

Situation Overview: Unity State, South Sudan

January - March 2018

REACH An initiative of
IMPACT Initiatives
ACTED and UNOSAT

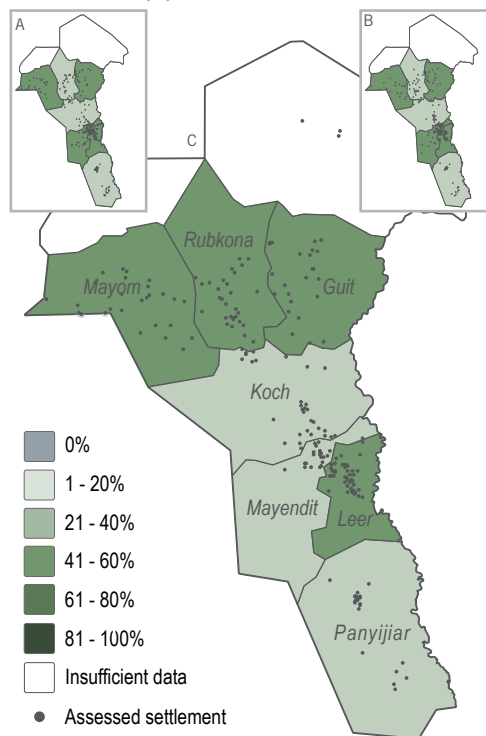
Introduction

According to REACH data, reported adequate access to food and services increased slightly over the first quarter of 2018 in Unity State. Nonetheless, incidents of conflict, in particular counties such as Koch¹, environmental and security challenges that undermined livelihoods, and an increasing reliance on humanitarian assistance suggest that populations in parts of Unity State will remain vulnerable in the coming lean season.

To inform humanitarian actors working outside formal settlement sites, REACH has conducted assessments of hard-to-reach areas in South Sudan since December 2015. The data is collected through interviews on a monthly basis from communities across the Greater Upper Nile region, Greater Equatoria region and Western Bahr el Ghazal region.

In the first three months of 2018, REACH interviewed a total of 795 Key Informants (KIs) in the Bentiu Protection of Civilians (PoC) site and Nyal. The KIs were from 433 settlements situated in 7 of the 9 counties in Unity State. The findings were triangulated through 10 displacement and food security and livelihoods (FSL) focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted in Bentiu and Nyal, secondary data and previous REACH assessments of hard-

Map 1: REACH assessment coverage of Unity State, January (A), February (B) and March 2018 (C)²



to-reach areas of Unity State.

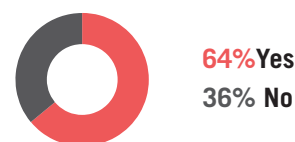
In order to ensure an understanding of current displacement trends and humanitarian conditions in settlements from which displacement took place, new arrivals, representing 87% of KIs, were specifically

targeted. The remainder of the KIs interviewed (13%) reported having been in the settlement or having had regular contact with someone from the settlement within the last month. This Situation Overview focuses on changes in humanitarian needs observed in the first quarter of 2018. The first section analyses displacement and population movement in Unity in early 2018, and the second section evaluates access to food and basic services for both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and local communities.

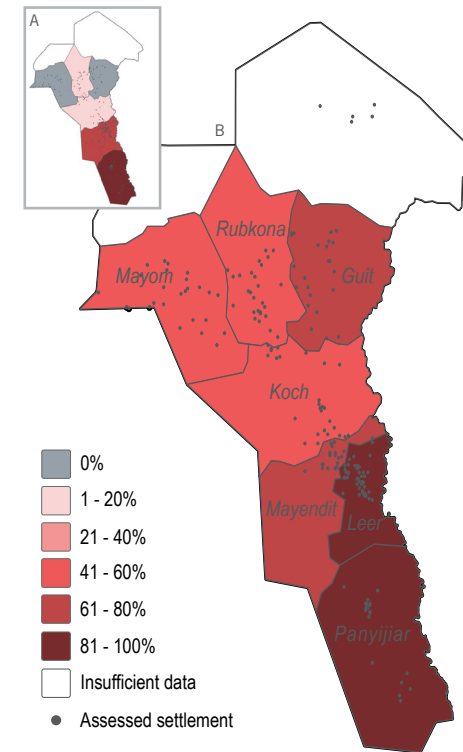
Population Movement and Displacement

The presence of IDPs in Unity State reflected not only localised insecurity but also more widespread challenges accessing sufficient food and services. The number of assessed settlements reporting the presence of IDPs increased in Unity State, from 45% in January to 64% in March (see Figure 1). As Map 2 illustrates, the percentages were consistently

Figure 1: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting IDP presence, March 2018



Map 2: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting an IDP presence, January 2018 (A) and March 2018 (B)



high in southern Unity. In Panyijiar, more than 90% of assessed settlements reported the presence of IDPs every month in the first quarter of 2018. For instance, during FGDs conducted in Nyal, Panyijiar County, participants had described Nyal as a place

1. The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED) Data, <https://www.acleddata.com/data/>, March 2018.

2. Data is only represented for counties whereby 5% of the settlements were assessed.

METHODOLOGY

To provide an overview of the situation in largely inaccessible areas of Unity State, REACH uses primary data provided by key informants who have recently arrived from, recently visited, or receive regular information from a location or "Area of Knowledge" (AoK). Information for this report was collected from key informants in the Bentiu PoC site and Nyal town in January, February and March 2018.

