside of the UNMISS camps is preventing people from going to markets or earning a living. People searching for food or firewood are forced to take extreme risks. This affects women and girls in particular. In Jonglei, women often rely on gathering firewood to sell. Paths may be safe, but away from these, rape is a constant threat.⁶⁸ In Leer, Unity state, women and girls walk up to seven days in search of food. So many women and girls are being abducted, raped, and killed along the route that some hire an elderly woman – who is less likely to be targeted – to make the journey instead of them.⁶⁹ The problem of access to food and exposure to violence is even more acute for displaced women. Women

‘In war before, they killed the men and left women and children; now they kill the women as they realize we make the men.’

Mary, representative South Sudan civil society, February 2014⁶⁷

are not traditionally allowed to own land in South Sudan. Displaced women are consequently less able than men to use land in the new communities where they find themselves.

Because men are more at risk of being killed on the basis of their ethnicity, women were first to venture outside of the UNMISS camps in Juba to reach markets and collect firewood. This in turn exposed them to sexual violence and even death. Inside the camps, women and girls have complained of sexual harassment and assault around latrine and washing facilities, and in poorly lit areas at night. Lack of lighting, limited mills to grind cereals, and difficulty finding charcoal or firewood all increase the threats faced by both women and men.

Boys and men are also at risk of being recruited into armed groups. One aid worker described seeing a child 'too young to be able to hold his gun' manning a checkpoint in Bentiu.⁷¹ Some recruitment is forced, but some is not. A strong cultural expectation that men and boys will protect women and girls means that recruitment is often voluntary. Many men and boys have few other ways to live up to expectations of what it is, in South Sudan, to be a man – and just as few alternatives to find a livelihood or an education. Schools have closed as a result of the conflict, leaving children with little opportunity to learn,⁷² while unpaid salaries and destroyed livelihoods mean that many men are unable to provide for their families.

Some of these threats can and must be reduced, for instance through more vigorous and extensive UNMISS patrolling. Nevertheless, much of this violence will continue until the conflict is over. Shockingly, it is nine months since the warring parties signed the first Cessation of Hostilities agreement in January, under the auspices of IGAD. Since then, the killing has not stopped. That agreement, however, provided for monitoring and verification teams (MVT) from IGAD states to monitor parties' respect for the ceasefire. In April, they first deployed to a limited number of places, but they were poorly resourced and often unable to reach areas of ongoing fighting. In August, one MVT member was killed. Now, the teams must be urgently resourced and vigorously supported – including by IGAD – to monitor and report publicly on violations of the ceasefire agreements, and of international humanitarian and human rights law.

'Being a father is always about being able to provide for your son, sending him to school or a good hospital if he needs it. But how can you say you're a father when you're just sitting here? I am just ashamed of being a father here.'

Matthew, displaced man, UN camp, Juba⁷⁰

3 THE RESPONSE: IMPACT AND POTENTIAL

The international community has responded to the vast needs for both assistance and protection outlined above. Where aid has reached, it has had a significant and measurable positive impact, helping to prevent famine in 2014. Food distributions have often made the difference in people being able to eat even one meal a day, while clean water has prevented more serious outbreaks of disease. This has saved many lives. However, to prevent greater catastrophe in 2015, humanitarian organizations now need to adapt programmes further to respond to the scale and complexity of this crisis.

In July, IPC experts concluded that aid had mitigated levels of food insecurity in several areas of Unity state, and had improved the situation for major concentrations of displaced people in Jonglei and Lakes states.⁷⁴ CARE's work in the three states – as set out in a recent evaluation – has helped result in shorter periods of hunger for displaced households; fewer people eating seeds (instead of planting them); and malnutrition rates amongst women and children falling – in some areas at least.⁷⁵ Screenings show that, since April 2014, World Vision's targeted interventions in Upper Nile have significantly reduced severe malnutrition in girls and boys under five.⁷⁶ Meanwhile, IRC's nutrition programme in Ganyiel has seen a decrease from 23 per cent of screened children suffering from malnutrition in May, to six per cent at the beginning of September, although these figures are likely to be influenced by other factors as well.⁷⁷ Alongside the nutrition and food security programmes, organizations such as Nonviolent Peaceforce have responded to the widespread risks of violence against civilians by creating civilian protection teams. These accompany groups of women collecting firewood, or ensure international presence in potentially high risk locations such as markets.⁷⁸

