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Investing in rural people in **South Sudan**

South Sudan is the youngest and third most fragile country in the world, ranked third out of 179 countries (2022 Fragile States Index). The country has experienced frequent conflict and instability, in addition to major floods and droughts, massive internal displacement resulting from inter-community conflicts, and climatic shocks, all of which have contributed to undermining the development gains the country had achieved since independence in 2011. A new peace agreement was signed in September 2018 and a Unity government formed in February 2020, which represent an important phase of transition from conflict towards peace, stability, and the start of economic recovery and development. With more than 7.7 million people facing severe acute food insecurity,¹ South Sudan has acknowledged the need to shift from humanitarian aid dependency towards a development-oriented agriculture growth path, which will be guided by existing policy and regulatory frameworks for agriculture and the livestock sector. To this end, the country is working to strengthen its institutions and promote resilience and livelihood opportunities across the country.

The population of South Sudan is estimated at 12.3 million, with 85 per cent living in rural areas.² For an estimated 88 per cent of rural households, agriculture, fisheries and the livestock sector are the primary source of livelihoods. The agrifood sector contributes an estimated 36 per cent of the non-oil GDP and, in

¹ World Food Programme. 2023 *WFP South Sudan. Situation report no. 310*.

² Eliste, P., Forget, V., Veillerette, B., Rothe, A.-K., Camara, Y., Cherrou, Y., Ugo, E. and Deng, S. 2022. *Transforming agriculture in South Sudan – From humanitarian aid to a development oriented growth path*. Rome. FAO and The World Bank. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cc1048en>



2018, employed about 50 per cent of the population (representing some three fifths of female employment and one third of male employment). The country has a vast untapped agricultural potential, with only 4 per cent of its land that is potentially arable currently being cultivated, and diverse climatic zones, fertile soils and reasonable rainy seasons that offer good conditions for a range of food products. However, the country faces significant constraints to agricultural production, including: the prevalence of manual cultivation, poor post-harvest and value-addition facilities, and inadequate irrigation and water harvesting techniques.

Women constitute over 60 per cent of households in South Sudan, a proportion that has increased as a direct result of conflict. Women play a major role in agricultural production but experience limited access to productive assets, extension services and credit. Prevailing gender norms and roles in the country undermine the promotion of equal rights and the ability of women to participate actively in development.

The country has one of the youngest populations in the world, with a mean average age of 19 years, and 45 per cent of the population below the age of 15 years. About 60 per cent of employed youth are in the agricultural sector, primarily engaging in subsistence farming and raising livestock, dominated by work that is unremunerated or under-remunerated.³

Climate-induced risks and hazards are intensifying, manifesting in the form of erratic rainfall, prolonged droughts, increased pest invasions, and floods. South Sudan is projected to experience more frequent temperatures above 40 degrees by 2050, posing significant risks, including health risks associated with extreme temperatures and shifts in vector-borne disease transmission patterns, food security and flooding, especially in Sudd wetlands and along major rivers.⁴

Eradicating poverty and building resilience for rural people

The vision of the Government of South Sudan is articulated in the South Sudan Development Plan and is operationalized through its successor, the South Sudan Development Initiative, with a clear emphasis on rural transformation and economic diversification and agriculture as the key sector that will spearhead both transformation and economic growth.

Investment in agriculture is guided by the Comprehensive Agriculture Master Plan/Irrigation Development Master Plan (CAMP/IDMP) 2015-2040, which was devised under the framework of the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) to achieve continental and regional agricultural development.

To support the most vulnerable subsistence and emerging market-oriented producers, together with associated organizations and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, IFAD targets areas where rural poverty is most severe. Targeting strategies combine: geographical targeting in consultation with the government; direct targeting including quotas for outreach and leadership positions; and self-targeting measures including promotion of crops, livestock, and economic enterprises of interest to target groups, especially women and youth.

Strong institutions are central to sustainable nation-building. IFAD supports government institutions from national level to states, strengthening their capacity to ensure effectiveness and enhance sustainability for all investments.

³ See footnote 1.

⁴ Richardson, K., Calow, R., Pichon, F., New, S. and Osborne, R. 2022 *Climate risk report for the East Africa region*. Met Office, ODI, FCDO.

IFAD's strategy in South Sudan

IFAD has been engaged in South Sudan since 2011, investing a total of US\$77.26 million with sole IFAD funding of US\$23.34 million across three projects, benefiting approximately 76,800 rural households. IFAD's long-term vision for the country is to gradually contribute to the reduction of food and nutrition insecurity and poverty among rural women and youth through inclusive and sustainable agriculture and livelihood transformation.

In line with the South Sudan Vision 2040 "Towards freedom, equality, justice, peace and prosperity for all" and the Revised National Development Strategy 2021-2024 "Consolidate peace and stabilize the economy", IFAD's newly designed country strategic opportunities programme (2023-2029), the successor to its country strategy note (2021-2022), focuses on contributing to enduring peace and development in South Sudan by improving food and nutrition security and reducing poverty.

This is to be achieved through increased productivity and resilience of farming systems, inclusive value chain development, strengthened rural institutions across communities, government and the private sector, and improved individual and institutional capacity. Community-driven development will be at the centre of interventions, combined with building the capacities of project participants and partners, strengthening ownership of investments, and contributing to improved sustainability. Nurturing networks of mutually beneficial partnerships between private sector business and community groups, and capacity-building for government institutions will further contribute to the sustainability of investments.