The first phase of the assessment methodology comprised a participatory mapping exercise to map the relevant settlements in Unity State. In-depth interviews were then conducted with selected participants using a standardised survey tool comprising questions on displacement trends, population needs, and access to basic services.

After data collection was completed, all data was aggregated at the settlement level, and settlements were assigned the modal response. When no consensus could be found for a settlement, that settlement was not included in reporting.

Data was analyzed at the county level using descriptive statistics and geospatial analysis. Due to access and operational constraints, the specific settlements assessed within each county each month vary. Thus, some changes over time reported in this situation overview might be due to variations in coverage.


of safety from insecurity and conflict for IDPs coming from Mayendit and Leer. Most people aim to reach Kok, Leer County and then travel by canoe to Nyal, Panyijiar County, but this is not without challenges, such as wild animals,

hunger, disease and high prices for renting canoes.³ For example, it costs approximately between 2,500 - 2,000 South Sudanese Pounds (SSP) for adults and 1,500 SSP for children for the journey from Kok to Nyal and takes 3 days.⁴

Over the same period, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting the presence of IDPs in northern and central Unity State increased (see Map 2). No assessed settlements in Mayom and Guit in January, in particular, reported the presence of IDPs; in March, however, 42% and 63% respectively reported the presence of IDPs.


According to both AoK data and focus group discussions, a number of reasons reportedly spurred displacements across Unity State, including insecurity, the lack of food and services, and distance from family. The lack of security was consistently the most frequently reported reason that newly arrived IDPs left their previous locations and arrived in the Bentiu PoC site and Nyal (see Figures 2, 3).

Figure 2: Primary reported reasons that newly arrived IDPs left their previous location

	Bentiu PoC		Nyal	
	Feb	Mar	Feb	Mar
 Insecurity	41%	36%	59%	58%
Lack of food	14%	19%	0%	2%
Far from family	17%	18%	13%	5%
Lack of health care	13%	15%	18%	22%

Among interviewed IDPs, the distribution of explanations for their displacement, however differed somewhat among those arriving in northern or southern Unity (corresponding to REACH's two data collection sites - Bentiu PoC and Nyal), reflecting the different challenges in nearby communities. In March, IDPs interviewed in Nyal came exclusively from Leer and Mayendit Counties; the majority (56%) reported insecurity as the primary reason of their displacement, followed by a lack of access to health care (22%). Conversely, interviewed IDPs arriving in the Bentiu PoC site in March came from seven of nine Unity State Counties, and reported a more diverse array of reasons for their displacement. While about a third (36%) of interviewed IDPs also reported insecurity as the primary reason for their displacement, other reasons including the lack of food (19%) and distance from family (18%). Indeed, AoK indicators captured reports of unseasonably low access to food in Northern Unity, especially in Mayom and Guit counties, while focus group discussants

Figure 3: Primary reported reasons that newly arrived IDPs came to their present location

	Bentiu PoC		Nyal	
	Feb	Mar	Feb	Mar
 Insecurity	26%	23%	43%	56%
Food distribution	15%	25%	0%	4%
Family	24%	28%	17%	5%
Health services	22%	20%	24%	27%

emphasised the lack of services, especially health and education.⁵ Between January and March, the International Organization for Migration's Displacement Tracking Matrix (IOM DTM) similarly reported that 23% of people entering the Bentiu PoC site cited shortage of food as the primary reason.⁶

Overall, inadequate access to food and conflict were key - and intertwined - drivers of displacement throughout Unity.

Situation in Assessed Settlements

Demographic profile

Host population in assessed settlements

Less than 3% of assessed settlements reported full depopulation, the majority (57%) of assessed settlements in Unity State reported that half or less than half of the population remained in the settlement in March. This dynamic was most pronounced in Leer, Guit, and Mayendit, where 83%, 70% and 67% of assessed settlements respectively reported that half or less of the host population remained. Consistent with reports of fighting in Koch in early 2018⁷, in January, 88% of assessed settlements in Koch reported that half or less than half of the population remained in settlements. Throughout the first quarter 2018, Panyijiar remained an outlier, with the vast majority of assessed settlements (93%) reporting that more than half or all of the population remained in the community.

3. REACH FGD with participants from Leer, January 2018.

4. REACH FGDs with participants from Leer and Mayendit, January 2018. This averages between \$6-12. The average exchange rate increased from 211 SSP to 241

SSP for 1 USD in the parallel market in the first quarter of 2018. WFP, South Sudan Monthly Market Price Monitoring Bulletin, Jan 2018, February 2018, March 2018.

5. REACH FGDs with participants from Mayom, Leer and Koch, February and March

Remaining host community members across Unity State were reportedly predominately female and there were more children than adults. For instance, in March, 64% of assessed settlements reported that there were more women than men, and 53% reported that there were more children than adults.

