

Humanitarian Situation Monitoring Western Equatoria State

April - September 2020
South Sudan

REACH Informing
more effective
humanitarian action

Introduction

Through the second and third quarter of 2020, humanitarian needs in Western Equatoria State (WES) increased due to a deteriorating security situation, displacement, unusual heavy rainfall and flooding, and COVID-19 related movement restrictions.

Information remains critical for an informed response, yet COVID-19 restrictions, insecurity and bad road conditions have limited the movement of key informants (KIs) to and from their settlements, and negatively impacted humanitarian access to many areas across the state. These challenges, however, did not affect the survey coverage.

To inform humanitarian actors working outside formal settlement sites, REACH has conducted assessments of hard-to-reach areas in South Sudan since December 2015. Data is collected on a monthly basis through interviews with KIs with knowledge of a settlement and triangulated with focus group discussions (FGDs), and secondary data. This Situation Overview analyses changes in observed humanitarian needs in Western Equatoria in the second and third quarter of 2020.

Methodology

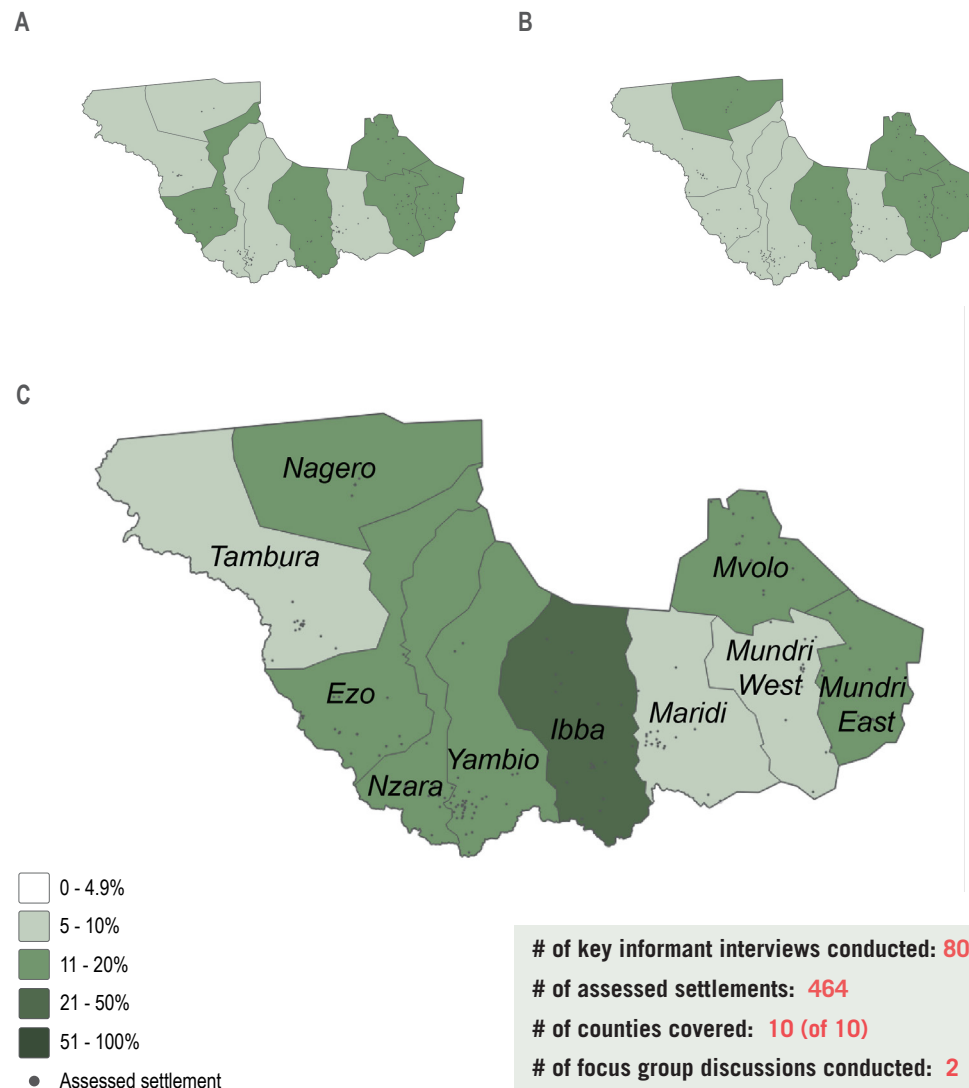
To provide an overview of the situation in hard-to-reach areas of Western Equatoria, REACH uses primary data from key informants who have recently arrived from, recently visited, or receive regular information from a settlement or “Area of Knowledge” (AoK). Information for this report was collected from key informants in Yambio and Maridi towns in Western Equatoria State between April and September 2020.

In-depth interviews on humanitarian needs were conducted throughout the month using a structured survey tool. After data collection was completed, all data was aggregated at settlement level, and settlements were assigned the modal or most credible response. When no consensus could be found for a settlement, that settlement was not included in reporting.