At the time of writing, humanitarian agencies have reached one third of the 3.9 million people needing immediate food assistance, and one third of the 7.2 million needing support for livelihoods,⁷⁹ often in the face of multiple challenges. However, impacts of aid are not evenly distributed across the country.

Why is the humanitarian response in South Sudan not more extensive? In the following sections, starting with the experience of those displaced people who have found refuge within the UNMISS sites, we outline some of the challenges for the humanitarian response, and begin to suggest solutions.

In Leer County, Unity state, MSF was treating around 40 malnourished children per month prior to the current crisis. Now it is around 1,000.⁷³

IN AND BEYOND THE UNMISS SITES

The UN has undoubtedly protected many thousands of people. When the conflict started in December 2013, UNMISS opened its gates to people fleeing the violence, saving hundreds – if not thousands – of lives. Nine months later, UNMISS is hosting around 100,000 people in 10 of its bases.⁸¹ The people who are situated within these camps, and who are in serious need of assistance, are easier for humanitarian agencies to reach than the great majority of people suffering in this crisis. From the outset, a high proportion of aid has been focused on these UNMISS sites, even though only 10 per cent of displaced people are located within them.⁸²

Even so, aid provision within the UNMISS sites has encountered problems. In UNMISS sites such as Bentiu and Malakal, humanitarian agencies have struggled to meet minimum standards.⁸³ The shortage of space has limited the water, sanitation, drainage and shelter provided. While there have been efforts to extend and improve the sites, there is still a long way to go to ensure that standards for decent provision are met.

To a limited extent, the UN's protection extends beyond its own bases. Where UNMISS patrols outside its camps, people feel able to leave the camp during the day in order to try to earn a living. Where UNMISS does not patrol, the environment outside the camp is too insecure for people to leave. UNMISS should build on successful examples, such as the regular patrols by Rwandan UN troops in Malakal which have allowed displaced people to go into the town, where shops and stalls are reopening, and where the market is beginning to function again.⁸⁵ Extending such patrols to other parts of the country – including patrolling on foot – and especially on roads and in towns and markets, could allow women and men to move more freely. In greater safety, women and men would be able to collect firewood, earn a living, and start creating the confidence amongst traders to reopen their businesses.

However, the challenge that thousands of people face in reaching aid is about far more than UNMISS's capacity and willingness to patrol beyond its bases. Humanitarian agencies have also struggled to reach some of the 1.3 million displaced people outside the UNMISS bases,⁸⁷ largely due to complex logistics and volatile insecurity. Beyond the UNMISS sites, humanitarian agencies' presence has been limited, leading to unpredictable assistance. There has been inadequate information and coordination about the needs and response in different areas. The humanitarian community is now establishing 'operational centres' where logistics and resources are concentrated in order to reach communities in need in rural, conflict-affected areas. These centres should facilitate a more stable presence of humanitarian personnel, assets and logistical capacity, and increase the efficiency of the response through better use of resources and a better understanding of the context. In turn, this will improve localized, safe service provision. But to do so humanitarian

'We take risks going outside to the market to feed our children. UNMISS needs to patrol more around the camp and the gates and also the roads to town so that we can go safely to the markets.'

Elisabeth, displaced woman, UN camp, Juba⁸⁰

'Rwandans patrol the town during the day. This makes us feel safer.'

Sara, UN camp, Malakal, Upper Nile state⁸⁴

'It is not fair for some NGOs to say they have covered all areas, while we know that not all needy people have been reached. People say the food ration is too small and doesn't cover all.'

