

Unity State is running out of goods supply as heavy rain hamper movement

Saturday 18 August 2012

August 17, 2012 (BENTIU) - Fuel prices continue to increase in Unity State with rains cutting off roads to neighbouring Lakes State, as the border with Sudan remains closed despite progress in talks between Juba and Khartoum over oil transportation fees early this month.

Oil production from Unity State and other areas of South Sudan was stopped in January as part of a dispute between Sudan and the newly-independent South. The closure caused a lack of hard currency making it harder for traders to import goods such as petrol.

South Sudan used to import the majority of its goods from Sudan until Khartoum closed the border for trade due to security concerns, threatening to shoot any traders who tried to do business with the world's newest nation.

On the black market the cost of petrol has more than doubled to 320 South Sudan Pounds (SSP) up from 180 SSP, approximately \$75 and \$40 respectively. The dramatic increase comes after heavy rains have left the state cut off from much of the rest of the country.

South Sudan only has a few kilometres of paved road and is recovering from decades of civil war and underinvestment. It has been self-ruling since a 2005 peace deal but the former rebels have struggled to create efficient institutions and tackle rampant corruption.

Majuan Roak a petrol vendor in Kalibalek market says fuel has increased since the heavy rains have made roads impassable with Lakes State to the south. He warned that they were selling what was being kept in storage and that fuel supplies could run out.

The people of Unity State will be reduced to walking everywhere unless the government worked hard to improve roads, he said. After three years selling fuel Roak carryout said he feared that soon he would be out of business if the situation continues.

Unity State, situated on the northern border of South Sudan is one of the farthest away from the capital Juba and South Sudan's main importers, Uganda and Kenya.

Food commodities in Unity State are also doubling in prices. The recent resumption of talks in Ethiopia was hoped to bring both Sudans into better relations at the border but still no mechanism has been reached.

Adom Mohamed Yousif, a trader from Sudan's western Darfur who is based in Unity State, told *Sudan Tribune* he used to bring goods from Khartoum before South Sudan's independence but now has to transport goods from Juba, which takes two weeks.

Yousif said that the poor condition of roads between Unity and Lake State is hampering business.

"For the last two days there is heavy rain, we have some goods coming on the way up to now we have not yet received them at all. These days the road becomes hard to pass through", said Yousif.

"If there is no road traders will not be able to do business", he said.

Kai Riak Kueithoy, the Director General at Unity State's Ministry of Finance, Trade and Industry says it is the responsibility of central government to maintain roads. He added that the road leading from Lake States to Mayiandit County of Unity State was passable but it is the section between Mayiandit County and Bentui that was impassable.

South Sudan's decision to stop oil-production at the start of the year due a dispute with Khartoum has forced the Juba government to introduce widespread austerity measures.

The austerity measures were affecting Unity State, he said, adding that the government was working to see that the flow of goods is maintain.

Kueithoy added that fuel inflation was affecting the whole nation but that he hoped this would end when oil production was resumed or a refinery is built in South Sudan.

Many people fled Bentiu in January and in April during bombardments of the Sudan Armed Forces. In April South Sudan briefly occupied Heglig/Panthou a disputed oil-producing area on their shared border.

Farmers fear that heavy rains may have destroyed their crops adding to food insecurity. The UN estimated that this year around half South Sudan's population could be food insecure.

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