Only counties with interview coverage of at least 5% of all settlements in a given month were included in analysis. Due to access and operational constraints, the specific settlements assessed within each county each month vary. In order to reduce the likelihood that variations in data are attributable to coverage differences, over time analyses were only conducted for counties with at least 70% consistent payam coverage over the period.

Quantitative findings were triangulated with focused group discussions (FGDs) with male and female local community members from all ten counties of WES and secondary sources. More details of the methodology can be found in the [AoK ToRs](#).

Map 1: REACH assessment coverage of the WES region, April (A), July (B) and September (C) 2020



1. To calculate the percentage of AoK coverage, the total number of settlements per county is based on OCHA settlement lists in addition to new settlements mapped by KIs reached each month.

2. Payam is the administrative unit below the county-level.

Key Findings



Displacement: In the second and third quarter of 2020, new displacement occurred in Tambura and Mundri East counties due to increased insecurity, and in Nagero County due to flooding. Observed decreased cross-border movements were likely due to the border closure implemented to prevent the spread of COVID-19.³



Food Security and Livelihoods: Access to food remained stable in WES, with 86% of assessed settlements reporting adequate access in September. However, due to insecurity, bad road conditions and flooding, the food security situation has raised concerns in Nagero County and Greater Mundri.⁴ In Nagero County 17% of assessed settlements reported adequate access to food and 83% hunger, and in Greater Mundri 72% reported adequate access in September.

86% of assessed settlements reported adequate access to food across Western Equatoria State in September 2020.

17% of assessed settlements in **Nagero County** reported adequate access to food in September 2020.



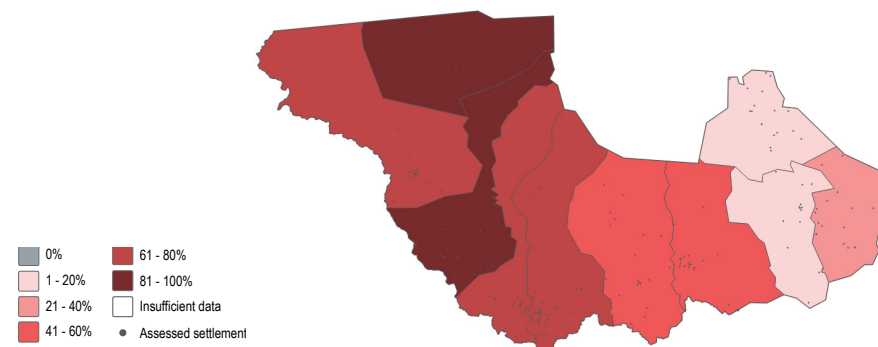
Protection: Despite increased insecurity across WES in Q2 and Q3, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting most people felt safe remained relatively high and stable throughout the reporting period (from 89% in March to 81% in September). School closures exacerbated rising teenage pregnancies and early marriage, the main reported protection concern for girls.⁵ Assessed settlements in Mundri East and Mundri West counties reported serious protection concerns for men and boys (i.e. abduction and forced recruitment), likely due to ongoing hostilities,⁶ and killing of civilians and looting was reported in Maridi, Mvolo, and Tambura and Mundri East counties during the reporting period.



Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH): The onset of the rainy season and planting activities had a cumulative effect on access to clean water as farming activities required many to stay in rural areas and resort to unsafe water sources due to limited access to boreholes outside of urban areas. Likely due to these reasons, in September only 39% of assessed settlements reported boreholes as the main source of drinking water.

WASH related needs continued to be particularly high in the eastern counties, where over half of the assessed settlements (57%) reported water collection taking 1 hour to half a day.

Proportion of assessed settlements reporting the use of water sources that are unimproved as the main drinking water source, in September 2020



Health: Access to healthcare was reportedly hindered by the distance to health facilities, lack of essential medication exacerbated by impassable roads,⁷ and insecurity, with Greater Mundri and southern payams of Maridi County being the most affected. The temporary closure of the Nzara County Hospital⁸ also negatively impacted access to health care in the western counties.⁹ Seizures, indicating a prevalence of nodding-disease,¹⁰ continued to be the main reported health problem in Mundri East (39%) and Mvolo (33%) counties in September.