IDP population in assessed settlements

Throughout the first quarter of 2018, the majority (more than 80%) of assessed settlements with IDP presence consistently reported that most of the IDPs were living together with the host community; however, in conflict-affected counties, IDPs reportedly had less access to shelter. In January, 25% of assessed settlements with IDP presence in Koch reported that most of the IDPs were living in spontaneous settlements. The following month, 20% of assessed settlements with IDP presence in Leer reported the same, and a further 10% reported that the majority of IDPs were living in the bush. In both cases, these trends paralleled reports of increasing insecurity in the counties, which may have prevented the local communities from hosting IDPs or prevented IDPs from building permanent shelters.

Consistent with prior months, the majority of assessed settlements with an IDP presence continued to report that the majority or all of the IDP population were female and that children outnumbered adults. In March, for example, 93% of assessed settlements with IDP populations reported the presence of more women than men among the IDPs,

and 80% reported more children than adults. Similar to previous months, this is likely linked to ongoing conflict as well as fears of forced recruitment across the state, which pulls men and boys away from the home or pushes them into the bush.⁸

Protection

As highlighted in the previous section of this Overview, January 2018 saw a concentrated increase in conflict incidents in Unity State, specifically in Koch County (see Map 4). Eighty-five percent (85%) of assessed settlements in Koch reported incidents during which civilians were killed or property was damaged, a substantial increase from the 27% reporting the same the prior month. Additionally, more than half of assessed settlements in Rubkona (64%), Mayendit (53%) and Leer (53%) reported incidents in January.

The security situation generally improved by March 2018, with some exceptions. State-wide the proportion of assessed settlements reporting conflict incidents decreased from 42% in January to 32% in March; in Koch, insecurity remained high but the proportion of assessed settlements were reporting incidents decreased by half compared to January (see Map 4). The reported prevalence of looting also decreased in Koch, starting in March. Figure 4 illustrates a consistent one-month lag in changes between the reported incidents of looting versus conflict in Koch, which suggests that there is a risk of substitution in the type of protection concerns. Meanwhile, insecurity increased in Mayom County in March, with

Map 4: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting incidents of conflict, January 2018 (A) and March 2018 (B)

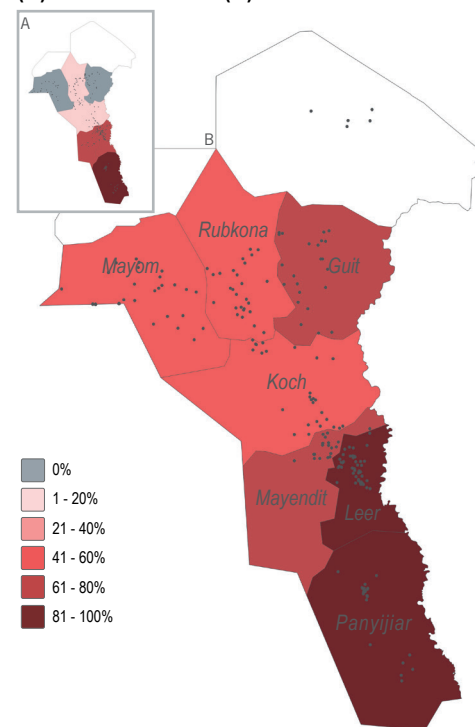
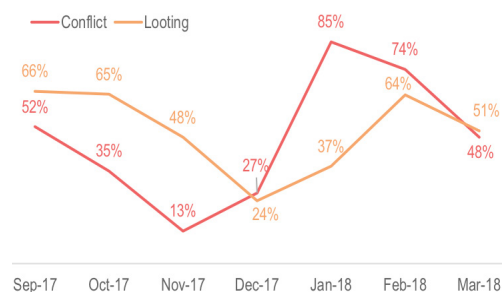


Figure 4: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting protection incidents, Koch County, September 2017 - March 2018



more than a third of assessed settlements reported conflict incidents, compared to 11% in the month prior.

In March, protection concerns for both men and women remained similar to preceding months with 32% of assessed settlements reporting sexual violence being the primary protection concern for women (see Figure 5). The primary protection concern for men in assessed settlements across the state continued to be killing and injury, reported by 54% of assessed settlements. Cited protection concerns revealed differences in the type of insecurity that was most prevalent in the different counties. In Leer, killing and injury from fighting between communities - i.e. inter-communal conflict - was consistently the most frequently reported protection threat for men. In contrast, assessed settlements in Koch and Rubkona were consistently more likely to cite intra-communal violence.

Figure 5: Most commonly cited protection concerns for men and women, March 2018



In March, the primary protection concern for girls reported by assessed settlements across Unity State was early marriage (21%). Whilst abduction was a primary protection concern

2018.
6. IOM, DTM Bentiu PoC Site Flow Monitoring 1 Jan - 31 Mar 2018, April 2018.