Church leader, Upper Nile state⁸⁶

agencies must learn the lessons from 2013, when similar centres were set up in Pibor in response to conflict in Jonglei state. These centres initially drew people into unsafe areas and encouraged them to take risks, such as crossing frontlines. Of course, this experience underlines the fact that the greatest obstacle for humanitarian access is the conflict itself.

INSECURITY

Between June and August, humanitarians reported almost 180 occasions where they had not been able to access people in need; most of these incidents were due to violence against personnel and assets.⁸⁸

Altogether, humanitarian agencies face countless obstacles including looting, illegal taxation of aid, and the killing and harassment of aid workers, as well as bureaucratic, practical, and security impediments to road, river and air travel. The River Nile is essential for transport within part of South Sudan during the wet season. This year, however, it has been almost unusable because of actual or threatened attacks⁸⁹:

between December 2013 and June 2014, only one convoy of barges was able to pass safely between Juba and the Upper Nile towns of Malakal and Melut. Since mid-August, humanitarian barges have once more been able to deliver assistance.⁹⁰

Both the government and the opposition have said repeatedly that they will respect humanitarian workers and assets, and not interfere with the delivery of aid. In January, May and June, they promised to ensure conditions conducive to humanitarian action. Regrettably, these promises have not translated into greater respect for humanitarian principles or improved access to people in need on the ground. Humanitarian food stocks that were pre-positioned in hard-to-reach areas before the wet season have been looted or stolen.⁹¹ Since December, 13 humanitarian workers have been killed, and many more have been wounded or are missing, feared dead.⁹² As is starkly demonstrated by the killing of six humanitarian workers in Maban in August, the targeting of civilians on the basis of their ethnicity makes it nearly impossible for Dinka or Nuer staff (the two largest ethnic groups) to work in areas not controlled by their own group – a control that is always dangerously shifting. Staff from Greater Equatoria state also feel threatened in conflict areas, accused by both sides of not supporting their cause.

LOGISTICS AND PROCUREMENT

Many vulnerable communities in South Sudan would be difficult to reach, even in the absence of conflict. In Jonglei, Oxfam teams walk 12 hours through the bush to find where people are sheltering.⁹³ South Sudan lacks even the most basic of road systems and only two per cent of roads are paved; during the rainy season, 60 per cent are inaccessible.⁹⁴ A road trip from Juba to Rumbek that would take two days during the dry season takes a week in the wet.

Box 4: Day-to-day challenges: the experience of South Sudanese NGOs⁹⁵

'The roads are so bad during this rainy season, we use donkeys to deliver food aid. If there's fighting, people cannot come to the town, and we have to walk for three hours with donkeys loaded with food, or use motorbikes.

We are pressed to inform both the opposition and the government of our movements. The opposition is suspicious of any assistance from Juba, while the government is suspicious of any aid going to areas affected by conflict. We are constantly having to show that we are carrying food, not arms.

Communication is another major challenge. There is often no network in the villages and to use a satellite phone for one minute costs over \$1. In Juba, when we try to communicate with our teams in the bush, we are constantly watched and have to explain why we are using a satellite phone as we are suspected of talking to the opposition.'

Even in a 'normal' year, delivering aid to all those who need it is difficult and expensive. This year, the challenges are far greater. Since the government banned commercial flights to opposition-held areas of Jonglei, goods have been brought overland from Ethiopia, including a six-hour journey on foot to the small town of Waat.⁹⁶ Since the Nile has been closed due to fighting, humanitarian agencies have had to make far more use of costly air transport, which is around seven times more expensive than road transport.⁹⁷ The UN World Food Programme (WFP) – which supports humanitarian logistics – is at full stretch. If the situation deteriorates again during the 2015 rainy season, using military aircraft is a possible resort. There is a risk that this could complicate people's access to aid even further, since both sides in the conflict see the UN as supporting the other, and UN military transport may invite further hostility.⁹⁸ While some donor governments have been generous, the high reliance on air transport makes adequate and predictable funding even more pressing.

