

Situation Overview: Western Bahr el Ghazal, South Sudan

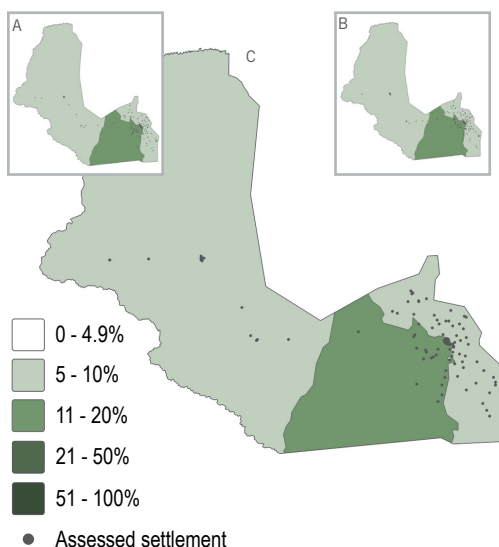
January - March 2018

Introduction

Ongoing conflict in Western Bahr el Ghazal (WBeG) State resulted in a continued deterioration of food security and livelihoods outcomes between January and March 2018. Clashes between armed groups in Raja County during the first quarter of the year have caused displacement and prevented communities from meeting their basic needs. Meanwhile, in Wau and Jur River Counties, a decline in violence has allowed humanitarian conditions to improve slightly.

REACH has been assessing hard-to-reach areas in WBeG State, South Sudan since

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



April 2017 to inform humanitarian actors. Data was collected through key informant interviews (KIs) on a monthly basis from settlements in Jur River, Wau, and Raja Counties. In the first quarter of 2018, REACH interviewed 805 key informants (KIs) from 412 settlements, covering all three counties of WBeG. The interviews were conducted in Wau Protection of Civilians (PoC) site and all five IDP collective centres in Wau Town, which are formalised IDP camps in which IDPs can receive shelter, aid and protection. Additionally, to triangulate the findings, REACH conducted 3 Shocks Profiling Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and 3 Food Security and Livelihoods (FSL) FGDs in Wau Protection of Civilians (PoC) site and Lokoloko Collective Centre with a total of 26 participants. In addition, the findings were supplemented with secondary data and past REACH assessments of hard-to-reach areas in WBeG.

To ensure an up to date understanding of current displacement dynamics and humanitarian conditions in settlements across WBeG State, REACH interviewed KIs who were either new arrivals or in contact with an individual from the assessed settlement within the last month.

This situation overview evaluates changes in humanitarian needs from January to March 2018. The first section analyses displacement and population movement in WBeG State and the second section focuses on access to food and basic services for

both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and local populations in assessed settlements.

Population Movement and Displacement

Overall, IDP populations remained relatively consistent through the first quarter of 2018. Fifteen percent (15%) of assessed settlements reported hosting IDP populations in March, which remained consistent with January and February. Steady improvements in the security situation across WBeG in the quarter meant there was minimal displacement across the state, with the exception of in Raja County, where two reported outbreaks of conflict led to waves of displacement in January and February.

Also partially attributable to the improved security in WBeG between January and March, Wau PoC site reported a decrease in population

Figure 1: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting incidents of conflict, September 2017 - March 2018

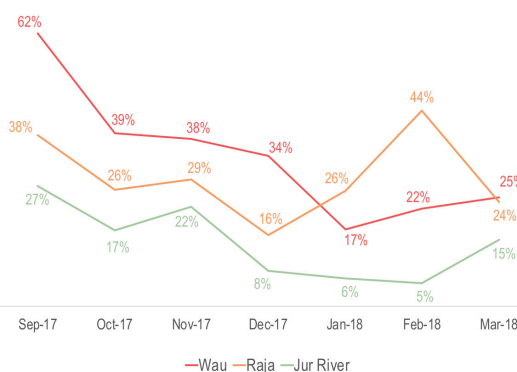
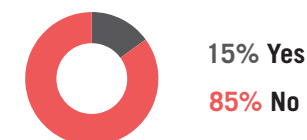


Figure 2: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting IDP presence, March 2018



from 25,029 registered individuals in January to 22,579 in March.¹ Similarly, the number of registered IDPs in the five IDP collective centres in Wau Town decreased from 14,936 to 12,177 individuals over the first quarter.^{2,3}