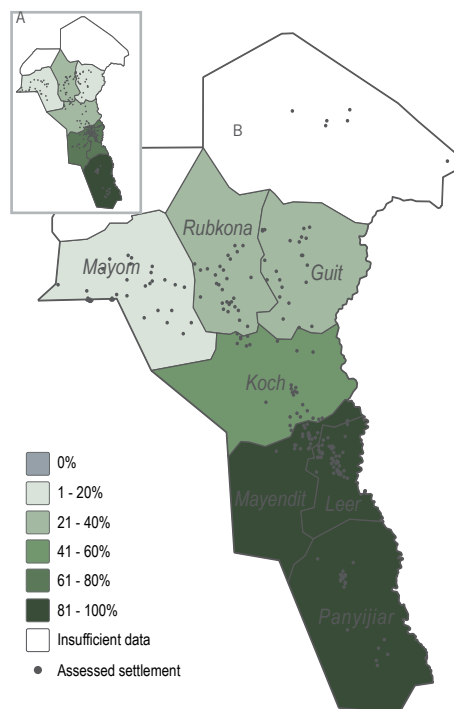
7. OCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Issue 02, South Sudan, 20 February 2018.
8. REACH FGD with participants from Mayom and Koch, February and March 2018.

for girls in the counties of Leer and Mayendit, which was reported by 44% and 43% of assessed settlements respectively. The primary protection concern for boys reported by assessed settlements across Unity State was forced recruitment (19%).

Food Security and Livelihoods

Overall, adequate access to food increased slightly over the first period of 2018 (see Map 5), and humanitarian assistance continued to play an important role in improved access to food. In March 2018, 72% of assessed settlements

Map 5: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food, January 2018 (A) and March 2018 (B)



overall reported adequate access to food. This is similar to the 64% that reported the same in January 2018 as well as to the 54% in March of the previous year (2017). Humanitarian assistance was reported to be the main source of food in 62% of assessed settlements state-wide in March, including in nearly all assessed settlements in Leer (94%) and Mayendit (95%). That said, reported food security varied considerably in assessed settlements across Unity State, reflecting differences in access to humanitarian assistance, livelihood activities, and environmental and security challenges. Throughout the first quarter of 2018, higher proportions of assessed settlements in southern Unity State counties reported adequate access to food compared to those in northern Unity.

Northern Unity (Rubkona, Guit, Koch, and Mayom)

Throughout the first quarter of 2018, reported adequate access to food in northern Unity State was low (see Map 5); an average of only 30% or less of assessed settlements reported adequate access to food each month. Distinct patterns emerged between the different counties to help explain the low access to food, concerning differences in the available livelihood activities and main sources of food.

In Rubkona and Guit, only 38% and 28% of assessed settlements respectively reported adequate access to food in March. The vast majority of assessed settlements in both counties continued to report engaging in subsistence farming as a livelihood activity

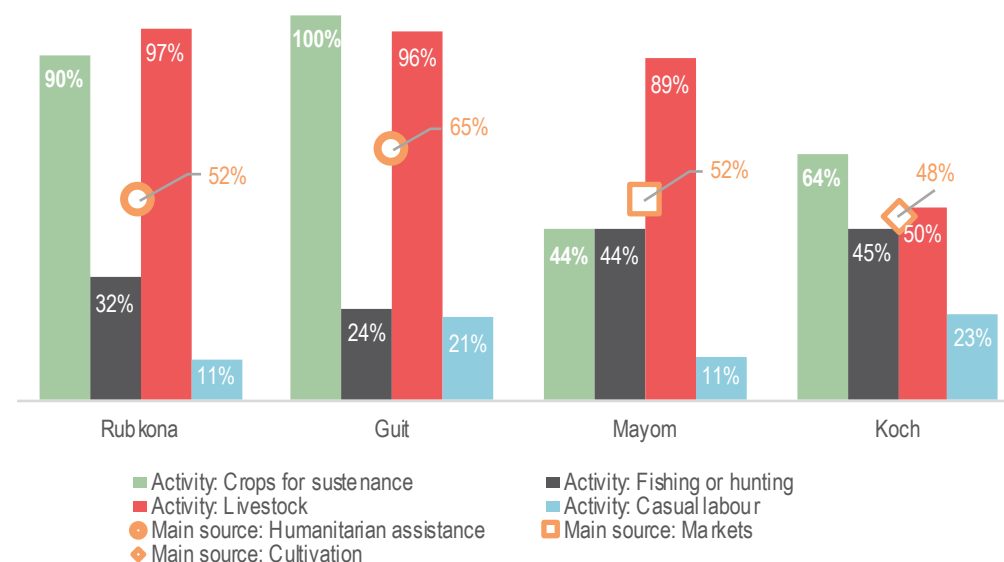
(averaging more than 90% each month of 2018); however, poor rains and environmental challenges have limited yields.⁹ In Rubkona, 89% of assessed settlements who reported inadequate access to food cited the lack of rain as the primary reason. As a result, only about a third of assessed settlements in Rubkona and Guit cited cultivation as the main source of food in March (35% in Guit, 34% in Rubkona). Absent productive livelihoods, many reported reliance on humanitarian assistance. The majority in both counties listed humanitarian assistance as the primary source of food (65% of assessed settlements in Guit, 52% in Rubkona) (see Figure 6).