Delays in the procurement of food and seeds have also been a constant challenge. In some areas, delays on the part of WFP and FAO, coupled with bad planning on the part of some NGOs, have resulted in seeds and tools being distributed long after the planting season, or in periods when people were facing increasing levels of hunger due to late food distributions, and so ate the seeds instead of planting them. These problems have been exacerbated by irregular funding.

FUNDING

Aid cannot end wars. But without it, even more people in South Sudan will die. The need for funding remains huge. Almost \$400m is still needed to support food security needs: almost a third of the population need direct food aid, and almost two-thirds need livelihoods support.¹⁰⁰ Despite a major international conference to galvanize donors, held in Oslo in May, and further pledging from donors at the UN General Assembly in September, the UN appeal for South Sudan has met only 61 per cent of its target. This leaves humanitarian operations short of almost \$700m of the \$1.8bn needed.¹⁰¹ Meanwhile, donors have been slow to recognize the needs of the countries that neighbour South Sudan as they try to respond to the influx of refugees. The joint UN appeal for the region is only 34 per cent funded.¹⁰²

'Waiting for data to be crunched in order to make sure all the numbers add up to famine is deadly for small children. It is like ringing fire alarms when the building is already burnt to the ground.'

Kate Donovan, UNICEF South Sudan⁹⁹

Box 5: A regional crisis

Between December 2013 and September 2014, more than 450,000 people fled from South Sudan.¹⁰³ By the end of the year, UNHCR predicts that 715,000 people will have fled the country.¹⁰⁴ Between June and August, an average of 3,500 South Sudanese crossed the border to Ethiopia every week, usually to remote areas where they find little support and which aid agencies struggle to reach.¹⁰⁵ The conditions in the camps where they seek refuge are appalling. In June, MSF reported that one in ten children being admitted to hospital in the camps was dying.¹⁰⁶

Food shortages are widespread across the region. This year, agencies estimate that more than 20 million people across the region do not have enough to eat, due to poor rains and conflict. This is four million people more than last year, and the situation is expected to deteriorate further in parts of several countries, including Kenya, Sudan, Ethiopia and Uganda.¹⁰⁷ While all those governments have an obligation to host refugees that they must honour, humanitarian agencies must also have contingency plans in place to scale up aid in these countries. Long-term and adequate assistance for refugees in surrounding countries is needed, and early warning systems tracking food insecurity across the region must be carefully monitored.

The US, the UK and the EU have been very generous in their funding. However, other donors that pledged aid at Oslo have not yet paid up – countries such as Italy and Switzerland.¹⁰⁸ Several donors, namely Qatar, Turkey and Egypt, made pledges for the first time but have not yet given money. Several European countries – including Belgium, Austria, France and Spain – have so far given notably little.¹⁰⁹

There are challenges to ensure not just the quantity but also the quality of assistance in South Sudan. More investment needs to be made to ensure the quality and diversity of the response, and to ensure that logistics and security are funded adequately. Donors and humanitarians need to agree on a range of responses that will support the immediate needs of the population, whilst enabling people to rebuild their coping strategies and depleted assets for the future. At the same time, longer-term funding to areas not directly affected by the conflict should be continued to prevent the situation in these areas from worsening.

LOCAL NGOS, LONG-TERM APPROACHES

Major bilateral funding has tended to go to international organizations, in part because they have the capacity to manage large grants and to scale up their activities relatively quickly. But in some areas, South Sudanese organizations – including faith-based organizations – are best placed to reach people. As plans are developed for 2015 and beyond, donors and NGOs should develop better partnership with such organizations. In 2014, less than six per cent of the UN Common Humanitarian Fund (CHF) was allocated to national organizations,¹¹¹ although donor governments often say that they rely on the CHF to allocate their funds to national organizations. A higher proportion should be allocated to South Sudanese NGOs in 2015.

