

# Situation Overview: Unity State, South Sudan

November 2016



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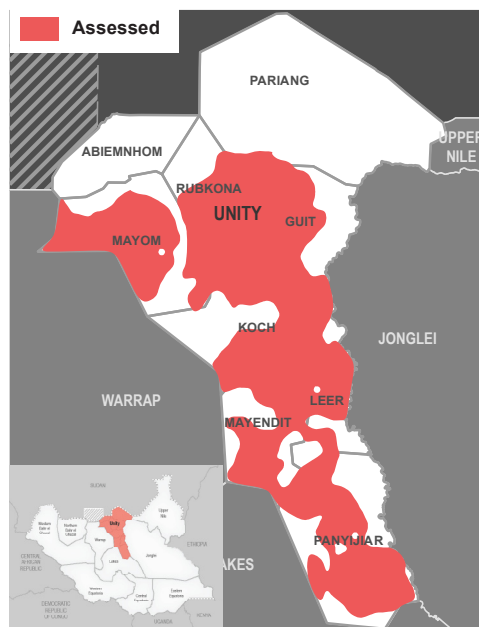
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## Introduction

Displacement trends, population needs and humanitarian access all continue to be negatively affected by the insecurity resulting from the ongoing fighting in Unity State since July. After a partial respite in October, November saw a resurgence of violence in Unity, with pronounced fighting in Leer, Koch and Rubkona Counties in particular. These clashes have continued to trigger displacement to sites such as Bentiu PoC and Nyal and have had a negative impact on humanitarian activities outside formal displacement sites, as has impaired physical access due to poor road conditions and UXO risks.

To inform the response of humanitarians working outside of formal settlement sites, REACH is conducting an assessment on hard to reach areas in South Sudan, for which data on communities across the Greater Upper Nile region is collected on a monthly basis.

Between 7 and 25 November, REACH interviewed 507 Key Informants (KIs) from 75 communities in 7 of the 9 counties in Unity State. 282 KIs were interviewed in Bentiu PoC, 205 in Juba PoCs 1 and 3, and 20 in Bor PoC. It must be noted that data collected from KIs arriving in southern Unity, in Nyal, were excluded from November reporting for methodological reasons. This means



**Map 1: REACH assessment coverage of Unity State, November 2016**

that population movement and dynamics to southern Unity State are largely not discussed within this report.

Findings have been triangulated using focus group discussions (FGDs), secondary data, and previous REACH assessments of hard to reach areas of Unity State.

New arrivals were specifically targeted during the data collection phase to ensure a better understanding of current displacement dynamics. Seventy-five per cent of respondents

interviewed had arrived in their displacement location in October or November, and therefore had up-to-date information about the village from which they had been displaced.

This Situation Overview provides an update to key findings from the October Situation Overview for Unity State. The first section of this overview analyses displacement trends in Unity State in November, as well as the push and pull factors that shaped patterns of displacement this month. The second section evaluates the population dynamics in the assessed communities, as well as access to food and basic services for both IDP and non-displaced communities.

## Population Movement and Displacement

The increased instability in November has triggered the largest population increase in Bentiu PoC since early 2016. Whereas in October, large numbers of people exited the PoC to settle in nearby Rubkona and Guit Counties, leading to an overall decrease in the population, in November the PoC experienced a massive influx of new arrivals fleeing the upsurge in clashes. As a result, the population increased from 101,022 at the end of October<sup>1</sup> to 120,333 at the end of November.<sup>2</sup> A recent multiagency rapid assessment in Leer

suggests that many vulnerable people in the most conflict-affected areas of Unity are forced to remain there, unable to make the long and difficult journey to Bentiu PoC in the north, or to the islands and Nyal to the south. These include young children, the elderly and the disabled.<sup>3</sup>

### Push factors for leaving pre-crisis location

Reflecting the impact of the current security situation on population movement in Unity State, the majority of KIs (77 per cent) reported a lack of security as the most important factor that pushed them to leave their pre-crisis location.

Sixty per cent of KIs reported inadequate access to food to be the second most important push factor, which can likely be attributed to the impact of insecurity on cultivation and harvests, flooding that has destroyed crops in many parts of Unity, a lack of humanitarian access and general food distributions (GFDs) in food insecure areas such as Leer, and the looting and destruction of crops by armed groups. During FGDs conducted in Bentiu PoC with new arrivals from Leer, Mayendit, Koch and Mayom, all but one reported that their crops had been destroyed by flooding, and several added that obstructed humanitarian access to their area was an important factor in their decision to come to the PoC.

