

Jonglei state: Insufficient rains put farmers hopes in limbo

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August 8, 2012 (BOR) – ‘Plants cannot be praised for their good leaves’ as a local saying in South Sudan's Jonglei State goes – ‘ran ace lec ee yoor’ – as farmers wait to see if mechanised agriculture will work in the midst of inconsistent rains this year.

Farmers in Jonglei State say expectations for an increase in yield have dropped despite the introduction of tractors and clearing more areas of South Sudan's vast arable land for farming.

South Sudan, which relies heavily on food imports, is attempting to increase food production to cope with rising inflation that has increased by from 47.8% in January and 79.5%, a record high in May, mainly due to the shutdown of oil production as part of a dispute with Sudan.

Inflation eased to 60.9% in July, according to official data, but the United Nations estimate that around half South Sudan's 8 million population will be food insecure in 2012.

In Werkok, about 20 kilometres east of Bor, the state capital, Jonglei's Ministry of Agriculture is supported two farms owned by groups of farmers with a total of 47 Fadden (approximately 70 by 60 metres).

When *Sudan Tribune* accompanied Mayen Atem Jonglei State's Minister for Agriculture and Forestry on a visit to the farms last week, farmers including John Deng, applauded the initiative but hoped that there has been enough rain this year to support the crops they planted.

“We wanted the farmers in Jonglei state to take farming serious[ly] and this is a good example,” Mayen said during his visit to Werkok.

A local grain known as ‘Zeet’ has been planted in many areas due to its suitability to the environment. It is short and flowers early and expected to be ready for harvest in three months. Importantly, its seeds are too large for a bird to swallow, which commonly happens in the smaller plots looked after by farmers on smaller plots and gardens.

“There will be no enough grain to sell but we will get seeds for [planning] next season. We will be able to harvest enough seeds,” Deng added.

In this village of Werkok, the farms supported by government lag behind. Around homesteads, locals own small gardens where crops are already flowering and children are already enjoying dura cans.

Jonglei State is a home to pastoralist communities and farming is normally practice on small scale. The Sudanese civil war of 1983—2005 uprooted many local communities and destroyed the culture of farming.

After the 2005 peace accord, known as Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that granted South Sudan the right to secede last year Jonglei State has been engulfed in tribal conflicts perpetuated by the acquisition of illegal arms during the war and competition over cattle. The local conflict reached a peak in December 2011 and January this year when an estimated 6,000 armed members of Lou Nuer attacked the neighbouring Murle of Pibor County.

The UN said at least 1,000 people died in similar clashes in 2011 and hundreds of thousands displaced and without food this year.

A comprehensive civilian disarmament campaign was launched in March by President Salva Kiir Mayardit in Bor. The 15,000 strong armed forces collected over 11,000 rifles and reported significant reduction in raids in May and June. Jonglei State ministry of Agriculture says it is taking time for peace in rural areas to translate into increased food production.

Many people fled rural areas into Jonglei's towns during the fighting.

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