Emergency levels (IPC Phase 4) of food insecurity are likely along the north-south border of Sudan during the lean season (July to September), as households are expected to experience atypically large food consumption gaps. Continued militia insecurity in southern Sudan and conflict along the north–south border, particularly in Abyei and South Kordofan; a persistent trade blockade into southern Sudan; and ongoing population returns as a result of the forthcoming July 9 separation of the north and south are assumed. Emergency food assistance and nutrition stabilization programs are needed to mitigate these factors and to save lives and livelihoods. Areas of particular concern include Unity, Warrap, Northern Bahr El Gazal, Abyei, and South Kordofan states, and the western border of Upper Nile State.

Militia insecurity and inter-tribal conflict in southern Sudan since early 2011 have displaced over 200,000 people, mainly to Warrap, Jonglei, Lakes, Unity, and Upper Nile states. In addition, recent fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA) in Abyei and South Kordofan state has displaced over 175,000 people. As a result, lean season food stocks, which generally comprise sorghum, wild food grains, and dried fish, have been lost, as have livestock, the main source of income and milk for most households. Most of the displaced are now in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and are meeting food needs through food assistance, though preliminary results of an inter-agency assessment conducted on June 22 in the Gogrial-Akon area of Warrap indicate that the prevalence of malnutrition was high among displaced children, and that current interventions are inadequate to fully meet needs. Surveys conducted during March/April 2011 in Aweil West and Aweil North (Northern Bahr El Gazal) by Concern, and in Gogrial West by Action Against Hunger (ACF) found Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) levels of 24.6, 24.5, and 22.3 percent, respectively. Though such levels have often been recorded in the past—largely due to water, sanitation, hygiene, and health issues—the situation could worsen significantly because of the compounding impacts of insecurity, displacement, high food prices, and returnee inflows.

The ongoing blockade of trade to the south since early May and insecurity along supply routes have worsened food and fuel shortages and driven up prices, as the north supplies more than half of the south’s cereal requirements. Increased supplies from alternative markets in East Africa have not alleviated high prices due to the increase in transport costs. Market food stocks in border states of the south have declined by 50 percent compared to typical lean season levels, while prices have increased by 50 to 100 percent, sharply reducing purchasing power at a time when most poor households rely exclusively on food purchase. Among local populations in border areas, poor households are currently Stressed or in Crisis.

In the coming months, ongoing conflict is likely to impact crop cultivation (June-August) and harvests (November/December) in both the south and north. In southern Sudan, Unity, Jonglei, and Warrap states would be most affected. In northern Sudan, failure to plant crops by mid-July could result in below-normal or failed harvests, in turn reducing food availability in southern Sudan, which relies on the north for cereals. Conflict may also affect the traditional movement of bagara cattle herders from southern Sudan into border areas of the north beginning in July, resulting in increased livestock disease and animal mortality. Finally, reluctance by southerners to migrate north for seasonal agricultural labor would create labor shortages in semi-mechanized agricultural areas and limit an important source of income during the lean season for southerners.

The Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) issues alerts to prompt decision-maker action to prevent or mitigate potential or actual food insecurity. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the view of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.
Food insecurity in the months ahead is likely to deteriorate. For 30 to 40 percent of households in border areas, typical lean season food shortages of 20-25 percent are likely to increase to at least 40 percent given ongoing trade restrictions. Insecurity, additional displacement, and returnees from northern Sudan who increase competition for scarce resources, are likely to further constrain food access. Furthermore, delivery of humanitarian assistance through September could become severely constrained as rains peak and flooding occurs. Assuming sustained conflict levels and ongoing trade restrictions, and continued shortfalls in humanitarian assistance, current Crisis levels of food insecurity are likely to deteriorate to Emergency levels through September in most border areas, particularly among the displaced. Improvements in food insecurity are only expected with the crop harvests starting in October.

Priority needs are to provide sufficient food assistance and nutrition stabilization programs for the next three months (July-September) to cover the anticipated above-normal food shortfalls, to prevent high levels of acute malnutrition and extreme depletion of assets, and to support normal crop cultivation. FEWS NET will continue to monitor the impact of conflict and trade on population movements, cultivation, and prices.