1 IOM, Bentiu PoC Update: Population Count 29 - 31 October 2016.

2 IOM, Bentiu PoC Update: Population Count 28 - 30 November 2016.

3 IOM, Concern, WHO, "Leer Temporary Protection Area Rapid Assessment", November 2016.

## METHODOLOGY

To provide an overview of the situation in largely inaccessible areas of Unity State, REACH uses primary data provided by key informants who receive regular information from their pre-displacement location or "Area of Origin".

Information for this report was collected from key informants in the Bentiu Protection of Civilians (PoC) site in Unity State, Bor PoC in Jonglei State, and Juba PoCs 1 and 3, throughout November 2016.

The first phase of the assessment methodology involved a participatory mapping exercise to map the relevant communities in Unity State, as well as the identification of key informants. 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 examined at the community level, and communities were assigned the modal response. Descriptive statistics and geospatial analysis were then used to analyse the data.

It should be noted that when no consensus could be found for a community, that community was not included in reporting. This, combined with the fact that sometimes only a subset of respondents are asked certain questions depending on their answer to a previous question, is why the total number of communities reported on may differ throughout this report.

Thirty per cent of KIs reported lack of health services to be the third most important factor. This represents a shift from previous months, when more KIs were reporting lack of shelter as the third most important factor. This could be a result of the exclusion of data from KIs in Nyal, but may also be linked to findings from October and November suggesting an improvement in shelter trends. Further investigation would be required to confirm this.

### Pull factors for choosing current location

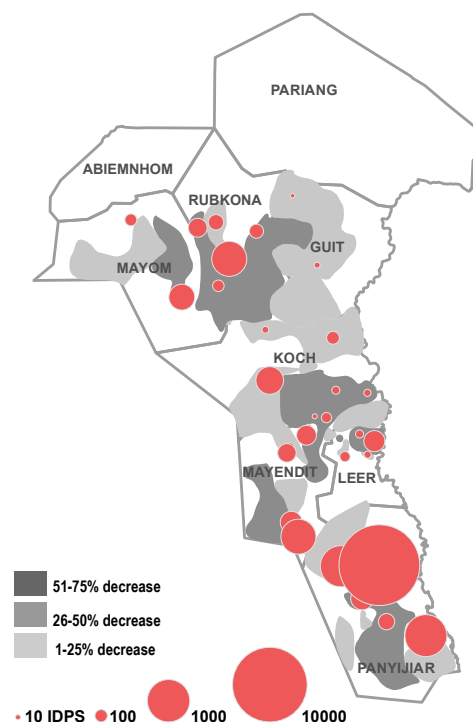
The major pull factors to the PoCs in Bentiu, Juba and Bor largely mirror the reported push factors. Seventy-three per cent of KIs reported perceived security as the primary reason for moving to their current location, 49 per cent reported proximity to food as the second most important reason, and 25 per cent reported access to health services as the third most important reason.

## Situation in Assessed Communities

### Demographic profile

#### Remaining population in assessed villages

All 74 communities for which a consensus could be determined reported that the host community population in their village had decreased, of which nearly half (49 per cent) reported that it had decreased by more than 50 per cent. 96 per cent of assessed communities



**Map 2: Reported host community population decrease, and reported IDP populations, November 2016**

reported that conflict was the primary reason for host community displacement.

Eighty-one per cent of assessed communities reported that the majority of the host population lived in their own homes. However, a slight majority of the communities assessed in conflict-affected Mayendit (6 of 11), and half of the communities in Koch (4 of 8) reported that most of the host community was living outside their homes, either in someone else's home or in the bush. This is consistent with FGDs conducted with new arrivals from conflict-affected areas,

which suggest that many tukuls have been burned down in the course of fighting, that many people feel it is too risky to remain in their tukuls, and that remaining populations regularly flee to the bush when fighting approaches.

### IDP population in assessed villages

7 per cent of assessed communities reported that they were hosting IDPs in November, predominantly in stable Panyijar. Prior to October, far more communities were reporting an IDP presence. This may suggest that many IDPs have moved to formal displacement sites, as reflected by the large increase in the population of Bentiu PoC, or left Unity State altogether. However, further investigation would be required to confirm this.