Similarly, the international response has focused heavily on providing food aid in-kind. This has been crucial for much of 2014, but as the conflict becomes ever more protracted, and as people's coping strategies become exhausted, a more sustainable approach is needed. Such an approach should meet immediate needs *and* help to build people's resilience for the future. This will take a variety of different approaches including replenishing livestock, providing veterinary services, and introducing innovative market-based interventions based on local initiatives already in place. Such market-based solutions should be developed both on the demand and the supply side, to help mitigate the food security crisis, prevent dependency on aid, and lay the foundations for early recovery.¹¹²

'Our farmers are languishing in squalid camps, when they should be tending to their fields, harvesting crops and planting for the next season. The lean season will be long as the humanitarian crisis deepens. There is no adequate food to sell and buy in the markets of Malakal town, which has led to prices increasing beyond the reach of ordinary people.'

Vincent Majrok, retired Emeritus Bishop of Malakal¹¹⁰

MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING

Many aid organizations have struggled to adapt rapidly to this extraordinary crisis. In early 2014, many organizations struggled to develop a rapid and effective humanitarian response. The initial response was impeded by a large-scale evacuation of staff after the conflict broke out; the lack of sufficient senior and experienced humanitarian staff in the country; and in some cases, a lack of prioritization of certain sectors, including food security. Since then, many organizations have struggled to recruit experienced national and international staff swiftly enough. Despite ongoing large-scale recruitments by many NGOs, this will continue to be a serious problem in months to come. This is particularly due to the unusual reliance on international staff in this crisis because of ethnically-driven security threats to national staff.

Notwithstanding these major challenges, humanitarian organizations have reversed the descent towards famine in several areas. However, with no end in sight to the fighting, they and donors need to seize the window of the October–May dry season when road access should become easier, to ensure that the humanitarian response becomes more effective, and that more vulnerable people can reach assistance. This challenge may become even greater as a result of recent policy proposals relating to civil society in South Sudan (see Box 6).

Box 6: NGO and civil society space

At the time of writing, a bill on the regulation of national and international civil society, known as the NGO bill, is in the process of being passed into law. If passed in its current form, it will make the provision of humanitarian aid even more challenging. While we welcome reasonable and appropriate regulation of civil society organizations, the process to agree this must be transparent, consultative and timely, and the benefits for the population must be clear.

If passed, the bill will lead to tight state supervision of community groups, civil society, and national and international organizations. It will significantly shrink the space for national NGOs and civil society organizations to monitor issues such as governance, accountability and human rights; impose significant constraints and additional costs on NGOs delivering humanitarian assistance and basic services; and has the potential to criminalize individual aid workers.

Right now, however, the biggest risk is that the bill will further slow down and complicate the delivery of humanitarian aid, as well as increasing government control over aid at a time when the government is party to a conflict. This will make it significantly more difficult for humanitarian agencies to be, and to be *seen* to be, impartial in every way. A significant proportion of South Sudanese people are living in areas under opposition control. As always, it is essential that the humanitarian response is governed by need, not politics.

4 CONCLUSION

South Sudan's conflict and food crisis are inextricably linked – and both are likely to worsen in the months ahead. Ensuring that humanitarian aid reaches wherever it is needed is vital. As well as meeting their immediate needs, aid must help to build people's resilience in order to survive next year and in the future. A third priority is to spread the benefits of UNMISS protection as far beyond its bases as possible, because this will improve people's safety and their ability to resume some normal economic activities. Ultimately, however, the only way to end South Sudan's food crisis is for the conflict to end, and a sustainable peace to be in place.

So far, famine in South Sudan has been averted – but only just, and largely due to the food assistance and the extraordinary survival skills of South Sudanese people which have now been worn down. However, when the dry season arrives in October, and movement becomes easier, renewed conflict is expected.¹¹⁴ Those areas not directly affected by the conflict may be expecting a reasonable harvest. However, any failure of rains, flooding, or spread of the conflict, could create great needs in those areas too. In short, the prospects for the next few months look daunting – most importantly for the people of South Sudan, but also for humanitarian agencies, the UN, donor governments and the whole international community, not least South Sudan's neighbouring countries as they respond to the growing refugee crisis.