However, a decline in camp population does not imply a proportional increase in the population returning to previous settlements. **No counties in WBeG saw an increase in reported returns of local populations in assessed settlements during the quarter.** State-wide, 66% of assessed settlements reported returns in January, consistent with the 64% reported in March. Displacement camp populations fluctuate episodically as many households (HH) live outside the camps in Wau Town and return when insecurity increases or for humanitarian services or leave seasonally for cultivation.⁴ A humanitarian partner's recent assessment on displacement in WBeG accredits the temporary movement out of camps to the stabilising security environment in Wau Town and the early stages of joint decongestion efforts by the government and humanitarian partners in IDP sites.⁵

1,3. IOM, Population Count Updated for March 2018, March 2018

2. The figures include populations from the five Wau collective centres: Cathedral, Masna, Nazareth, Lokoloko and St. Joseph (listed in order of population size, from largest to smallest)

4,5. Nonviolent Peaceforce, Security Perceptions and IDPs' Return in Wau, March 2018



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METHODOLOGY

To provide an overview of the situation in hard-to-reach areas of Western Bahr el Ghazal (WBeG), REACH uses primary data provided by key informants who have recently arrived, or receive regular information, from a location or “Area of Knowledge” (AoK).

Information for this report was collected from key informants in the Wau PoC site and the five collective centers in Wau in January, February and March 2018.

The first phase of the assessment methodology comprised a participatory mapping exercise to map the relevant settlements in WBeG. 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 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 analysed using descriptive statistics and geospatial analysis.

Due to operational constraints that can impact coverage each month, some of the reported changes in this overview may be due to the variations in coverage.

In contrast to the improved security in most of WBeG State, a series of attacks in Raja County in January and February displaced populations. In both February and March, over 60% of assessed settlements in Raja County reported that IDPs had been displaced during the month of February. Additionally, in January, all KIs in Raja County reported that new arrivals came because of insecurity; in February this proportion decreased but remained the highest reported reason at 40%.

In mid-January, a clash between armed actors in Dolo, Raja County reportedly triggered the displacement of 2,200 people from Dolo southwest to Chandioy as well as into the surrounding bush. Chandioy is a remote settlement with limited access to resources to meet IDPs’ basic needs and ongoing insecurity has prevented IDPs from returning to Dolo.⁶ Additionally, in early February, there was an outbreak of conflict in Deim Zubier, Raja County, which displaced roughly 850 civilians to Namutina in Nagero County, Western Equatoria. IDPs are reportedly living with the host community, though there are limited resources to support the rapid influx.⁷

The displacement following the outbreaks of conflict in Dolo and Deim Zubier was evident in the reduction of populations in assessed settlements in Raja County in the first quarter. Host community populations overall decreased; **the percentage reporting that more than half of the host community remained in the settlement dropped from 32% to 6% between January and March in Raja County.** Meanwhile, the proportion reporting that half or less than half of the population remained in the community increased from 68% to 94% during the quarter.

Though IDP populations remained relatively consistent in WBeG in the first quarter of 2018, Wau County maintained the largest proportion of assessed settlements hosting IDPs in WBeG State (22% in March) which is primarily attributable to the Wau PoC and five collective centres in Wau municipality. Additionally, similar to previous months, the majority of known IDP displacement sites in WBeG are located within Wau County, the largest of which is the Greater Bagarri area, which still hosts over 10,000 IDPs. Refer to REACH’s Greater Bagarri Food Security and Livelihoods Update for more information.⁸

Situation in Assessed Settlements

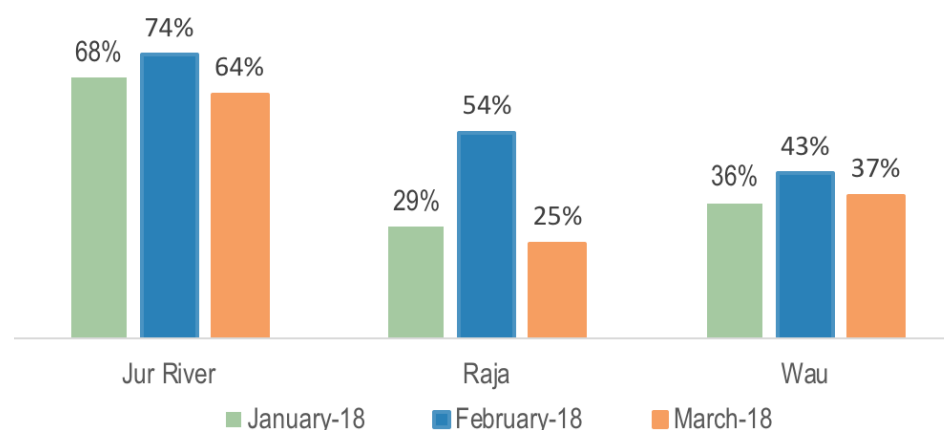
Food Security and Livelihoods

In the first quarter of 2018, food security in WBeG remained critical, particularly in areas most affected by conflict, such as Raja and