### Protection

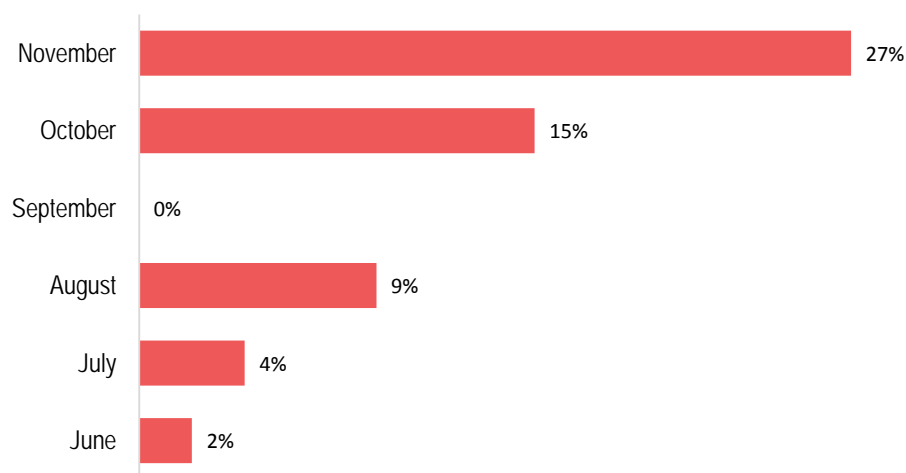
The protection context in Unity State changed in highly concerning ways during the month of July, with reports of major violence committed against civilians, particularly in counties such as Leer, Koch and Mayendit. According to FGDs conducted with new arrivals in Bentiu PoC and Nyal, this trend has only continued, with fighting reportedly spreading further to new areas in November and triggering additional displacement.

Forty-eight per cent of assessed communities reported having access to protection services in November. Thirty-six per cent of assessed communities, all in Leer, Mayendit and Koch, reported that women would be unsafe at any time of day if they had to leave their shelter. Sixty-six per cent reported the same for men,

including communities from all counties. FGDs suggest that this gender discrepancy is attributable to the disproportionate targeting of men for physical violence and forced recruitment. This is also supported by the recent Nonviolent Peaceforce assessment of the Temporary Protection Area in Leer, in which IDPs reported that although sexual violence is a serious threat for women, men experience an even higher risk of being injured or killed by armed groups.<sup>4</sup>

**Sexual violence is the biggest protection concern for women**, as reported by 75 per cent of assessed communities. A recent multiagency rapid assessment in Leer indicated that women are most vulnerable when outside their village (for example, while fleeing violence) and when collecting firewood.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 1: Communities reporting forced recruitment as the important protection concern for men, June - November 2016**



**Being killed or injured is the biggest protection concern for men** (70 per cent). **Forced recruitment continues to rise as an important protection concern for men**, as reported by 15 per cent of communities in October and now 27 per cent in November. Populations in Mayom and Guit are disproportionately vulnerable to forced recruitment for political reasons.

### Shelter

Shelter trends continue to be gradually improving for host communities compared to previous months. The most common type of shelter reportedly used by host communities in November is the rakooba (62 per cent), followed by the tukul (38 per cent). A high proportion of rakoobas, which are temporary

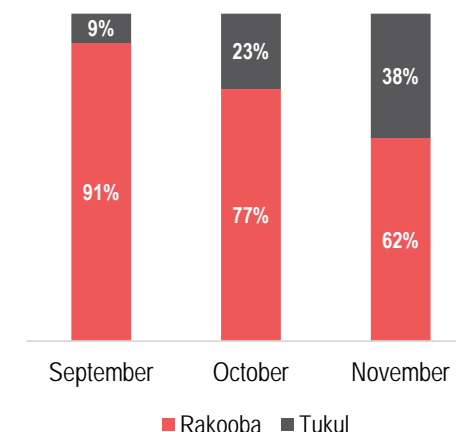
structures that are easily set up and taken down, is usually a sign of displacement, or that permanent shelters (tukuls) have been damaged, destroyed, or are considered unsafe to inhabit due to fighting. However, a higher proportion of communities reported tukuls as the most commonly used shelter in their village than in October (23 per cent of assessed communities), itself an improvement on September (9 per cent). This could be indicative of an emerging positive shelter trend, although the likely effect of excluding data collection in Nyal from our November analysis must also be taken into account.

Of the few communities reporting an IDP presence, all for which a consensus could be determined reported that the majority of IDPs live in rakoobas. Sharing of shelters by IDPs and host communities was also reported by all assessed communities reporting an IDP presence. These findings are an indication that, despite possible improvements, **shelter remains a high-priority need outside formal displacement sites**.