Humanitarian organizations including the agencies writing this paper, must do more to consolidate and improve the quality and effectiveness of our response. Together with policy makers and donors, we need to raise the standard, and extend the coverage, of the humanitarian response. Together, we must reach every area, however hard-to-reach. We must respond to need across different sectors, and adapt to a longer-term, more protracted crisis than has been planned so far. We need to design and implement more creative and cost-effective interventions to serve the South Sudanese people and prevent a worse situation in 2015.

Humanitarian agencies must focus every effort to ensure:

- **The creation of better conditions in UNMISS sites** – by coordinating with UNMISS more effectively in relation to our complementary roles within the camps;
- **Delivery of predictable aid where people are**, particularly in 'hard-to-reach areas'. We need to coordinate better, focusing not only on rapid response teams, but also on developing a strategic model that can target assistance in a sustained way for a protracted conflict (including creating 'operational centres' based on risk analysis and scenario planning which takes into account the upcoming dry season);
- **Diverse and sustainable interventions, building on local systems.** This may include supporting the local economy, and ensuring a more diverse food ration by providing part of it through cash, vouchers or food fairs. It should also include increased income generation activities, stronger livestock supply and production; supporting basic

As the dry season approaches, communities are activating local conflict management systems and rebuilding local market systems. In March and April, when one local market was on the verge of collapse, Nuer chiefs in southern Unity state brokered a tentative economic peace with Dinka chiefs from neighbouring Jonglei state so commerce could resume. 'We agreed on this peace with Dinka chiefs in Jonglei because we cannot watch people starve to death when there is a place to get food.'

Executive Chief, Southern Unity¹¹³

services for animal health; and seed banks supplying quality seeds, in both the short and long term.

- **Improved management and planning to prevent future delays** – and to ensure clear, strategic planning for a protracted food and protection crisis, including increasing numbers of refugees beyond South Sudan, and all relevant contingencies. This must include prioritizing the following measures:
 - **Investments in human resources:** rapid recruitment procedures, as well as strong capacity building programmes for the long-term;
 - **Better coordination amongst actors, better managed supplies,** particularly of food and seeds, and increased local procurement of food, seeds, tools, and other goods through local markets wherever possible.
 - **Better consultation with communities to ensure the response strengthens their ability to respond and adapt to new challenges,** including talking further to communities about what would benefit them, identifying and building on what they are already doing, and conducting Emergency Market Mapping and Analysis (EMMA) and other research.

But much more needs to be done to tackle South Sudan's conflict and food crisis. We therefore offer the following recommendations for all the key actors. Working together, we can prevent catastrophe in 2015.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To end the violence and support sustainable peace:

Parties to the conflict and all armed groups should immediately:

- End violence and respect all agreements signed to date, including the Cessation of Hostilities and humanitarian agreements.
- Ensure that all their forces, at every level of command, stop attacks against civilians, their homes and livelihoods, and end the forced recruitment of children.
- Ensure that all forces guarantee protection of and respect for humanitarian staff, and the safe and unhindered access for humanitarian aid – including through guaranteeing safe passage in towns and rural areas and by removing all existing bureaucratic barriers.

The **Government of South Sudan** should also:

- Review the NGO Bill and guarantee the space for national civil society to hold the government to account, while ensuring that humanitarian aid is delivered on the basis of need.

The UN Security Council should:

- Agree a comprehensive arms and ammunition embargo on all parties in South Sudan, and establish a monitoring body and panel of experts to monitor and report on its effective implementation. The embargo should last until effective mechanisms can ensure that arms sent to South Sudan will not be used to commit or facilitate serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law, including the recruitment of children into armed groups.
- Give UNMISS full political support, and ensure that it is adequately and appropriately resourced. This includes ensuring that the full 12,500 mandated troops are deployed, as well as police and civilian staff, to enable robust protection of civilians in and beyond UNMISS bases.