Mayom County experienced a precipitous drop in food security in recent months. Only 6%

of assessed settlements reported adequate access to food in February 2018, compared to 86% just five months prior and 85% in the same month last year. The decrease reflects a distinct combination of shocks to the county's livelihood profile, which differs from others in northern Unity.¹⁰ Assessed settlements in Mayom reported higher market access, more consistent engagement in livestock rearing, less cultivation, and less reliance on humanitarian aid as a primary food source.

The primary reported reasons for inadequate access to food in Mayom were environmental; in March, 66% of assessed settlements reporting inadequate access to food cited a lack of rain and the short growing season as primary reasons. Focus group participants

Figure 6: Northern Unity Counties: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting engagement in livelihood activities versus the most frequently cited main source of food, March 2018



9. Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, National Bureau of Statistics and the Food and Agriculture Organization, South Sudan Crop Watch, March-July 2017.

10. See forthcoming REACH, Mayom County Profile, March 2018.

also stressed the impact of localised conflict, cattle raiding, flooding, market disruptions and the legacy of a severe cattle disease crisis.¹¹ For more information on the deteriorating access to food in Mayom, please see the forthcoming REACH county profile.¹²

Absent sufficient cultivation, markets were the primary source of food among the majority of assessed settlements in Mayom in March (52%), more distantly followed by cultivation (12%), foraging (12%), livestock (8%), and humanitarian assistance (8%). That said, all assessed settlements also reported an increase in market prices for cereal in March, which subsequently had a “large impact” on the ability to access enough food in nearly all (93%) of assessed settlements.

Unlike in Rubkona and Guit, reported reliance on humanitarian assistance was low in Mayom County; only 8% of assessed settlements reported humanitarian assistance was the main source of food in March. Historically, there has been a smaller humanitarian presence in Mayom compared to neighbouring counties; however, two INGOs did distribute food in Mayom during this period. The relatively small impact of these distributions in AoK data is perhaps explained by FGD participants’ statements that many people from more rural areas in Mayom were not registered and that the amounts distributed were insufficient when subsequently shared amongst dispersed settlements.

Finally, insecurity featured more prominently in explanations for food insecurity in Koch.

As a consequence of conflict affecting Koch County in early 2018, aid workers were relocated from Koch town in February and humanitarian access and assistance to the county decreased.¹³ The impact of the insecurity on access to food is evident. Only 26% of assessed communities in February reported adequate access to food. Further, 29% of assessed settlements with inadequate access reported that the stopping of food distributions was the primary reason, while 36% cited the destruction of crops in fighting, and 14% reported insecurity generally.

Surprisingly, cultivation was the most frequently reported main source of food among assessed counties in Koch (48%) in March (see Figure 6). In January, however, only 46% of assessed settlements reported engaging in cultivation as a livelihood source, rising to 64% in March. The reliance on cultivation likely reflected the limited options for sources of food in the county rather than a sufficient level of crop production. In January, only 15% of assessed settlements in Koch reported humanitarian assistance as their main source of food, which is also similar for February (19%) and March (24%).

In January, the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) classified Koch as IPC Phase 4 (“Emergency”) in the February to April period, in the presence of humanitarian assistance.¹⁴ Therefore, protracted absence of humanitarian assistance and conflict-related restrictions to population movement is likely to result in a deteriorating food security situation.

Southern Unity (Mayendit, Leer, and Panyijiar)

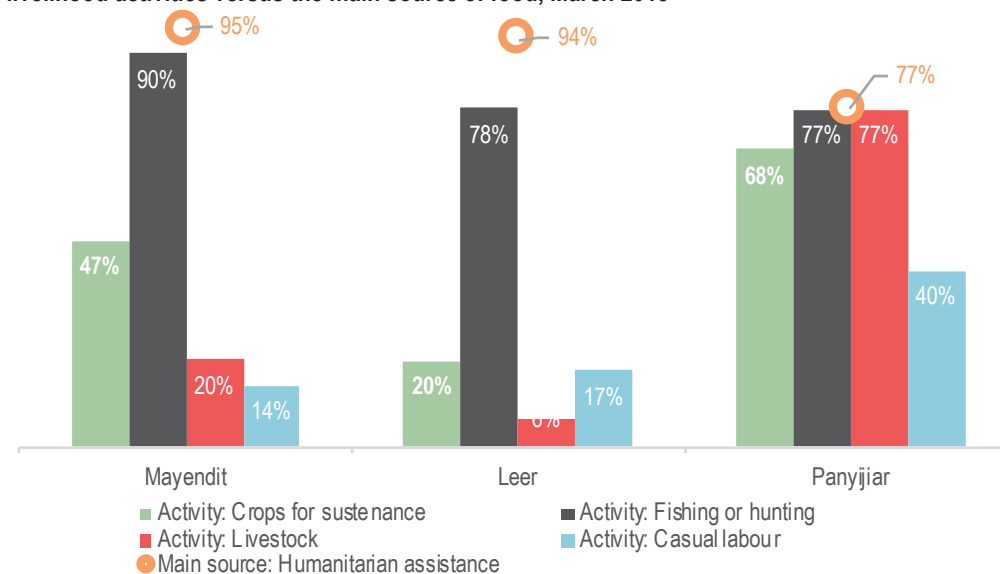
Adequate access to food remained higher in southern Unity counties, largely due to high levels of humanitarian assistance. In Leer and Mayendit Counties, reported access to food improved from an average of 65% of assessed settlements in January to 98% in March; in Panyijiar, adequate access to food was reported by more than 80% of assessed settlements every month.