### Food security

Alarming, **38 per cent of assessed communities reported that deaths from hunger had occurred in the past three months**, including 82 per cent of assessed communities in Leer and half of those in Koch and Panyijiar.

In their food security forecast for the October 2016 to May 2017 period, FEWS NET identified southern and central Unity as one of the two



**Figure 2: Most common types of shelter reportedly used by host community, September - November 2016**

regions “of greatest concern” in South Sudan.<sup>6</sup> FEWS NET classifies most of Unity State as either ‘stressed’ or in ‘crisis’. Those counties that have been most directly affected by the fighting since July (namely Leer, Koch and Mayendit) are classified as experiencing a food security ‘emergency’ (or IPC Phase 4, with ‘famine’ being Phase 5). As of October, Guit has also been classified in the ‘emergency’ category. The report warns that **without significant humanitarian intervention, central and southern Unity State are at serious risk of entering famine (Phase 5) as the lean season approaches**, stressing that “improvements to humanitarian access and high levels of assistance are needed to prevent the loss of life.”<sup>7</sup>

Only 47 per cent of assessed communities

4 Nonviolent Peaceforce, “Protection Assessment Report: Temporary Protection Area, UNMISS Base, Leer Town”, December 2016.

5 IOM, Concern, WHO, “Leer Temporary Protection Area Rapid Assessment”, November 2016.

6 FEWS NET, “Food Security Outlook: October 2016 to May 2017”.

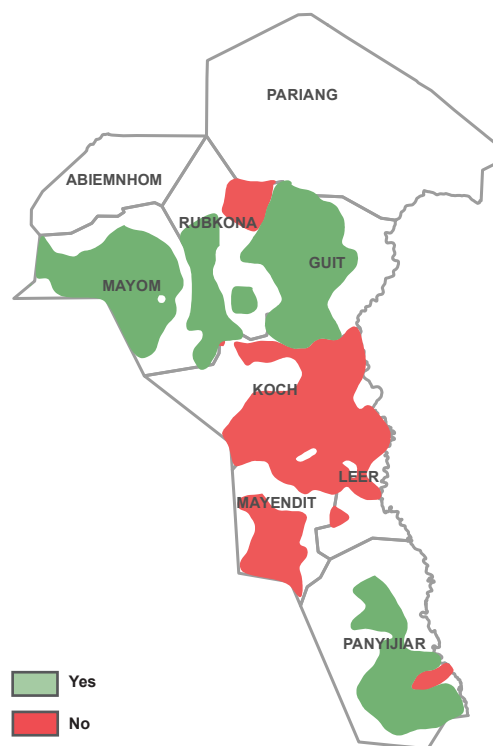
7 Ibid.



reported that they had adequate access to food in November, which is comparable to both September and October. As in October, none of the assessed communities in conflict-affected Leer, Mayendit and Koch reported adequate access to food. These figures reflect the persistent food insecurity experienced in large parts of Unity State, as well as the pronounced impact of conflict on access to food.

The most important sources of food have changed markedly since the July crisis. In November, 42 per cent of assessed communities identified cultivation as their primary source of food, **25 per cent reported foraging for wild foods, and 28 per cent cited humanitarian aid.** By contrast, in June 85 per cent of assessed communities were reportedly relying on humanitarian aid, only 15 per cent cited cultivation, and no communities reported foraging for wild food.

These trends are partly attributable to the advent of the cultivation season, which has permitted more people to rely on their own crops for food instead of depending on humanitarian aid. However, reliance on aid has also declined due to the negative impact of the renewed crisis, as it has become difficult or impossible for humanitarians to conduct general food distributions in many parts of Unity where it is unsafe to cultivate. Foraging has likely become more prevalent because the increased instability has impeded cultivation, forcing many to flee to areas where foraging is the only viable source of food, and prevented humanitarians from accessing certain food



**Map 3: Communities reporting adequate access to food, November 2016**

insecure areas.

