

South Sudan

Insecurity in Eastern Equatoria



	Not required	Low	Moderate	Significant	Major
Need for international assistance			X		
Expected impact	Very low	Low	Moderate	Significant	Major
			X		

Crisis overview

Following the escalation of conflict in Juba on 7-11 July the situation across South Sudan has remained tense and clashes have been reported across the country. Immediately after the events in Juba a notable increase in violence was reported in Magwi and Torit counties in Eastern Equatoria. Clashes are likely ongoing. People are fleeing the area in anticipation of more heavy fighting. It is expected that the ceasefire in place since 11 July will not hold and violence will continue to spread. Between 7-27 July more than 37,500 people fled to Uganda, at a rate of 2,000 – 4,000 people per day. If clashes are ongoing it is also likely that thousands of people are currently internally displaced in Eastern Equatoria.

Key findings

Anticipated scope and scale

Conflict: The political environment appears increasingly fragile and the opposition has become more fragmented. The ceasefire in place since 11 July, seems unlikely to hold and conflict in Juba will resume. This is likely to trigger an intensification of conflict in Eastern Equatoria and elsewhere.

Displacement: As clashes intensify more people are likely to be displaced internally as well as to neighbouring countries, triggering a regional crisis.

Priorities for humanitarian intervention

- **Protection:** Reports of indiscriminate killings against civilians and sexual violence.
- **Shelter:** An unknown number of homes have been burned down.
- **Health:** As conflict triggers movement of people, containing the cholera outbreak is a priority: at least one case reported in Torit.

Humanitarian constraints

Attacks and looting of humanitarian supplies are occurring regularly in South Sudan. Access is made more difficult due to flooding as a result of the current rainy season. Flights are often cancelled due to lack of runway space.

Limitations

The numbers of displaced vary daily.

The level of frequency and intensity of clashes in Eastern Equatoria remains unclear.

It is difficult to determine how the conflict will evolve. The extent to which clashes across the country are related to the macro conflict and ongoing political developments remains difficult to determine.

Crisis impact

Over recent months there has been a rise in the number of clashes reported between government forces and armed groups allied to the opposition in Eastern Equatoria. Reports suggest that fighting increased again after 6 July in Magwi and Torit counties. Close to Torit town the local governor declared a state of emergency in the area. It is likely that clashes are ongoing. Since 7 July over 37,500 people have fled to Uganda (Radio Tamazuj 09/07/2016; 06/07/2016; OCHA 22/07/2016; The Exchange 12/07/2016; URN 13/07/2016).

Protection: Displaced populations from Eastern Equatoria are reporting ongoing clashes. Civilians have been indiscriminately targeted and killed and homes have been burned. Incidents of sexual violence have also been reported. As people flee towards the Ugandan border men and boys are being forcibly recruited by armed actors (UNHCR 26/07/2016; Radio Tamazuj 06/07/2016). Unaccompanied and separated children are likely amongst the displaced population.

The recent escalation of conflict in Juba echoes the events that triggered the civil war in December 2013, when the President and Vice President turned against each other and mobilised a conflict that became increasingly ethnicised in nature. A loose alliance of ethnic Nuer have supported Machar while ethnic Dinka are largely associated with supporting the President. The number of targeted ethnic killings is likely to increase as conflict escalates and the peace agreement further destabilises.

Shelter and NFIs: Homes have been burned in Torit and Magwi counties (Radio Tamazuj 09/07/2016; 06/07/2016).

Health: The Ministry of Health has officially declared a cholera outbreak. As of 25 July, 294 suspected cholera cases have been reported, including 17 deaths. Most cases have been reported in Juba, although at least one case has been reported in Torit, Eastern Equatoria. The ongoing movement of people from Juba and surrounding areas as well as in Eastern Equatoria risks facilitating the spread of the disease (UNICEF 25/07/2016).

Education: There are reports from April stating some residents were fleeing parts of Eastern Equatoria in part due to a lack of educational facilities in the state. There is nothing to indicate that this situation will have improved (Miraya FM 19/05/2016).

Food: Shops and markets have closed in Magwi county due to fears of rising insecurity in the area (Radio Tamazuj 26/07/2016).

Vulnerable groups affected

More than 90% of the arrivals in to Uganda are women and children. These groups are particularly at risk of sexual and gender based violence (UNHCR 26/07/2016).

Men and boys are at risk of being forcibly recruited by armed actors operating in the area (UNHCR 26/07/2016; Radio Tamazuj 06/07/2016).