Engagement in livelihood activities in southern Unity counties differed starkly from those in northern Unity (see Figure 7). The most frequently reported livelihood activity in Mayendit and Leer was fishing

and hunting (90% and 78% of assessed counties, respectively). Reflecting continued security concerns, less than half of assessed settlements in Mayendit (47%) reported cultivating land in March, and only 20% in Leer. Only about a third of assessed settlements in Leer (36%) reported having physical access to land for cultivation in March. In the absence of diverse livelihood activities, the majority of assessed settlements in both counties reported that humanitarian assistance was the primary source of food for the community throughout the first quarter of 2018, peaking at 95% of assessed settlements in Mayendit in March, and 94% in Leer (see Figure 7).

Assessed settlements in Panyijiar reported

Figure 7: Southern Unity Counties: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting engagement in livelihood activities versus the main source of food, March 2018



11. REACH FGD with participants from Mayom, February and March 2018
12. REACH, Mayom County Profile: Populations, FSL & Services, forthcoming.

13. OCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin Issue 02, South Sudan, 20 February 2018.
14. IPC, Key IPC Findings: January-July 2018.

greater diversity in livelihood activities - including, cultivation, hunting and fishing, and raising livestock - yet, 77% of assessed settlements in March reported that humanitarian assistance was the primary source of food (see Figure 7). Furthermore, the first quarter of 2018 saw a sharp increase in the proportion of assessed settlements in Panyijiar relying primarily upon humanitarian assistance, from about a fifth (22%) and a half (52%) in November and December 2017, to consistently greater than three-quarters throughout the first quarter of 2018. Increased reliance on humanitarian assistance may reflect seasonal depletion of harvests, as well as the recent arrivals of IDPs that do not have access to cultivation as a source of food. Cereal household food stocks might be further depleted due to sharing resources and hosting IDPs, with at least 90% of assessed settlements in Panyijiar reporting the presence of IDPs.

Shelter

Amidst continued insecurity in Unity, assessed settlements reported an increase in shelter destruction in early 2018 as well as a temporary increase in the number of IDPs without shelter.

Local community shelter conditions

Consistent with trends of reported incidents of conflict, the proportion of assessed settlements living in the more permanent structures, or tukuls, was lowest among conflict-affected counties. In March, only 63%, 69%, and 60% of assessed settlements in Koch, Leer and

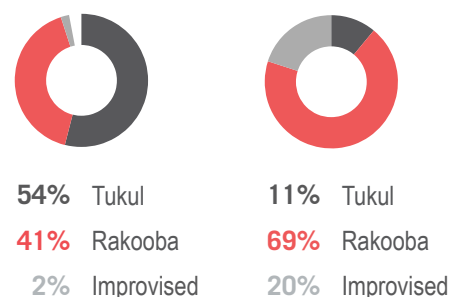
Mayendit (respectively) reported that host communities primarily lived in tukuls.

Koch and Mayendit reported the greatest levels of shelter destruction in early 2018. In January, nearly a third (32%) of assessed settlements in Koch reported that shelters had been destroyed or partially destroyed during fighting in the last month; more than a quarter (27%) reported the same in Mayendit. These numbers rose in February (to 48% and 32%, respectively), likely reflecting a lag in reporting from January conflict incidents, before falling again in March (to 14% and 22%, respectively).

IDP shelter condition

The majority of IDPs reportedly continued to live primarily in less permanent shelters than host communities (see Figure 9). In January, during the height of conflict incidents, 69% of assessed settlements in Unity with IDPs present reported that IDP populations primarily lived in rakoobas, 20% in improvised shelters,

Figure 9: Primary shelter type of local community (left) and IDP community (for assessed settlements hosting IDPs), Unity State, January 2018¹⁴



and 11% in tukuls. All reports of improvised shelters as a primary shelter type for IDPs came from assessed settlements in Leer and Mayendit counties.

In advance of the rainy season, the most commonly cited NFIs reported as needed by IDPs in assessed settlements in March were plastic sheeting (40% of assessed settlements) mosquito nets (20%), and soap (16%).

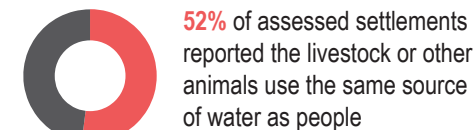
WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene)

Access to improved water sources remained challenging across Unity State. Just over half (52%) of assessed settlements in March reported that their main source of water was an improved source (borehole, tap stand, or water yard), as opposed to an unimproved source and surface water (e.g. unprotected well, river, or swamp). Access to safe water was particularly low in Rubkona, where only 15% of assessed settlements reported that communities primarily used an improved source; the majority (74%) reported using the river for drinking water.