Shelter/ Non Food Items (NFI): Access to reliable shelter generally remained stable across Western Equatoria, however fighting and flooding had reportedly destroyed shelters in Mundri East and Nagero counties. Besides shelter destruction due to conflict, assessments highlighted over 5000 households (HH) losing shelters, belongings, food, livestock and livelihoods, and forecasted poor harvest due to loss of crops in Mundri East and West.^{11,12} In Tambura County in September 18% of assessed settlements reported shelters being destroyed due to fighting following the hostilities taking place in June.¹³



Education: Education institutions remained closed across South Sudan during Q2 and Q3 to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Solely candidate classes (primary eight and senior four) were expected to resume the 5th of October 2020.¹⁴

3. Radio Tamazuj. South Sudan closes airports and borders over coronavirus fears. 23 Mar 2020. [Link](#).

4. Greater Mundri includes Mundri West, Mundri East, and Mvolo counties.

5. Eye Radio. Concerns over rising teenage pregnancies as schools remain shut. 30 May 2020. [Link](#).

6. Radio Tamazuj. NAS accuses SSPDF and SPLA-IO of joint military operations. 1 June 2020. [Link](#).

7. Radio Tamazuj. Rains render Juba-Yambio road impassable. 9 Sep 2020. [Link](#).

8. Catholic Diocese of Tambura Yambio. The Reopening Of St. Teresa Hospital By Bishop Edwardo Hilbore After Four Months Closure. 17 Oct. 2020. [Link](#).

9. Western counties include Yambio, Nzara, Ezo, Tambura and Nagero counties, while eastern counties refer to Ibba, Maridi, Mundri West, Mundri East and Mvolo counties.

10. Nodding syndrome is a disease specific to South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda, most commonly developing during childhood and "causing progressive cognitive dysfunction, neurological deterioration, stunted growth and a characteristic nodding of the head", according to WHO. The epicentre for the disease in South Sudan is Greater Mundri. Little is known on the causes of the disease. For more information, [see the following](#).

11. Mercy Corps. Rapid Assessment Report on Flooding in Mundri East and West. 17 Aug. 2020.

12. IRNA Floods Fact Finding Mission Report: Mundri West and Mundri East Counties. 24 Sep. 2020.

13. United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Situation in South Sudan. Report of the Secretary General. 8 Sep. 2020. [Link](#).

Population Movement and Displacement

While the security situation was relatively stable in Q1, the second and third quarter of 2020 saw increased insecurity across the state, and were characterized by a number of clashes and resulting population movements. Persistent leadership vacuums due to the delayed implementation of the 2018 peace agreement,¹⁵ pockets of flooding due to unusually heavy rainfall,¹⁶ interethnic tensions coupled with armed attacks in Tambura County,¹⁷ and increased¹⁸ armed clashes in the Mundris¹⁹ resulted in new displacement across Western Equatoria. These factors, if left unaddressed, could further drive conflict and displacement, and result in the deterioration of food security in the breadbasket of South Sudan.

Internal Displacement and Returns

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) Humanitarian Snapshot, 71,000 Internally Displaced People (IDP) were estimated to be living in Western Equatoria in September 2020.²⁰ Reported presence of IDPs remained stable across much of WES, with 86% of assessed settlements reporting this in March and 72% in September. In Greater Mundri, in September, nearly half of the assessed settlements (44%) reported half or more of the population to be IDPs displaced within the region, an increase compared to 29% in March, likely due to a worsening security situation in the area.²¹ The highest proportion of assessed settlements reporting IDP presence was in Nzara (94%), Mundri East (83%) and Tambura counties (82%).

While IDP presence overall remained stable, newly arrived IDPs were reported in Tambura County and Mundri East County in September, by 18% and 11% of assessed settlements respectively, reportedly due to insecurity. In Nagero County in September, 17% of assessed settlements reported new IDP arrivals and indicated that this was due to flooding.

The proportion of assessed settlements reporting IDP returnees in September (82%) remained similar to March (83%), and 39% reported IDPs returning the 6 months prior to September. With agricultural activities being the main source of food and livelihoods in WES,²² the main reported reason for IDPs returning was access to land, reported by 70% of assessed settlements.