Humanitarian constraints

In June the number of reported access issues was comparatively lower in Eastern Equatoria than elsewhere in the country. Those that were recorded occurred around Torit. The current operational constraints within Eastern Equatoria are not clear, however ongoing insecurity in the area is likely to be restricting movement. There are currently road warnings in place around Torit. Following the recent violence in Juba, insecurity has increased on the surrounding roads and vehicles have been subject to looting. This is may hinder deliveries to Eastern Equatoria. The current rainy season is also likely to hinder access as roads become flooded (OCHA 30/06/2016; WFP 22/06/2016; WFP 14/07/2016).

Aggravating factors

Seasonal information

The rainy season (June–September) is ongoing. Cumulative rainfall has been above average (FEWSNET 13/07/2016). The rainy season contributes to a peak in waterborne diseases and malaria cases. Malaria is a top cause of mortality. In 2015 malaria reached unprecedented levels in South Sudan (MSF 31/05/2016; OCHA 11/07/2016).

Food security crisis

4.8 million people in South Sudan are severely food insecure. Although the food security situation is better in Eastern Equatoria than elsewhere, the decline has been rapid since the start of the year with many people in the state facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3). Kapoeta is worst affected due to particularly low rainfall and failed crop yields. The situation is made worse by an unusually long and harsh annual lean season, due to last until September (FAO 16/07/2016; Africa Renewal 24/06/2016; Sudan Tribune 21/07/2016).

Under normal conditions, harvesting of maize and sorghum crops would take place in July–August. The planting of the second season crop would take place directly thereafter, in August–September. With renewed violence this might be jeopardised (FAO 16/07/2016).

Economic situation

The South Sudanese pound has depreciated by 90% since December 2015, and inflation is at 300%. There has been an upward trend in prices of basic commodities since May. The trend spiked significantly following the fighting in Juba, which has caused the price of basic commodities to skyrocket by up to 80% (FAO 22/07/2017; Trócaire 08/07/2016). Countrywide fuel shortages worsened in March 2016, disrupting road movement and trade (FAO 17/03/2016).

Contextual information

Background to the current conflict dynamics between the SPLA and SPLA-IO

Conflict erupted in the ranks of the SPLA in December 2013, after President Salva Kiir accused Vice President Riek Machar of plotting a coup against him in Juba. Within the army, Nuer and Dinka troops clashed (Small Arms Survey 2015).

A peace deal formed between the SPLA and SPLA-IO was signed in August 2015. This was meant to bring an end to the civil war that began in December 2013.

In April 2016 leader of the SPLA-IO Riek Machar resumed his role as Vice President and returned to Juba. A Transitional Government of National Unity was set up. 1,300 opposition forces were also brought to the capital with the stated aim of creating a joint security force with government troops. Since their arrival in April however, there has been no attempt to unify the forces and no process of demobilisation. Meanwhile tensions between the government and opposition have been increasing. This is largely due to President Kiir's refusal to revoke the decision to restructure South Sudan from ten to 28 states, (a move understood as a way for the government to ensure stronger control at a local level), as well as refusal to allow the opposition cantonment sites in areas beyond Greater Upper Nile, the main scene of conflict since 2013. The opposition want 11 military cantonment sites in Greater Equatoria, and eight in Bahr el Ghazal. The government refuses to agree as it rejects that groups operating in these areas are connected to the wider conflict, and therefore not entitled to the same arrangements that apply in Greater Upper Nile. Consequently, clashes in these regions have been intensifying over recent months (Small Arms Survey 25/07/2016; BBC 11/07/2016; Sudan Tribune 25/06/2016; Sudan Tribune 01/06/2016; ECHO 14/07/2016).

Recent escalation of conflict in Juba

Both Salva Kiir and Riek Machar seemed to have had little influence over the outbreak of fighting in Juba (African Arguments 11/07/2016). Officers involved in the fighting did not initially obey commands from Kiir and Machar for a ceasefire (Peace Direct 13/07/2016). Reports are growing that Salva Kiir is losing control over the SPLA to the ruling Chief of General Staff and former governor of Northern Bahr El Ghazal Paul Malong (African Arguments 11/07/2016; Small Arms Survey 25/07/2016).