State wide, more than half of assessed settlements reported that livestock or other animals currently used the same source of water as people (see Figure 10). Such practices increase the potential transmission of parasitic water-borne diseases. As animals defecate in or near the water, it raises the risk of people consuming faecal material when drinking, which can result in diarrhoeal diseases, including cholera.

Contributing to poor hygiene and sanitation

Figure 10: Shared water sources, March 2018



condition in the state and consistent with previous months, open defecation remained a common practice within assessed settlements throughout the first quarter of 2018. Consistently more than 75% of assessed settlements reported that none of the community used latrines. Comparatively, this exceeds the countrywide AoK average of 56% of assessed settlements reporting the same in March 2018.

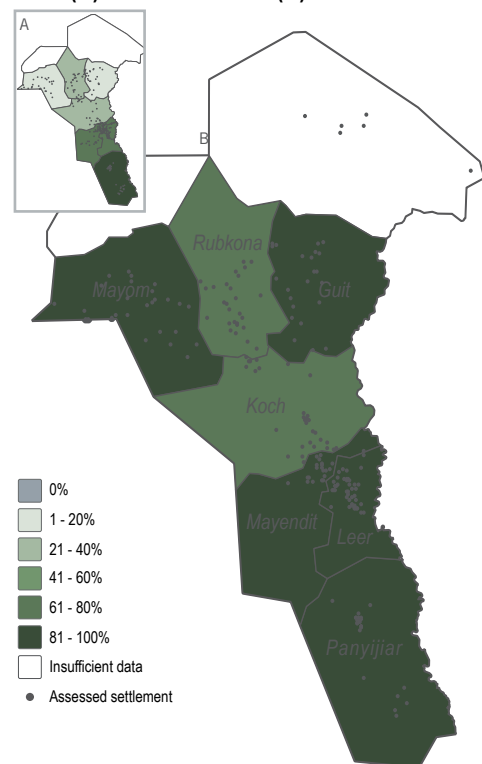
The combination of minimal access to improved water sources, frequency of shared water sources, and open defecation is a cause for concern; in particular, ahead of the approaching rainy season when water-borne disease outbreaks seasonally increase.

Health

Since the start of the year, reported access to health services by assessed settlements continued to remain similar across Unity State (see Map 6). In March, 87% of assessed settlements overall reported that health facilities were accessible, which is similar to the 80% reported in January and a large increase from the 44% reporting the same in March of last year.

Whilst the overall percentage of assessed

Map 6: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting access to health services, January 2018 (A) and March 2018 (B)



settlements reporting access to health facilities remained comparable over the last three months, improvements were reported in Koch and Rubkona. In January, only 24% of assessed counties in Koch reported access to health facilities, but, in March, 77% reported the same. Similarly, reported access to health facilities in Rubkona increased from 31% to 70% of assessed settlements over the same period.

Changes in reported access to health facilities

likely reflect volatility in the security situation. Evolutions in the main reasons cited for the inaccessibility of health facilities in Koch and Rubkona over the first quarter of 2018 help to illustrate this dynamic (see Figure 11). In Koch, 40% of assessed settlements cited insecurity as the main reported reason why health facilities were not accessible in January, but none cited this in March; reflective of the security improvements in Koch in the end of the first quarter. The increased proportion of settlements citing the destruction of facilities in conflict as the main inhibiting factor, however, shows that the negative impact of conflict on health persists beyond the fighting itself.

Figure 11: Most commonly cited reasons that health facilities are not available, Koch and Rubkona Counties

	Koch		Rubkona	
	Jan	Mar	Jan	Mar
Insecurity	40%	0%	29%	18%
Facilities destroyed in conflict	20%	43%	0%	18%
Facilities never there or too distant	20%	29%	50%	47%
No drugs or no staff	20%	29%	21%	18%

At the same time, several health access challenges appear to have pre-dated the conflict. State wide, half of all assessed settlements in March without access to healthcare reported that facilities were never there or too distant, which indicates that access to healthcare in remote settlements

was low even prior to the start of the conflict. Even among settlements reporting access to facilities, proximity remained challenging. Of the assessed settlements reporting access to health services in March, the majority (55%) reported that it takes an hour or more by foot to access health facilities. In the case of Mayom and Rubkona, more than a third of assessed villages are a half day away or more (35% and 41%, respectively).

Malaria continued to be the main health concern reported by 62% of assessed settlements across Unity in March, and malaria drugs was the primary health care item most reported by assessed settlements (92%), which is a concerning trend ahead of the 2018 rainy season, as malaria cases are anticipated to seasonally increase over the coming months. In addition, 8 cases of suspected Measles, including 1 death, were reported in Mayom in mid-March, with verification pending.¹⁵

In the first quarter of 2018, access to health was of particular concern in conflict-affected areas of Koch and Rubkona, where insecurity either restricted access to or destroyed already limited health infrastructure.

