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# South Sudan: Starvation threatens unless urgent action is taken



ICRC

INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE  
OF THE RED CROSS



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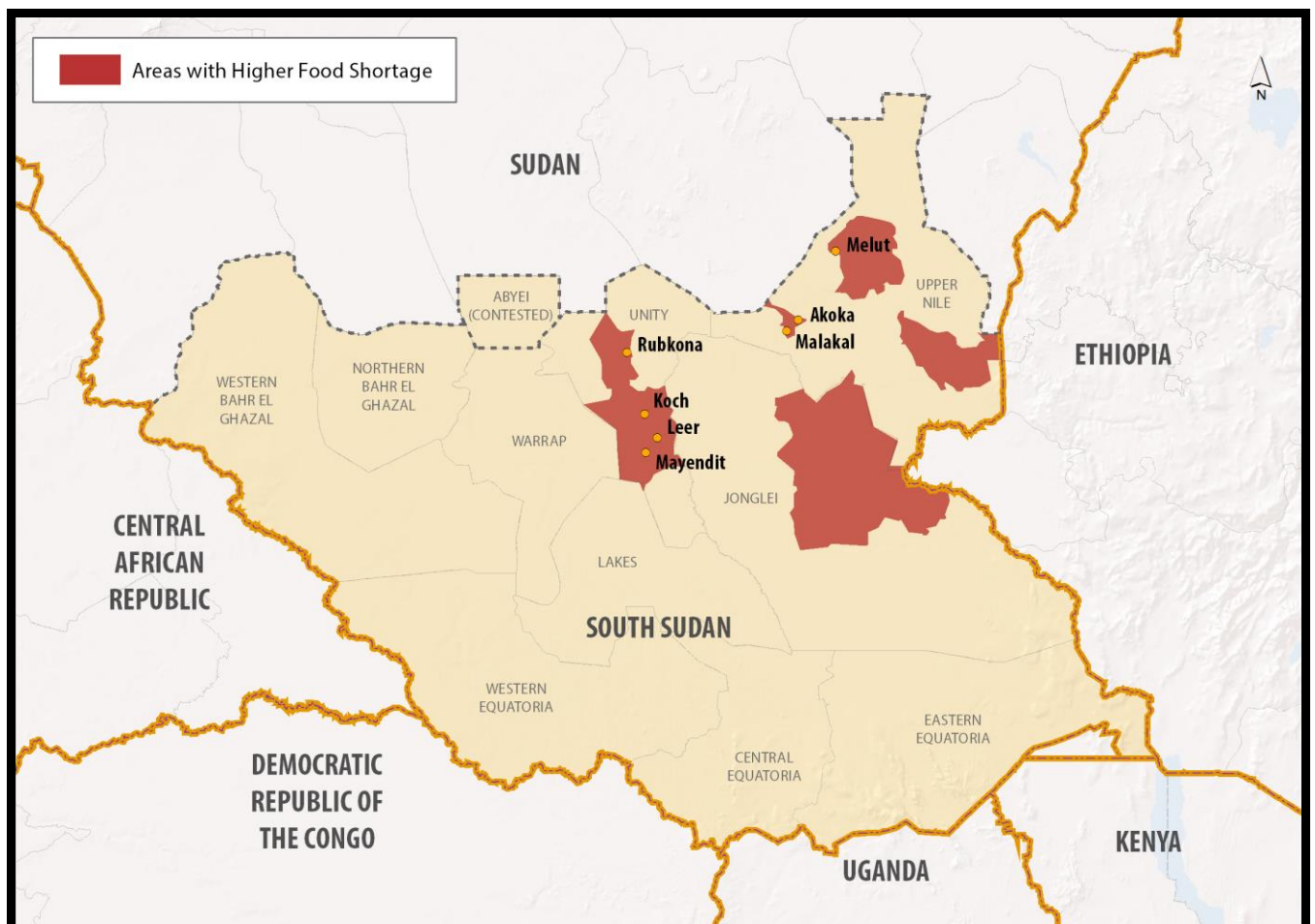
## Current situation

South Sudan is experiencing one of the world's worst humanitarian crises. More than two million people – representing around 20% of the country's population – have been forced to leave their homes. Fighting has been the principle cause of the turmoil. Many people have been displaced more than once and this has meant that efforts to bring humanitarian aid and support, have been severely disrupted. The latest displacements come at a time when the crucial planting season is under way. The situation is particularly severe in Koch, Mayendit, Rubkona and Leer counties in Unity State, Malakal, Melut, Akoka, Fashoda and Longuchok counties in Upper Nile State and in central and northeastern parts of Jonglei State. Economic activity is minimal, food prices are rising and basic services, limited.