The "triple nexus" (humanitarian–development–peace nexus) will guide interventions, which will require implementation support and technical assistance for ongoing projects and those in the pipeline.

In keeping with the Government of South Sudan's development strategies and IFAD priorities, IFAD's investment portfolio in South Sudan will mainstream gender, youth, nutrition and climate change, with a focus on women's empowerment, skills training for youth, increasing local supply of nutritious foods, creating nutrition awareness, improving labour productivity and promoting improved climate-smart agriculture, environment, and natural resource management.

The strategy aims to contribute to enduring peace and development in South Sudan by improving food and nutrition security and reducing poverty among women, youth and rural communities through inclusive and sustainable agriculture and livelihood transformation.

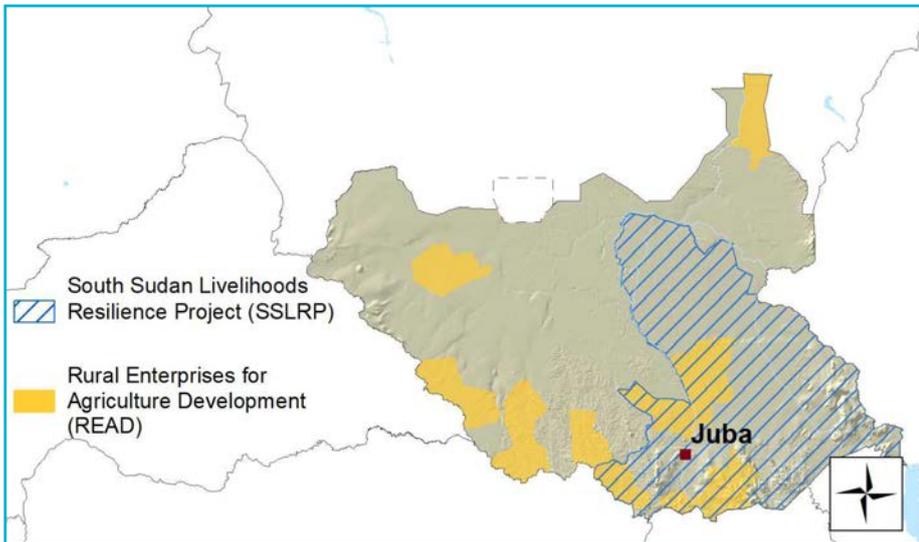
Three strategic objectives underpin this approach:

- Increased productivity and resilience of farming systems and associated rural enterprises to help build a resilient food system in South Sudan;
- Accelerated development of inclusive value chains for food and other products serving local and regional demand; and
- Enhanced institutional capacity for effective national and local policy development, delivery, coordination, and monitoring mechanisms.

Ongoing operations

South Sudan Livelihoods Resilience Project (SSLRP) 2021-2026

SSLRP aims to contribute to improved and resilient livelihoods among the targeted rural communities by empowering communities to participate in decision-making processes that will play a role in recovering agricultural livelihoods, building household resilience, and promoting stability. SSLRP focuses on re-establishing livelihoods for rural communities, with a special emphasis on returnee households, young people and women. It is hoped that, by the end of the project, household resilience to emergency and crises will be strengthened, local agricultural production rebuilt and incomes gained through micro enterprises and short-term employment stabilized.



The project targets 38,800 poor households across three states in five counties: Bor, KajoKeji, Magwi, Terekeka and Torit. Target groups consist of poor, food-insecure farmers, and agropastoral and pastoralist households engaged in fishing, cropping, and livestock activities, with special emphasis on the inclusion of youth, women and vulnerable groups, such as returnees, women-headed households and persons with disabilities.

The project seeks to bridge the humanitarian–development gap by supporting recovery opportunities anchored in the agriculture sector that will promote livelihood development, peace and stabilization. This will be achieved through activities that address constraints to agricultural productivity enhancement and livelihood improvement, including: (i) increasing access to productive inputs; (ii) improving post-harvest handling and storage; (iii) developing climate-smart agricultural infrastructure; (iv) increasing market linkages; and (v) creating stability and stabilization through temporary jobs for youth in infrastructure construction.

The total cost of the project is US\$18.7 million, including US\$9.8 million of IFAD financing. It is cofinanced by the Government of the Netherlands (US\$7.04 million), with parallel financing from the African Development Bank (US\$5.6 million), the Government of South Sudan (US\$0.78 million) and the project participants (US\$1.04 million).

Rural Enterprises for Agriculture Development (READ) 2023-2029

READ aims to improve household food security and incomes by supporting rural producer organizations so that they can become sustainable and resilient actors in food value chains. The project will target around 27,500 households across six counties in six states (Aweil Centre, Magwi, Maridi, Nzara, Renk and Yambio).

READ is financed by the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program (GAFSP), the United Nations Development Programme, the Cooperative Bank of South Sudan, the Government of South Sudan and in-kind contributions from project participants.

IFAD is an international financial institution and a United Nations specialized agency. Based in Rome – the United Nations food and agriculture hub – IFAD invests in rural people, empowering them to reduce poverty, increase food security, improve nutrition and strengthen resilience. Since 1978, we have provided more than US\$24 billion in grants and low-interest loans to fund projects in developing countries.

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