



21 June 2014 - South Sudan is the world's youngest, and one of its poorest nations, and its people are accustomed to adversity. But six months of war has uprooted many and destroyed their livelihoods. Now some four million people require humanitarian assistance.

"The biggest single obstacle is the absence of peace," Toby Lanzer, the top UN humanitarian official in South Sudan, [told IRIN](#) . According to UN figures, about 1.5 million people have fled their homes since December, when fighting broke out between supporters of President Salva Kiir and those of his former deputy, Riek Machar. Thousands have died in the violence, including many civilians brutally targeted because of their ethnicity.

[UNICEF](#) , the UN Children's Agency, said in April that the number of children under five years of age suffering severe acute malnutrition across South Sudan had reached 223,000, or double the total before the crisis. It warned that 50,000 of them could die this year unless they received assistance.

"There's a lot of tension. Places like Bentiu (the capital of Unity State) are really on a knife-edge. Anything can happen there, and it's not the only location," Mike Sackett, the acting country director for [WFP](#) in South Sudan, told IRIN. To make sure the rations reached the most needy, and help prevent aid being seized by combatants, Sackett said WFP was inserting small "hit-and-run" teams into crisis zones for little more than a week to assess requirements, register those in need, and oversee the airdrops and the distribution.

The environment brings other challenges. Fields where green shoots should be poking through the wet soil lie untilled and overgrown; herds of cattle that would sustain communities through the lean season have been lost or stolen; food stores have been looted or burned. In Bentiu and Panyijar, planes have been unable to land after rain because the airstrip becomes too boggy. The UN is negotiating with oil companies to get access to an all-weather strip north of Bentiu. Still, despite many obstacles UN agencies have reached over 80 locations in the past six months, mostly by air.

For civilians, the rainy season brings some respite. With richer grazing, cattle produce more milk, while wild foods and fish can be more plentiful. Moreover, the first so-called 'green' harvest comes in September, ahead of the main crop in November. But yields are expected to be meagre in the north and east, where the fighting has primarily raged. Once those crops are used up, the food crisis is expected to intensify.

The failure of international pressure to stop the fighting before the planting season has prompted increasingly loud warnings that starvation could lead to far more deaths unless beleaguered civilians receive urgent - and sustained - assistance.

Source: [IRIN News](#)

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