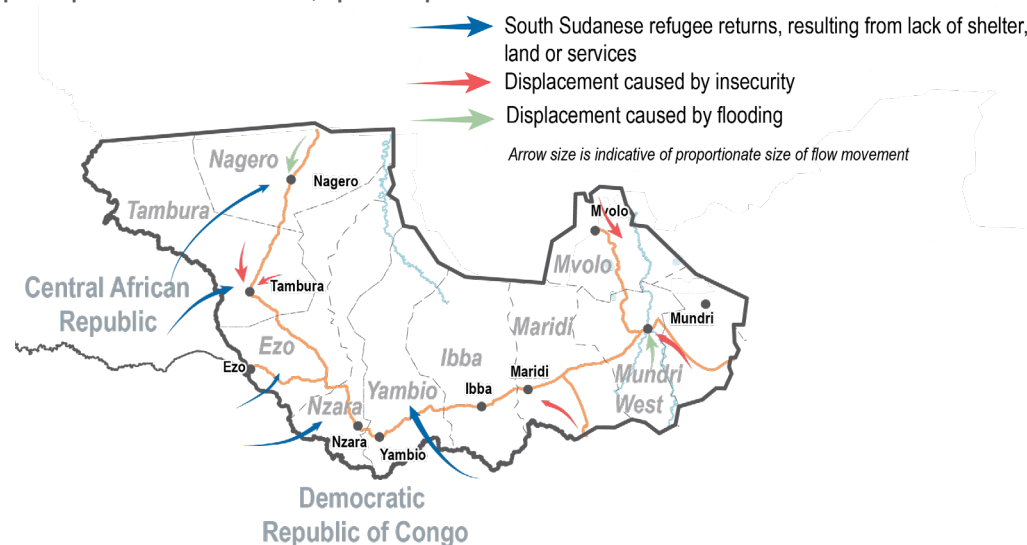
Cross-border movements

WES hosts a sizeable refugee population due to ongoing hostilities in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), and Central African Republic (CAR). As of 31 August 2020, 10,025 refugees were registered in WES, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR),²³ most of whom were residing in Makpandu Refugee Camp (Yambio County), Ezo Town, Nandi and Andari (Ezo County), and in Source Yubu and Tambura Town (Tambura County).²⁴ While large

cross-border movements did not take place in Q2 and Q3, in May 2020, new refugee arrivals took place to Yambio County from DRC due to opposition armed group (OAG) attacks.²⁵

Beside refugees from DRC and CAR, South Sudanese refugees were also reportedly returning during Q2-Q3, with 15% of assessed settlements reporting refugee returns in September. While the scope of returns was likely lower than usual due to the border closure,²⁶ 23% of assessed settlements in Yambio County reported refugees returning from DRC, mostly to access shelter and land.

Map 2: Population movement WES, April to September 2020



Food Security and Livelihoods

Overall, the food security situation in WES appeared to have remained stable throughout Q2 and Q3 of 2020, with 86% of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food, and 91% reporting own cultivation as main source of food in September. This is likely due to reliable access to land for cultivation and agricultural inputs, and is consistent with the Crop Monitor report which forecasted good yields for this year.²⁷ Additionally, despite the COVID-19 border restrictions,²⁸ access to markets seemingly remained high in WES with all assessed settlements reporting presence of a market in Q3. This likely enhanced local and imported food availability in market-dependent settlements ahead of the first harvest, even though the prices for basic goods were unusually high²⁹ due to the border restrictions and the impassable Juba-Maridi road because of the heavy rains.³⁰

14. UNICEF Press release. UNICEF and UNESCO welcome the decision to reopen schools in South Sudan. 21 Sep. 2020. [Link](#).

15. United Nations Human Rights. Office of the High Commissioner. Renewed violence and delayed implementation of the peace agreement severely threaten peace and stability in South Sudan, UN experts note. 14 Aug. 2020. [Link](#).

16. Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) of the United Nations. South Sudan Dekadal Weather Update.

17. VOA News. South Sudan in Focus. 19 Jun. 2020. [Link](#).

18. Radio Tamazuj. NAS accuses SSPDF and SPLA-IO of joint military operations. Radio Tamazuj. 1 Jun. 2020. [Link](#).

19. The Mundris consist of Mundri East and Mundri West counties.

20. OCHA. Humanitarian Snapshot. September 2020. [Link](#).

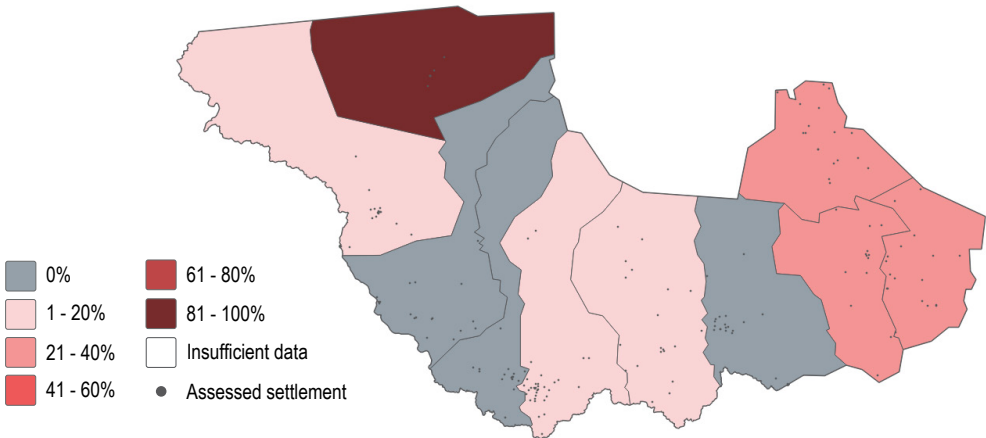
21. Radio Tamazuj. NAS accuses SSPDF and SPLA-IO of Joint Military Operations. 1 June 2020. [Link](#).