Only 11 per cent of assessed communities reported access to a market in November, which is comparable to previous months. It is worth noting the continued impact of the instability on market prices across the country, which has led to hyperinflation, the rate of which reached an all-time high of 836% in October.<sup>8</sup> This often makes purchasing food from the market an unviable option even for those who can physically access one. In Bentiu market, for example, buying 1 kg of field beans in mid-

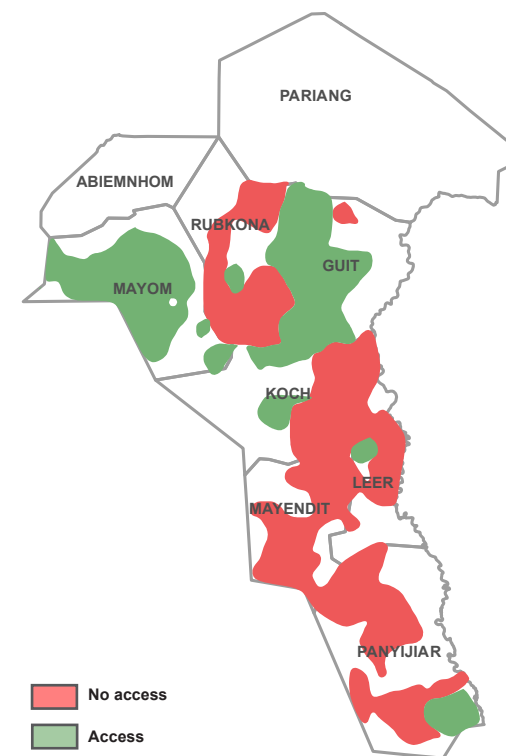
October 2016 cost nearly 8 times what it did in mid-October 2015.<sup>9</sup>

Of the 34 communities reporting inadequate access to food in November, 77 per cent reported that the most important reason was that it was too unsafe to access food by their preferred method. The second most important reason was reportedly the destruction of crops (69 per cent of assessed communities), in most cases likely due to flooding. This is supported by a FEWS NET assessment from mid-September, which reported that since July, heavy rains have caused flooding with severe consequences for food security in northern South Sudan<sup>10</sup>, as well as by the majority of FGDs conducted in Bentiu PoC since October.

### Livelihoods

Ninety-six per cent of assessed communities reported that land was available for cultivation, but only 32 per cent reported access to agricultural inputs. Furthermore, 65 per cent of assessed communities reported that most of the farming implements and tradesmen's tools in the community had been looted. This means that although land is widely available and accessible, many communities lack the means to make use of this opportunity for cultivation to improve their food security.

Moreover, only 10 per cent of assessed communities reported access to casual job opportunities. This is likely a reflection of the negative impact of insecurity and conflict, and of the general economic situation in South Sudan, on livelihoods and cultivation in Unity



**Map 4: Communities reporting access to agricultural inputs, November 2016**

State.

As in previous months, a large proportion of assessed communities (44 per cent) reported that at least one major cattle raid had taken place in the past six months, predominantly in Leer, Koch and Mayendit. Of these, 85 per cent reported that personal property other than cattle had been damaged, 70 per cent reported that community infrastructure such as a school or health facility had been damaged, and 93 per cent reported that displacement had occurred as a result of the raid.

8 OCHA, South Sudan Humanitarian Bulletin Issue 19, 6 December 2016.

9 WFP South Sudan Weekly Price Tracker, Week 2 October 2016.

10 FEWS NET, "Global Weather Hazards Summary", 9-15 September 2016.

## Water and Sanitation

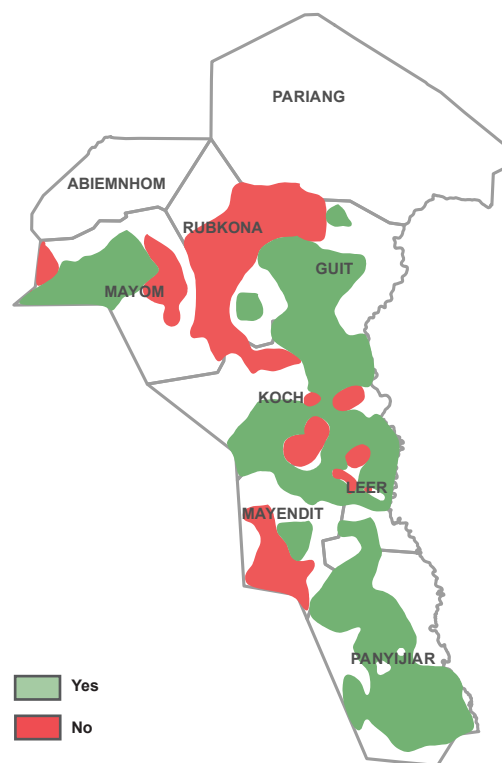
Sixty-seven per cent of assessed communities reported access to safe drinking water (borehole), of which 95 per cent reported that safe water could be accessed by walking for less than an hour. It should be noted that even in villages with functioning boreholes, FGDs suggest that these are often only used by those living in relatively close proximity to them, with those living further away obtaining their water from unprotected sources such as rivers and swamps.