Following the fighting Machar fled the capital and refused to adhere to an ultimatum by Kiir, demanding Machar return to Juba within 48 hours or be replaced. Consequently, on 25 July Kiir announced he had replaced Machar with mining minister and member of the SPLM-IO, Taban Deng Gai (Al Jazeera 26/07/2016). This move has caused deep divisions within the opposition and is perceived by many of Machar's supporters as a breach of the August 2015 peace agreement (Sudan Tribune 26/07/2016). The African Union has approved the deployment of a 3,000 strong peacekeeping force in order to restore stability. The South Sudan government is against the decision (BBC 19/07/2016).

Likely developments

Fierce opposition to the new state boundaries and government refusal to allow the SPLM-IO cantonment sites will continue to fuel tensions. Clashes in Bahr el Ghazal and Greater Equatoria will continue. As new individuals within both the government and the opposition use this time of uncertainty and fragility to wield greater influence, they may have less incentive to pursue the peace deal as they benefit from fighting in terms of power and financing (African Arguments 11/07/2016). The situation is further complicated by the removal of Reik Machar. Although the SPLA-IO has historically been very factionalised, this decision has created a much deeper division amongst its members and the newly appointed Vice President has little control over the opposition army. If forces loyal to Machar withdraw their support from the transitional government, the risk of the peace deal collapsing is further heightened. Although the SPLA-IO are militarily weaker than they were two years ago, the risk of a return to civil war seems likely. As the political situation appears increasingly fragile, the ceasefire in Juba is unlikely to hold and fighting is likely to escalate throughout South Sudan (ISS 15/07/2016; AFP 07/07/2016; WFP 22/06/2016; ICG 12/07/2016; African Arguments 11/07/2016).

Widespread fighting will have severe humanitarian consequences. The number of displaced is expected to increase and civilians will face high extremely high protection risks (African Arguments 11/07/2016). Many humanitarian agencies will be forced to withdraw and access will be further complicated as the rainy season renders many roads impassable.

Past displacement

Currently, some 1.69 million IDPs have been registered, as well as 264,200 refugees (UNHCR 30/06/2016). The majority of IDPs are in Unity state (around 560,000), followed by Jonglei (513,000). The protracted IDP and refugee population in Eastern Equatoria is low: As of April 2016 around 8,500 IDPs were registered in Eastern Equatoria. The area is not reported to host a refugee population (OCHA 30/03/2016; 30/06/2016).

Stakeholders

SPLA: After the creation of South Sudan, the SPLA's political branch, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), become the ruling party. The group's leader, Salva Kiir from the Dinka ethnic group, became President of South Sudan. The SPLA is estimated to number 210,000 soldiers (IISS 2013).

SPLA-IO: In late 2013, Riek Machar, Vice President and a senior SPLA commander belonging to the Nuer ethnic group, was accused by President Kiir of planning a coup, and removed from his position. This led to the formation of the SPLA-IO and civil war (Small Arms Survey 2015; IASR 2015).

Other armed groups: The conflict situation is complex as many armed groups have splintered from the SPLA-IO, and never adhered to the August 2015 peace agreement (Small Arms Survey 2015).

United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) recently had its mandate extended until the end of August 2016. UNMISS currently consists of 12,100 troops, and 1,200 police (UNMISS 31/03/2016). It has called for extra troops and more robust capabilities, such as attack helicopters. UNMISS is in charge of PoC sites (UNSC 13/07/2016).

Neighbouring countries' relationship to the conflict

Uganda: Traditionally a supporter of the SPLA, Ugandan military convoys crossed into South Sudan on 14 July to evacuate its citizens from Juba. The convoy of around 50 trucks and up to 2,000 soldiers may remain in Juba to aid the SPLA (AFP 14/07/2016).

Sudan: Historically, Sudan has supported South Sudan's armed groups in their opposition to the government. If the conflict escalates again in South Sudan, it is likely that Khartoum will renew its support. A number of Sudanese armed groups still operate within South Sudan.

Key characteristics

Demographic profile: In 2011 the population of Eastern Equatoria was 0.9 million (National Bureau for Statistics 2011).

Food: Eastern Equatoria is currently facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3). This year marks the first time such poor indicators have been recorded in the region. It is largely due to market disruption, economic downturn, insecurity, and crop failures (FEWSNET 31/05/2016; Food Security Cluster 30/06/2016).

Health: Infant mortality: 60.3/1,000; Under-five mortality: 92.6/1,000; maternal mortality ratio: 789 per 100,000 live births (World Bank 2015).

WASH: 13% of South Sudanese have access to improved sanitation; 85% practise open defecation; 41% have access to safe drinking water (HNO 31/12/2015).