22. FEWS NET. Livelihoods Zone Map and Descriptions for the Republic of South Sudan (updated). August 2018.

23. UNHCR. South Sudan Refugee Population Statistics. 31 August 2020. [Link](#).

Despite the apparent relatively stable access to food in WES, only 17% of assessed settlements in Nagero County reported adequate access to food, and the majority (83%) reported experienced hunger, indicative of food insecurity in the County. In the case of Greater Mundri, 29% reported inadequate access to food in September. Generally assessed settlements reported diverse coping strategies including reducing the number and size of meals, and consuming less expensive food. Despite hunting being unusual and challenging during the rainy season because of the lush vegetation, the majority of assessed settlements in Tambura and Nzara counties (61% and 56%, respectively) reported that people in the settlement were hunting to cope with livelihoods gaps, likely due to the loss of employment opportunities for many households as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.³¹

Map 3: Proportion of assessed settlements in Western Equatoria State reporting inadequate access to food, September 2020



Areas of concern

The low access to food in **Nagero County** has been persistent throughout the previous quarters, and reporting of adequate access to food decreased notably from 50% of assessed settlements in December 2019 to 40% in March, and to 17% in September. This may be attributed to perceived insecurity during the previous planting season (resulting in limited access to farms to cultivate

and low harvest), higher food prices due to COVID-19 international movement restrictions, and poor road conditions preventing the market- and humanitarian aid dependent population to have adequate access to food. Consequently, inadequate access to food appeared to have remained high throughout the lean season (June to August)³² and 83% of settlements reported perceiving that most people in the settlement experienced severe hunger in September. In addition, 67% of settlements reported most people having one meal a day (compared to the 12% WES average) and employing extreme coping strategies such as going entire days without eating, or adults not eating so that children could eat. This is consistent with the August 2020 Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) update, which projected Nagero County to be in crisis (IPC phase 3).³³ The relatively higher proportion of assessed settlements reporting the market as the main source of food (50% in September), compared to 1% in the rest of WES, makes populations more vulnerable to market disruptions, such as flooding and insecurity making markets inaccessible and increased prices/decreased purchase power of the South Sudanese Pound. Cultivation being less available in Nagero County is also likely due to the persistent low access to agricultural tools and seeds, reported by 83% of assessed settlements in September (80% in March), and insecurity. Consumption of wild foods, common during the lean season with a wide availability of wild foods, was reported by all assessed settlements in July, however 71% also reported that this made them sick, generally uncommon in WES, with only 3% reporting that in the other counties.

Similarly, assessed settlements in **Greater Mundri** reporting inadequate access to food increased from 4% in July to 28% in September, despite first harvests generally occurring July-August,³⁴ with the main reported reason being exhaustion of previous harvest, likely due to poor road conditions and flooding. FGD participants from Mundri East County reported reduced harvest yields in the flood affected areas.³⁵ Flooding reportedly led to loss of crops, farmland and livestock, affecting approximately 5,000 households.^{36,37} Likely driven by insecurity and flooding, in September 24% of assessed settlements reported most people were having only one meal per day and 11% of assessed settlements in Mundri East County reportedly employed extreme coping strategies of only children eating, likely having a negative effect on the health of other household members. While rearing goats, sheep and poultry is another important source of livelihood³⁸ in WES, 52% of KIs from Greater Mundri reportedly sold more livestock than usual as a coping strategy which may have an adverse impact on future access to food. In addition, 72% of assessed settlements in Greater Mundi also reported the consumption of wild foods in July, much higher than the WES average (52%).

24 UNHCR. South Sudan Refugee Population as of 31 July 2020. [Link](#).
25 Eye Radio. Hundreds of Congolese flee into S. Sudan. 9 May 2020. [Link](#).
26 Radio Tamazuj. South Sudan closes airports and borders over coronavirus fears. 23 Mar. 2020. [Link](#).
27 Crop Monitor Early Warning, no.53. September 2020
28 Radio Tamazuj. South Sudan Closes Airports and Borders over Coronavirus Fears. 23 Mar. 2020. [Link](#).
29 WFP. Market Update: Depreciation of South Sudanese Pound (SSP). 30 Sep 2020. [Link](#).
30 Radio Tamazuj. Rains render Juba-Yambio road impassable. 9 Sep 2020. [Link](#).
31 UN WOMEN. Small business owners in South Sudan bear the brunt of COVID-19 as livelihoods shrink. 23 Jul. 2020. [Link](#).
32 FEWS NET. Livelihoods zone map and descriptions for the Republic of South Sudan (updated), August 2018
33 FEWS NET. South Sudan Food Security Outlook Update. August 2020. [Link](#).
34 FEWS NET. Livelihoods zone map and descriptions for the Republic of South Sudan (updated), August 2018
35 REACH. FGD with participants from Mundri East County. 29 September 2020.
36 Mercy Corps. Rapid Assessment Report on Flooding in Mundri East and West. 17 August 2020.
37 IRNA Floods Fact Finding Mission Report: Mundri West and Mundri East Counties, WES. 24 September 2020.