Ninety-nine per cent of assessed communities reported open defecation, with only one community in Rubkona reporting the use of latrines. This can be attributed to a general absence of latrines as well as the fact that open defecation is an entrenched practice that will require substantial behavioural change communication to eliminate. **Sanitation infrastructure and hygiene promotion therefore remain a priority need in Unity State.**

## Health

**Seventy-eight per cent of assessed communities reported that they did not have access to health services in November**, with many reporting that previously existing services were abandoned, looted, destroyed or otherwise unable to function due to fighting (42 per cent of communities reporting no access to health services), or that health services simply never existed in the first place (47 per cent).

An overwhelming majority of assessed



**Map 4: Communities reporting access to safe drinking water, November 2016**

communities (92 per cent) identified malaria as the biggest health concern in their community, and 31 per cent reported diarrhea as the second most important health problem. This is consistent with findings from the South Sudan Health Cluster, which reported that malaria accounted for 43 per cent of the major causes of death in South Sudan, followed by acute watery diarrhoea at 11 per cent, for the January-August 2016 period.<sup>11</sup>

Although not highlighted by REACH data, it should be noted that the ongoing outbreak of cholera in South Sudan remains a priority

health concern in Unity State. While cholera was officially confirmed in Bentiu PoC in October, the first cases in Nyal were confirmed on 1 November. Those who did not receive the oral cholera vaccine during the 2015 vaccination campaign are particularly susceptible. Investigating and responding to cholera in Leer and Mayendit has been highly constrained by the insecurity there.<sup>12</sup>

## Education

**Only 9 per cent of assessed communities reported access to education services in November** (exclusively pre-primary and primary schools). However, secondary data from education partners working in Unity suggests that education services may be underreported in REACH data because KIs are likely to report that there is no access to education if there is no school in their village, when in fact a school in a nearby village can be reasonably accessed on a daily basis. This will be rectified in REACH methodology for future reporting.

Of the 6 communities reporting access to education, all reported that more than 50 per cent of boys were attending school, while only 3 reported the same for girls. FGDs conducted by REACH in education catchment sites in previous months suggest that this gender disparity in school attendance rates is linked to traditional gender roles.

Access to education, which has always been limited in Unity State, has been further set back by the closing down of many schools in the southern counties (particularly Leer and Koch) as teachers fled and NGO staff were

evacuated due to the fighting in July. Many of these schools have yet to reopen. FGDs suggest that schools in conflict-affected areas are susceptible to abandonment because most teachers are young men, which makes them particularly vulnerable to targeting for physical violence and forced recruitment.

## Conclusion

The fighting that began in southern Unity State in July has continued to negatively affect displacement trends, population needs and access to basic services in November. More IDPs entered Bentiu PoC in November than in any month since the renewal of the crisis in July, and its population now stands at more than 120,000.

Many host communities have either been directly affected by the fighting (with consequences such as violence, looting, destroyed property and displacement), or have been cut off from humanitarian access due to the resultant insecurity. The high prevalence of more temporary structures (rakoobas) as the primary shelter in almost all communities is likely a reflection of the instability, fear and high levels of displacement currently being experienced by large parts of the population in Unity State. However, although rakoobas remain the most common type of shelter, the reported increase in tukuls may be a positive sign that some populations are increasingly able to build or return to permanent shelters.

Access to basic services (most notably food, health and education) has remained low since the beginning of the July crisis, and continues

11 Health Cluster Bulletin #5, 23 September 2016

12 WHO, Situation Report #95 on cholera in South Sudan, 17 November 2016.

to do so in November. Food security remains the most pronounced challenge, as cultivation has been impeded by insecurity and flooding, humanitarians have been prevented from implementing general food distributions in some of the most food insecure parts of Unity, and access to markets is extremely limited. As a result, many have had to resort to negative coping mechanisms, and deaths from hunger are widely reported.

While improvements in humanitarian access are expected with the beginning of the incumbent dry season and consequent rehabilitation of roads, instability is also expected to increase as armed groups will be able to mobilise more easily. It is therefore likely that the volatile security context will continue to have a negative impact on population needs and on humanitarian access to hard to reach areas.

#### About REACH Initiative

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.

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