Lighting and cooking: Only 1% of South Sudan's population is connected to the electricity grid. More than 96% use firewood and charcoal for household heating and cooking (African Development Bank 10/2012).

Literacy: total population 27%; male 40%, female 16% (CIA Factbook 2009 est.)* This data is prior to independence and covers South Sudan.

Response capacity

Local and national response capacity

Beyond the work of local NGOs, there is no significant national response capacity.

International response capacity

Many international organisations are operational in South Sudan.

Humanitarian actors are currently placing an emphasis on cholera prevention and response (UNICEF 16/07/2016; WHO 25/06/2016).

Food distribution programs are ongoing in Eastern Equatoria (Africa Renewal 24/06/2016).

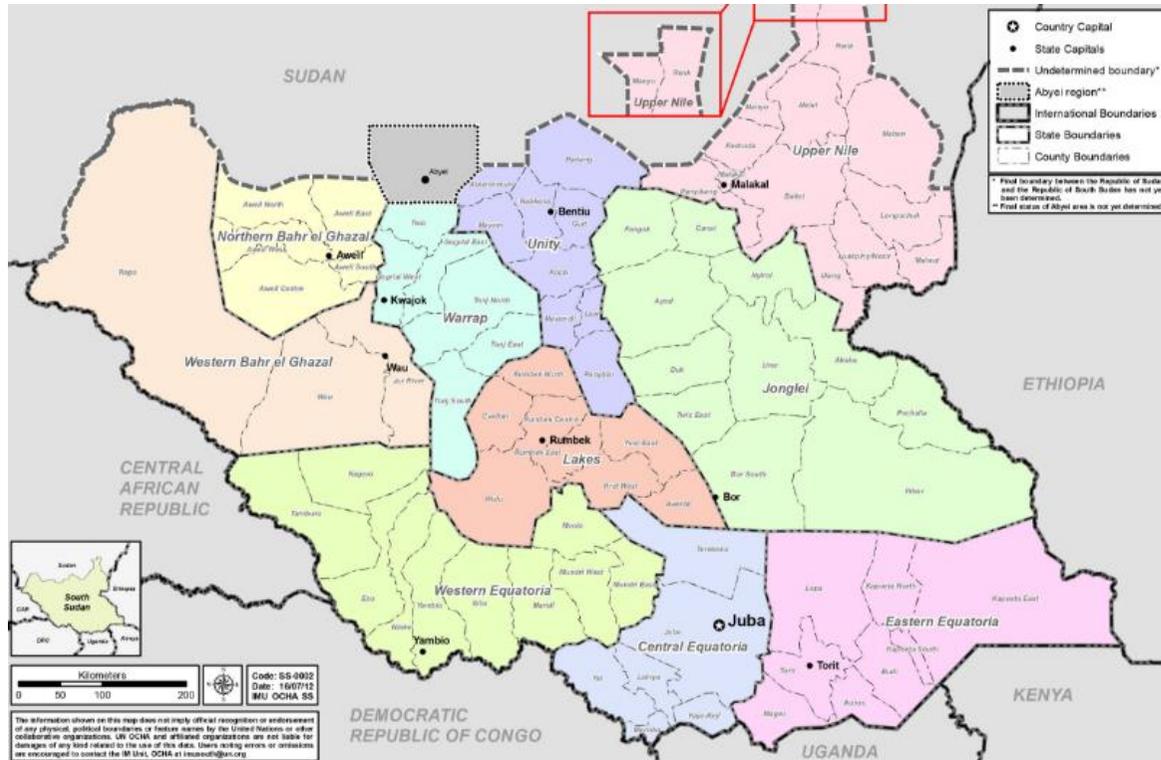
Information gaps and needs

- IDP figures are not available.
- There is no information regarding specific sectoral needs of the population likely to be affected by ongoing conflict in the area.
- The extent to which humanitarian access is restricted in Eastern Equatoria is not clear.

Lessons learned

- The high turnover of expatriate staff in South Sudan poses security concerns, as relative inexperience and a lack of local knowledge can lead to errors in response in high-risk environments (IRIN 12/07/2016).
- Since independence in 2011, 71 aid workers have been killed and 103 wounded. 64 of killed aid workers were South Sudanese. Local humanitarian workers face significantly higher protection risks due to the ethnic dimension of the conflict (IRIN 12/07/2016).

Map of South Sudan states



(Source: OCHA 2016) Map does not show the 28 state structure