Protection

Despite the relative stability during the previous quarters, Western Equatoria experienced increased insecurity during Q2 and Q3. While the majority of assessed settlements in WES reported that most people felt safe most of the time in September (81%), similar to March (89%), during May, June and July a lower proportion of assessed settlements reported most people feeling safe (68%, 61%, 71%, respectively). The reasons behind the decreased perception of safety likely stemmed from an increasing number of COVID-19 cases across the country,^{39,40} the first case of which in WES was confirmed in Yambio in June, and conflicts erupting across the state. The lagging implementation of the peace agreement, delayed appointment of county-level authorities and the resulting power-vacuum likely contributed to the insecurity.⁴¹ The humanitarian context changed significantly due to the pandemic, and COVID-19 restrictions raised new human rights and protection concerns.⁴²

An increase in insecurity in Maridi, Mvolo, Tambura and Mundri East counties during Q2 and Q3 negatively impacted the protection situation across the state. In April, 11% of assessed settlements in **Maridi County** reported civilian casualties and looting, which was only similarly high in January and February (25%, and 17% respectively) after clashes occurred in the area.⁴³ In **Mvolo County**, 27% of assessed settlements in May reported civilian casualties (compared to 6% in March) and 18% looting, likely partially caused by raiding incidents.⁴⁴ In **Tambura County**, 20% of assessed settlements reported killings in June, aligned with reports of violence between parties⁴⁵ and increased inter-ethnic animosity.⁴⁶ In **Mundri East County**, 17% of assessed settlements reported civilian casualties and looting in September (compared to none in March), likely due to an increase of clashes between armed forces in the area.⁴⁷ Protection concerns in Mundri East and West and Maridi County reportedly were abduction of men (17%, 15%, and 15% respectively),⁴⁸ as well as forced recruitment of men and boys,⁴⁹ likely due to the heightened presence of armed groups in the area.

While insecurity and COVID-19 cases reportedly deteriorated feelings of safety,⁵⁰ challenges faced by women and girls stayed consistent with previous quarters. The most commonly reported protection concerns for women in WES in September were domestic violence (44%) and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV, 13%). Domestic violence remained a concern in the eastern counties of WES, with 72% reporting it as the main concern in September, similar to 71% in March, notably higher than the 14% average in the western counties. For girls, early marriage were the most commonly reported protection concerns (61% in September). An increase in teenage pregnancies was reported, likely as an outcome of school closures at the end of March, which could result in girls not being able to continue their education and married off early without targeted assistance.⁵¹

For men, assessed settlements continued to report that fighting between neighbors was the main protection concern (41% in March and 26% in September), followed by alcohol usage (21%), with the latter potentially contributing to the high proportions of assessed settlements reporting domestic violence and SGBV as protection concern for women.⁵² For boys, 20% reported alcohol usage as the main protection concern in September, which was highest in the eastern counties (34% of assessed settlements in the eastern counties). As schools remained shut for most students, and many men and boys faced lack of employment, economic hardship, and idleness, these concerns could persist in Q4 2020.

Top 3 most commonly reported protection concerns in assessed settlements in WES, Sep. 2020

Women	Men
1 Domestic violence 44%	1 Fighting between neighbours 26%
2 Sexual violence 13%	2 Alcohol usage 21%
3 Fighting between neighbours 7%	3 Harassment 8%

Girls	Boys
1 Early marriage 30%	1 Alcohol usage 20%
2 Domestic violence 18%	2 Fighting between neighbours 14%
3 Alcohol usage 2%	3 Early marriage 9%

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

Access to a functional borehole appeared generally stable across WES (63% in March and 69% in September), and reporting of access increased in Greater Mundri (34% in March and 81% in September). However, overall, only 39% of assessed settlements reported a borehole as the main source of drinking water in September, likely due to the rainy season and farming activities often requiring households to stay in rural areas with limited access to boreholes. The most commonly reported source of drinking water was a well (45% in September). The use of unimproved water sources likely affected the health of these communities, where self-reported diarrheal diseases and malaria were the main health problems reported in September. (See Health section.)

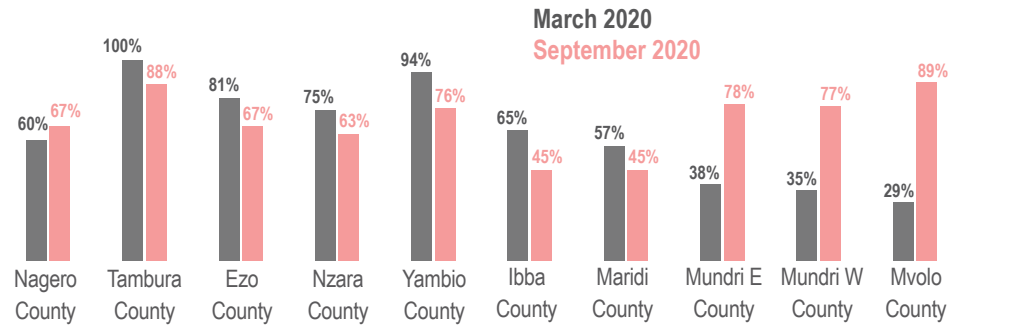
38 FEWS NET, Livelihoods zone map and descriptions for the Republic of South Sudan (updated), Aug. 2018
39 CARE, South Sudan: Rising coronavirus cases coincide with start of lean season. 12 May 2020. [Link](#).
40 World Health Organisation (WHO). South Sudan COVID-19 responders recount stigma ordeal. 13 Jul. 2020. [Link](#).
41 UN Human Rights. Office of the High Commissioner. Renewed violence and delayed implementation of the peace agreement severely threaten peace and stability in South Sudan, UN experts note. 14 Aug. 2020. [Link](#).
42 WHO. South Sudan Humanitarian Response Plan. COVID-19 Addendum. Jun. 2020. [Link](#).
43 International Organization for Migration Displacement Tracking Matrix (IOM-DTM); Western Equatoria Event Tracking, Maridi County. Feb. 2020. [Link](#).
44 Eye Radio, Mvolo cattle raid death toll rises to 10. 27 Apr. 2020. [Link](#).
45 VOA News. South Sudan in Focus. 19 Jun. 2020. [Link](#).
46 United Nations Security Council. Situation in South Sudan. Report of the Secretary General. 8 Sep 2020. [Link](#).
47 Radio Tamazuj. NAS accuses SSPDF and SPLA-IO of joint military operations. 1 Jun. 2020. [Link](#).

