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Summary Report on Resilience and Vulnerability in South Sudan

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Background

In 2017, a growing concern about the eroding coping capacity of people, communities and institutions in South Sudan led development partners to pause and reflect on their efforts and growing vulnerability. In October 2017, a consultation among donors, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and United Nations (UN) agencies noted that in spite of billions of dollars of food and other humanitarian and development assistance, food insecurity in South Sudan steadily increased over the period 2015–2017. While conflict and economic collapse have largely driven the country’s dramatic increase in food insecurity, health risks, exposure to heightened climate variabilities, lack of access to information and services and negative social norms are contributing significantly to the erosion of household and community resilience and associated vulnerability to hunger, with women and children being disproportionately affected. Recognizing individual donor or sectoral efforts were not changing the situation, it was concluded that development partners must find a new way of working – one which moves beyond coordination towards strategic integration and convergence. A call was therefore issued to direct development and humanitarian assistance towards protecting and building resilience of people, communities and institutions, and increasing attention to tackle the drivers of vulnerability. Rooted in concern for growing vulnerability, consultations, analysis and planning for resilience was brought into focus in October 2017, at a workshop held in Juba, sponsored by development partners, including donors, UN agencies and NGOs – both international and local. These initial conversations had a lot to build on from ongoing resilience work in South Sudan of NGOs and UN entities. As such, a more organized dialogue on resilience began. Building on this momentum, and with strong concern for value for money (the “biggest bang for your buck”), in April 2018, partners committed to focus on resilience interventions that could have the largest impact on the resources available. This gave birth to the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience (PfRR). An analysis was conducted to provide an update on the status of resilience and vulnerability in the Republic of South Sudan for the year 2018 and to mid-2019 – a time when significant strategic pivots took place in the country, placing focus on resilience. The analysis was conducted through a joint effort between the World Food Program (WFP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF).

In South Sudan, resilience is defined as the ability of individuals, communities, and households to anticipate, adapt to, and/or recover from the effects of potentially hazardous occurrences (natural disasters, economic instability, conflict, and other social shocks) in a manner that protects livelihoods, accelerates and sustains recovery, and supports economic and social development. The analysis reviews trends and changes that have occurred and examines the linkages and causality between resilience and vulnerability. It builds upon evidence from the national, subnational, community and household levels.

The analysis resilience analyses and modeling done for the first time in the country to measure resilience draws from several unique datasets and analytical tools including data collected in 2018 for resilience profiles, , and new analyses of Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring System (FSNMS) and the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) analysis in order to examine vulnerability.

Analysis Findings

Overall, the findings suggest that resilience in South Sudan is fundamentally confronted with a complex socio-environmental nexus, which connects social, environmental, political, governance, and economic conditions. Indeed, South Sudan remains a highly fragile state due to continuing conflict and a crisis in governance. Traditional conflict prevention, mediation and resolution structures have been weakened, which has eroded the ability of institutions to withstand political and security shocks. Weak rule of law translates into total impunity of perpetrators of violence, and fuels vigilantism and gross human rights violations. At both macro and micro levels, conflict has had a major negative impact on the enabling environment for development and resilience building.

With respect to the macroeconomic situation, the currency devaluation in December 2015 has led to high inflation and worsening exchange rate of the South Sudanese pound to the US dollar. Inflation in South Sudan averaged 89 percent from 2008 to 2018, with an all-time high of 549 percent in September 2016. As the situation continues to deteriorate, the depth of poverty has increased with 66 percent of the population (two out of three persons) in South Sudan living below the poverty line.

Household surveys and focus group discussions conducted in 2018 to inform the Partnership for Recovery and Resilience efforts confirm that food insecurity is a real and ubiquitous risk in South Sudan, entangled in warfare, conflict and climate variabilities. Most households in the seven Partnership Areas experienced lack of food over a 12-month period. Civil war and conflict are the main drivers of food insecurity in most counties, followed by climate shocks like drought. Torit, Bor, Rumbek and Aweil experienced the largest impacts from droughts; Torit, Bor and Aweil also experienced significant flooding.

Due to conflict and other crises, South Sudan experiences forced migration which results in a high number of internally displaced people (IDPs). Overall, a total of 1, 275, 868 IDPs were identified across the country in November-December 2018, with one-fifth (20 percent) having arrived in their present location in 2018 alone, and 70 percent in 2017 and 2018 combined. Moreover, there are more than 2 million South Sudanese refugees spread across the neighboring countries of Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya and DRC.