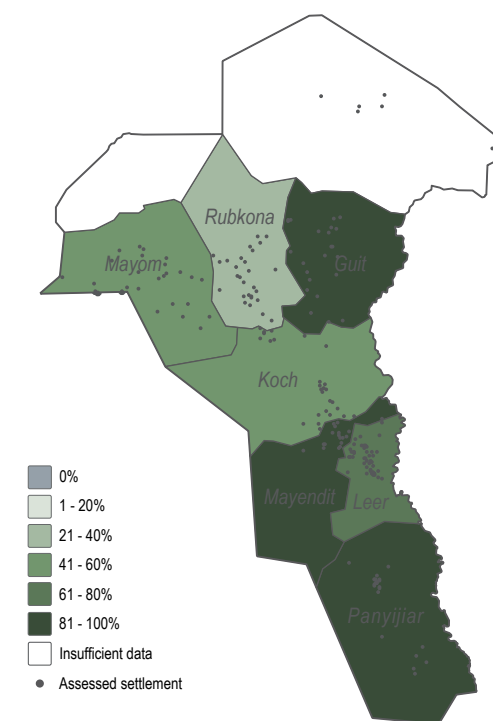
Education

Reported access to education services increased slightly over the first quarter of 2018. Sixty-six percent (66%) of assessed settlements reported that education services were accessible in March 2018 (see Map 7), compared to the 53% that reported the same in January. Reported access increased

in all assessed counties, but the trend was especially pronounced in Koch County. In January, only 4% of assessed settlements in Koch reported access to education facilities; by March, the number had increased to 44%. This is likely as a reflection in increased humanitarian access at the end of the quarter following insecurity in January.

Part of the increase in access to education likely reflected the marginally improved security situation State-wide over this period. In January, 20% of assessed settlements where

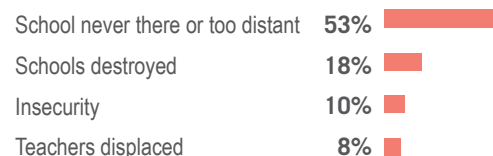
Map 7: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting access to education, March 2018



15. WHO, Epidemiological Update, 26 March to 1 April 2018.

education was inaccessible cited insecurity as the main reason; in March, only 10% reported the same (see Figure 12). At the same time, structural barriers to education persisted. That schools were never there (38%) or too distant (15%) remained the most commonly cited reason among assessed settlements where education was inaccessible in March.

Figure 12: Four main reasons that education is not accessible, March 2018



Pronounced gender disparities persisted in the school attendance rates. In March, only 32% of assessed settlements with access to education reported that more than half or all of the girls attended school, while 75% reported the same for boys. That said, considerable variation existed between counties. Reported attendance rates approached parity between genders in Panyijiar (62% of assessed settlements reporting greater than half attendance for girls, 73% for boys); however, in neighbouring Mayendit, 60% of assessed settlements reported more than half of boys attend school, but no settlements reported the same for girls.

Where children were unable to access educational services, high school fees were a common reason preventing both boys (15%) and girls (18%) from attending school in March.

In addition, the lack of school supplies (28%) and the need to work in the home (30%) were reported as separate inhibiting factors for boys and girls, respectively. The most commonly cited reasons for lack of attendance were generally consistent across months.

Conclusion

The combination of insecurity, environmental challenges and large populations of IDPs continued to stress livelihoods and services in Unity State between the months of January and March. Koch is an area of particular concern, classified by the IPC as a Phase 4, or emergency. Mayom is also of high concern, with only 6% of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food in February. Across the state, however, the widespread reliance on humanitarian assistance as a main source of food underscores the general deterioration of livelihood activities in Unity State and exposes a concerning vulnerability, should humanitarian access be restricted.

WASH continues to be a prevailing problem for counties across Unity State, with only half of assessed settlements reporting access to an improved source of drinking water, and more than half reportedly sharing their water source with livestock. This is especially disconcerting as the rainy season is approaching and is likely to increase the spread of water-borne diseases.

Access to health services seems to be improving, with 84% of assessed settlements reported access to health services in March

2018. This is an improvement from the 44% reporting the same one year prior. However, structural challenges persisted; many assessed settlements continued to report that the lack of nearby health infrastructure prevented populations from accessing care. Additionally, the impact of conflict impeded access to health services in conflict-affected areas, most notably in Koch and Rubkona.

While humanitarian assistance remains widely important to address needs arising out of compounding conflict, environmental and displacement challenges throughout Unity State, negative trends in Koch and Mayom are of particular concern. The positive impact of humanitarian assistance can be seen in the improvements to access to food reported in Leer and Mayendit; 100% and 97% of assessed settlements, respectively, reported adequate access to food during the month of March. However, as in previous months, the continuation of this positive trend will be largely dependent upon sustained humanitarian access to enable the delivery of life-saving assistance, with the IPC January 2018 update noting that in the worst-case scenario, a protracted absence of humanitarian assistance and conflict-related restrictions to population movement would likely lead to populations in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5).

About REACH

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. All REACH activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information, you can write to our in-country office: southsudan@reach-initiative.org or to our global office: geneva@reach-initiative.org.

Visit www.reach-initiative.org and follow us @REACH_info.