In Greater Mundri, 79% of assessed settlements reported boreholes as the main source of drinking water in September, likely due to adequate rainfall, and thus better water pressure in boreholes. Additionally, while in March 25% of assessed settlements reported rivers being the main source of water, this steadily decreased to 9% by September. On the contrary, 45% of assessed settlements in **Maridi County** reporting the presence of functional boreholes was below average, and 35% continued to report rivers as the main source of drinking water in September (compared to 19% in March, and 29% in July), likely due to inadequate number of boreholes and crowding at water points.

Findings suggest that fetching water was a time-consuming activity across WES, with only 8% of assessed settlements reporting in September that it took less than 30 minutes, and 62% that it took 30-60 minutes. A third reported water collection taking 1 hour to half a day in WES, reporting of which was particularly high in the eastern counties (57% of assessed settlements). In addition, some assessed settlements in **Mundri East County** reported safety concerns when accessing preferred water point (17% in September). FGD participants reported that there are only a few boreholes in their area, and necessity to leave their home pre-dawn to return with water by noon. This reportedly posed a protection concern, especially during the rainy season, as lush vegetation reportedly increased the risk of SGBV.⁵³

Reported latrine use worsened since the previous quarter, with 50% of assessed settlements reporting that less than half of the population used latrines in September (compared to 20% in March). The main reported reason for not using a latrine was that none were available, likely due to households staying in rural areas to farm, where there were less or no latrines. However, in Greater Mundri, cultural reasons reportedly also played an important role (38% in September).

Proportion of assessed settlements reporting presence of a functional borehole in WES, March-September 2020:



Despite increased hygiene sensitization activities across WES due to COVID-19,⁵⁴ in September 42% of assessed settlements reported that most people in their settlement did not wash their hands, and 28% only with water, similar to March. The highest proportion of assessed settlements where most people reportedly did not wash their hands at all, were in Ibba County and Greater Mundri, likely due to challenges in accessing water (75% and 76% in September, respectively). The increase of soap prices⁵⁵ due in part to the impassable Juba-Maridi road⁵⁶ and the currency depreciation⁵⁷ also likely contributed to the stagnating hand washing practices in Western Equatoria.

Health

Health care facilities in general reportedly remained accessible in WES during Q2 and Q3, with 99% of assessed settlements reporting presence of a functional health facility within walking distance in September. However, access to hospitals in Nzara County declined from 27% in April to 6% by September, likely due to the four-month closure of the Nzara St. Theresa Hospital, impeding access to health services for many in the area.⁵⁸

While most health facilities remained functional during the reporting period, distance to the nearest functional health facility reportedly remained challenging, with only 51% of KIs reporting that a health facility was reachable within 1 hour. As communities commonly access health services on foot, for vulnerable and/or critical care patients the distance could hinder their access and impact their health condition.

Lack of medication at the health facilities was the main reported barrier to accessing health care (69% in September, compared to 42% in April), and in Mvolo, Ibba and Maridi counties nearly all assessed settlements reported the health facility not being stocked with the medicine most people needed the month prior to data collection.⁵⁹ Difficult road conditions during the rainy season likely hindered the transportation of drugs to county hospitals and clinics.

Insecurity hindering access to health services was reported by 36% of assessed settlements in the **Mundris**⁶⁰ likely due to the ongoing conflict in the area. In the southern payams of **Maridi County** persistent insecurity reportedly prevented humanitarian actors from providing health services.