Nationwide, the average Resilience Capacity Index (RCI)¹ from all the surveyed households is estimated at 29.3. The RCI had regional variation by State with Warrap having the highest² RCI of 37.9 and Central Equatoria, the lowest RCI of 21.0. Overall, assets held by individuals and households is the main driver of resilience across all states. Productive assets, including agricultural tools, seeds for planting,

¹ RCI is measured using the Resilience Index Measurement and Analysis (RIMA) model which is a quantitative approach that identifies the main factors that contribute to household resilience in selected areas using latent variable models and regression analysis.

² In a cross-sectional setting, the RIMAI methodology measures the contribution of different capacities to the current well-being outcome (food security in this case). By design, the higher the capacities, the higher the expected outcome and the lower the vulnerability associated with the wellbeing outcome. Therefore, an increase in resilience capacity is expected to reduce vulnerability.

wheelbarrows and grain grinding tools as well as the size of land for cultivation owned by the household play a significant role in contributing to resilience. Among the partnership areas, Bor emerged as the one with the highest RCI, while Wau had the lowest RCI. There were variations in the determinants of resilience capacity across the partnership areas. In Aweil, Yambio, Torit, Wau and Rumbek, the assets pillar plays the most significant role in determining the resilience capacity of households. The assets pillar comprises productive assets including agricultural tools, seeds for planting, wheelbarrows and grain grinding tools, as well as the size of land for cultivation owned by the household all of which play a role in contributing to resilience. In Bor, the resilience capacity is mostly driven by their adaptive capacity and relatively better access to basic services which is driving their resilience capacity.

The respondents in Wau which had the lowest resilience capacity among the partnership areas reported low access to Social Safety Networks (SSN), such as borrowing and formal cash transfers which could be attributed to sustained insecurity, limited movement and humanitarian access since 2016 with extreme depletion of livelihoods. Since July 2016 crisis, most areas of Wau County were not accessible until late December 2017, resulting in limited access to humanitarian assistance. However, there are parts of Wau County that are relatively calm and accessible enabling humanitarian actors to operate well.

Evidence of gender imbalance with respect to resilience was also found; indeed, female-headed households tend to experience lower degree of resilience compared to their male counterparts. As expected, an increase in conflict prevalence has the potential to significantly reduce resilience. Several respondents complained how conflict has led to schools closing, raising costs and depleted remote communities of quality teachers, and parents of incomes to pay school fees. In addition, orphaned children, after conflicts, often can no longer afford school fees.

Often overlooked in resilience building programs, governance is a major driver of community level resilience as improved community governance is associated with higher resilience capacity. The seven PfRR Partnership Areas generally have a poor view of government services; households complained about poor job creation, poor transportation infrastructure and lack of equity and poverty. Findings indicate that the impact of institutions and local leadership on households is not the same across the seven partnership areas.

Paramount chiefs and other traditional chiefs, as well as local government, play the largest leadership role, though their influence varies across the areas. NGOs and Faith-based Organizations (FBOs) also play a modest role in some communities. In most communities, traditional leaders continue to play a significant role. Most surveyed households in three of the seven counties indicated that traditional leaders play a larger role than political leaders; a negligible proportion believed political leaders had more influence. Traditional leaders seem to carry more importance in the counties that predominantly elect them.

As expected, resilience has a positive effect on food security (vulnerability), as measured by the predicted Household Dietary Diversity Score (HDDS). Overall, the proportion of people facing severe food insecurity (Phase 3 or worse) in South Sudan has increased from 19 percent in September 2014 to 58 percent in September 2018, to 54 percent in mid-2019. The absolute number of food insecure people peaked in 2017 and 2018. Households of most concern include those with no land, no livestock, female-headed and IDP/returnees.

Among the Partnership Areas, the areas with highest resilience capacity (like Bor South, Torit, and Aweil North) are relatively more food secure and have improved access to humanitarian resources. Recently, Yei and Wau have registered high food insecurity with very low resilience capacity, indicating an escalated conflict situation with limited movement and humanitarian access.

Conclusion

Given the complex nature of the crisis facing the country, it requires a broad coalition of support to address not only the urgent humanitarian crisis but also to help restore production systems and assist communities cope, recover, and build their resilience to shocks and crises. It is in that context that a Partnership for Resilience and Recovery was put together which places community institutions at the center of efforts to build the resilience of livelihoods and production systems in the country. The proposed partnership is aimed at producing business models (interventions) for integrated humanitarian and development services through community-based delivery mechanisms that emphasize the productive sector as the foundation for resilience and recovery in target locations. The Partnership promotes and uses an integrated programme framework for resilience, adapted to the South Sudan which comprises four pillars: i) Re-establish Access to Basic Services, ii) Rebuild Trust in People and Institutions, iii) Restore Productive Capacities, and iv) Nurture Effective Partnerships.