UNMISS should do all that it can to protect civilians more robustly by:

- Protecting displaced people in its bases, through a strong and consistent presence of civilian protection and human rights teams, as well as UN police across all UNMISS sites.
- Maintaining a presence and active patrolling in areas at high risk of conflict or with high concentrations of IDPs, and along access roads, to help ensure freedom of movement. This, in turn, will help increase access to livelihoods and markets for people living within and outside of UNMISS sites.
- Carrying out long-range patrols beyond towns, and boat patrols along rivers.
- Making sure contingency plans are in place to allow for a swift and appropriate response as more people are expected to arrive at its bases in the coming months.

The international community, including governments of the region and the AU, should:

- Apply coordinated, strong political pressure to parties to the conflict that fail to implement political, humanitarian and security agreements, particularly the Cessation of Hostilities.
- Fully resource the IGAD MVTs and ensure that they are able to move around freely without being attacked. MVT investigations should cover violations of international humanitarian law as well as violations of the Cessation of Hostilities. Reports should be published and used by IGAD to hold parties to the conflict accountable. When conducting investigations, teams should work closely with civil society organizations, should include people from all ethnic communities, and should ensure the safety of those who are consulted.

To avert famine and ensure that the most vulnerable people can reach aid:

UNMISS and humanitarian agencies should:

- Ensure that there is a clear distinction between them; that humanitarian agencies take a strong lead in negotiating access; that guidelines on civilian/military coordination are adhered to; and that UNMISS refrains from making statements on humanitarian issues.

The Government of South Sudan should:

- Significantly increase the budgets of key ministries responsible for food security, health and nutrition, as well as water and sanitation, and prioritize long-term investment in the agriculture sector.

The Governments of Ethiopia and Sudan should:

- Facilitate the delivery of aid by humanitarian organizations across their borders into South Sudan, in order to ensure a continuous supply line to respond to growing needs and to improve the safety of humanitarian aid workers.

International donors should:

- Swiftly and fully fund the humanitarian appeals for South Sudan and the regional refugee response. Donors that pledged funds at the Oslo conference in May should immediately complete their disbursements. Donors should also maintain funding to long-term programmes wherever possible, including in the states not directly affected by the conflict. They should include planning to support livelihoods while the crisis continues (as well as part of the recovery once the crisis is over), alongside critical life-saving food assistance.
- Immediately fund initiatives that strengthen people's capacity to deal with future shocks and the next hunger season. Food assistance, livelihood recovery and then recovery should be cash- and market-based wherever feasible to support economic recovery and support traders and people's capacity to address future shocks. Activities to support livelihoods should go beyond emergency livelihood kits, to include re-stocking and supporting basic services for animal health, and financing seed systems.

NOTES

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- ⁵ IPC (July 2014) 'Technical Release: Republic of South Sudan', http://www.fews.net/sites/default/files/documents/reports/IPC Update - July 2014_Final.pdf
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- ⁹ Oxfam interview, UN House, Juba, July 2014.
- ¹⁰ IPC (July 2014) 'Technical Release: Republic of South Sudan', op. cit.; IPC (September 2014) 'Communication Summary', op. cit.
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- ⁴⁸ Mercy Corps interview, Ganyiel, Unity, August 2014.
- ⁴⁹ Oxfam interview, Awerial, January 2014.
- ⁵⁰ For example, in normal periods, traders in Ganyiel in Unity state purchase goods from Juba, Bor and Malakal. Since this year's crisis started, however, it has been too insecure for Nuer traders to do business in government-controlled areas, which has completely stopped trade with the three areas that previously served as a primary source of supplies.
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- ⁶¹ IPC Technical Manual, <http://www.fao.org/docrep/010/i0275e/i0275e.pdf>
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- ⁶⁴ The IPC has predicted that even in Unity state, where conditions have improved, renewed fighting will wipe out the gains made. In fact, fighting has recently broken out in the surrounding areas of Rubkona and Bentiu, which will probably have major consequences for markets and displacements.
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