Access to health care was most commonly reported to be challenging in **Mvolo County**, where 72% of assessed settlements reported that it took one hour to half a day on foot to reach a health care facility, and 11% that it took a full day. Additionally, 17% of assessed settlements reported insecurity in the area, and 11% insecurity at the health facility as a barrier in September.⁶¹ FGD participants expressed challenges accessing essential medication, and needing to walk long distances to Mapuodit or the Mundris to access health care or medication.⁶²

Similar to previous quarters, assessed settlements continued to self-report malaria as the main health problem in September (39% of assessed settlements). Seizures, most likely nodding-disease⁶³ that affects the development of children and is specific to Greater Mundri, continued to be the main reported health problem in Mundri East (39%), Mvolo (33%) and Maridi (10%) counties, similar to previous quarters.



Shelter/ NFI

The shelter situation generally remained stable across Western Equatoria, however pockets of fighting and flooding destroyed shelters between April and September. Generally, tukuls⁶⁴ and other permanent shelters were the most frequently reported shelter type for host communities (95% in September), while IDPs and IDP returnees most commonly lived in less secure rakoobas,⁶⁵ reported by 24% and 32% of assessed settlements, respectively, in September.⁶⁶ The main reported NFI needs for IDPs were cooking pots and blankets in September due the colder weather during the rainy season.

In **Mundri East County**, both conflict and floods affected access to shelter in Q2 and Q3. In September, 17% of assessed settlements reported shelters being destroyed due to fighting, and 17% reported IDPs staying without shelter, presumably as a result of increased hostilities in the area.⁶⁷ Additionally, a rapid assessment done by Mercy Corps in August,⁶⁸ followed by an Inter-Agency Rapid Assessment Report in September,⁶⁹ highlighted high shelter needs in the Mundris due to seasonal flooding, with over 5000 households affected by the loss of shelters, household properties, and displacement. Based on the report, due to the loss of food, livestock and livelihoods, and forecasted poor harvest due to loss of crops, the affected populations could face food insecurity without assistance, as well as diseases due to lack of shelter and WASH facilities.

While access to shelter was stable in Q1 in **Tambura County** with no reported shelter destruction, the hostilities taking place in June⁷⁰ increased needs for shelter assistance: 18% of assessed settlements reported shelters had been destroyed due to fighting. In addition, 14% of assessed settlements in September reported IDPs staying in community buildings or in the open without shelter.



Education

Across South Sudan, education institutions remained closed since 20 March 2020 due to COVID-19 prevention measures.⁷¹ While candidate classes (senior four and primary eight classes) resumed on the 5th October 2020, most pupils will go back to school in February 2021, after a year without

education.⁷² Humanitarian actors operating in the area remarked a rise in teenage pregnancies since the school closures,⁷³ due to which many girls will likely not be able to resume their education without support.

Conclusion

While, compared to the rest of South Sudan, the situation in Western Equatoria continued to be relatively stable, increased insecurity and flooding affected several counties in a crucial time ahead of and during the planting season. Insecurity and floods due to unusually heavy rainfall affected the shelter situation in the Mundris, and Tambura County experienced increased insecurity, inter-ethnic tensions and shelter destruction. The COVID-19 movement and trade restrictions, the depreciation of the South Sudanese Pound, and impassable roads due to heavy rains had a cumulative effect, and food prices rose to unseen levels.⁷⁴ The food security situation has raised concerns in Nagero County and Greater Mundri, where targeted assistance will be needed to aid the population more dependent on the market (in the case of Nagero County) and unable to plant (both). The economic hardship will likely continue to increase the risk of domestic violence and SGBV for women, and COVID-19 related school closures are expected to further increase the prevalence of teenage pregnancies and early marriages, mostly affecting girls.

Footnotes, continued:

63 Nodding syndrome is a disease specific to South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda, most commonly developing during childhood and "causing progressive cognitive dysfunction, neurological deterioration, stunted growth and a characteristic nodding of the head", according to WHO. The epicentre for the disease in South Sudan is Greater Mundri. Little is known on the causes of the disease. For more information, [see the following](#)

64 Tukuls are mud huts with more permanence.

65 Rakoobas are temporary shelters made from straw.

66 Among the assessed settlements reporting the presence of IDPs or IDP returnees in September.

67 Radio Tamazuj. NAS accuses SSPDF and SPLA-IO of joint military operations. 1 Jun. 2020. [Link](#).

68 Mercy Corps. Rapid Assessment Report on Flooding in Mundri East and West. 17 Aug. 2020.

69 IRNA Floods Fact Finding Mission Report: Mundri West and Mundri East Counties, WES. 24 Sep. 2020.

70 UNSC. Situation in South Sudan. Report of the Secretary General. 8 Sep 2020. [Link](#).

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About REACH Initiative

REACH Initiative 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. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).

59 In September, 94% of Mvolo County, 90% of Ibba County, 85% of Maridi County KIs reported the health facility not being stocked with the

60 The Mundris consist of Mundri East and Mundri West counties.

61 38% of assessed settlements in Mundri West, 33% in Mundri East, and 17% in Mvolo County reported that the area is too insecure to access health care, while 17%, 8% and 11%, respectively, reported that the health facility itself is insecure in September.

62 REACH. FGD with participants from Mvolo County. 30 Sep. 2020.