## What needs to be done

It is vital that civilians are not targeted – as they are being now. The wounded and the sick, health care personnel and facilities, must be respected. Women and children should be specifically protected.

In the meantime, the practical needs of the people are massive and wide-ranging. From drinking water to health care, from shelter to clothing; all is needed. But at the top of the list is, food. Hundreds of thousands of people need to be supplied with food in the short term. In the long term, methods need to be found to provide sustainable sources of food. Efforts have been made to do this; the ICRC has played a key role in providing seed and tools and fishing kits. This has had an impact (see ‘post-harvest assessments’ below).



## ICRC Research: post-harvest assessments

In 2014, the ICRC distributed different types of seed to **380,000 people**; mainly groundnut, maize, sorghum, staple and vegetable seed; and food on a regular basis to **150,000 people**. During November and December 2014, the ICRC carried out post-harvest assessments (PHAs) to evaluate the results of these seed distributions to farming communities. The analysis of these assessments has been used as a basis for intensifying the ICRC's efforts to address the severe food shortages.

The PHAs were conducted amongst 1,000 farmers across seven states – the largest such research so far carried out by the ICRC in South Sudan. Through **41 focus group discussions** and around **400 interviews**, farmers reported on their seed stocks, cultivated areas, the resulting crop yields and the challenges they faced during the agricultural season. The ICRC also met local authorities and community leaders to gather market data to identify the constraints in transporting goods to market. To review the nutritional situation, the ICRC conducted periodic nutritional surveys in communities that received food rations and worked with other organizations involved in nutritional activities, to collect relevant data.

The results showed that food rations, seed and tools provided by the ICRC helped people in Leer and Waat, Aweil North and Juba West/wider Equatoria state to avoid a famine situation. People could cultivate crops and produce their own food by planting distributed seed. **In areas where the ICRC had been assisting for 11 months, there was a significant improvement, with global acute malnutrition rates, dropping from 34,1% in June 2014 to 12% in March 2015.**

However, due to the disruption caused by the conflict, the lack of security, dry spells, flooding and crop disease, the average amount of cultivated **land shrank by 40-60% compared to the previous year. The production of staple crops, such as sorghum decreased by 50 to 80%, especially in conflict areas.** Low levels of food production are likely to strain the resources of farmers even more. Most of the farmer's seed reserves are likely to be consumed, leaving little for the coming years.

The research shows that with adequate resources, well-planned interventions and the understanding of community needs, humanitarian organizations such as the ICRC can bring positive change to peoples' lives. However, the assessment also shows that the situation remains fragile, even in places where the ICRC has intervened. Therefore, the ICRC is appealing to donors for an additional **22 million Swiss francs** (23 million USD). With these funds the ICRC wants to assist up to **340,000 people** with food; increased rations of sorghum; supplementary food for children until the end of the year; provide productive materials such as seeds, tools and fishing kits to more than **300,000 people** (initial plans were for 100,000); increase the capacity to preserve the health of livestock from **500,000 to 800,000 animals**; and maintain five mobile surgical teams to help the war-wounded. Most of this work will be carried out in collaboration with the South Sudanese Red Cross.

The results of the PHA show clearly that support to agriculture should not be limited to distributions of food. It should have the broader objective of improving the overall food situation by giving support to local markets through seed fairs and food vouchers. The PHA also shows the importance of supporting regions that are not directly affected by the conflict but are key food producers. Well-chosen community projects (for instance vegetable gardening), aimed at raising awareness and promotion of good practices, such as irrigation techniques, should also be encouraged.

## **ICRC response to the situation in South Sudan**

Since the beginning of the current crisis in December 2013, the ICRC has carried out the following:

- Provided over 1.1 million monthly food rations to people in remote areas in Lakes, Unity, Upper Nile, Warrap, Jonglei, Northern and Western Bahr el Ghazal, Western and Central Equatoria states; helping on a regular basis over 150,00 people in the most affected areas;

- Provided around 400,000 people with seed and tools, and more than 170,000 people with fishing kits;
- Vaccinated around 600,000 heads of livestock benefiting more than 255,000 people;
- Performed nearly 5,400 operations in 15 local facilities;
- Conducted over 19,600 outpatient consultations and provided antenatal care for more than 1,300 women;
- Visited over 8,700 people held in various places of detention.



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