parts of Wau counties. The outbreak of conflict in April 2017 and the subsequent delayed rains in 2017 reportedly impeded normal cultivation, resulting in poor production later in the year.⁹ Yields from the previous harvest were not sufficient to meet food needs and harvested food reportedly lasted for a limited period in assessed settlements across WBeG.¹⁰ In March, 45% of assessed settlements reported having adequate access to food state-wide, a decrease from February, when 59% reported the same, yet consistent with January (Figure 3). In WBeG State, **59% of assessed settlements reported hunger was either severe or the worst it could possibly be in March 2018**, though this varied significantly across counties, attributable to the differing security environments (Map 2).

The vast majority of reported barriers to accessing enough food in WBeG remained conflict-related in the first quarter (Figure 4). Assessed settlements consistently reported that **they lacked access**

Figure 3: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food by county in WBeG, January 2018 - March 2018



6. REACH, Chandioy Food Security and Livelihoods Brief, February 2018

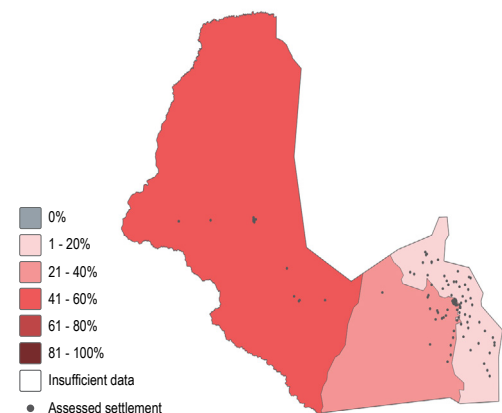
7. World Vision International, Fact Finding Assessment Report for Namutina, Nagero County: 29 March, April 2018

8. REACH, Greater Bagarri Food Security and Livelihoods Update, November 2017

9. REACH, Situation Overview WBeG, November 2017

10. Reported by FGD participants from Wau and Raja counties in February 2018

Map 2: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting hunger as severe or the worst it could be, March 2018



to enough food because past displacement had disrupted cultivation. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of assessed settlements reported this as the cause for inadequate access to food in March, an increase from the 26% in January, but a decrease from the 49% in February.¹¹ These figures are likely attributable to the fact that most of the remaining food was looted or destroyed during conflict in April 2017 and the displaced populations reportedly struggled to cultivate more food since being displaced.

Market dependence was reportedly high in Wau and Raja counties over the assessment period. Though functioning markets remained highly accessible in the first quarter, with 85% of assessed settlements reporting accessibility in March state-wide, 74% of those who reported access to markets also reported the price of cereals had increased. **The increase in market prices, combined with national price inflation, continued to reduce the purchasing power of the**

population, which could dramatically impact food security in the coming months given the high market dependence.^{12,13}

Casual labour continued to be the most commonly reported livelihoods activity, at 84% state-wide in March, followed by fishing and hunting. The shift away from crops for sustenance as a primary livelihoods activity is reflective of the end of the cultivation season.

Raja County

Ongoing conflict in Raja County continued to have a severe impact on access to food and livelihoods in the first quarter of 2018; **only 25% of assessed settlements in Raja County reported having adequate access to food** in March. Sixty percent (60%) of assessed settlements said hunger was either severe or the worst it could be in March, a spike from the 28% reported in February. These figures are a strong indication that Raja County is currently experiencing very high levels of food insecurity.

Figure 5: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting impact of cereal price increase on adequate access to food, March 2018

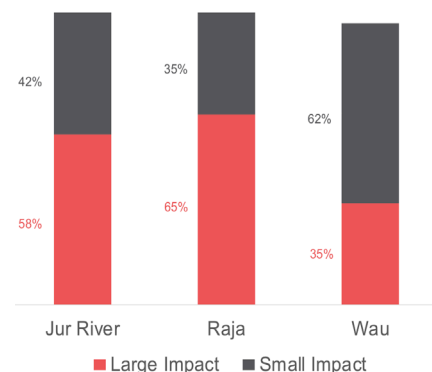
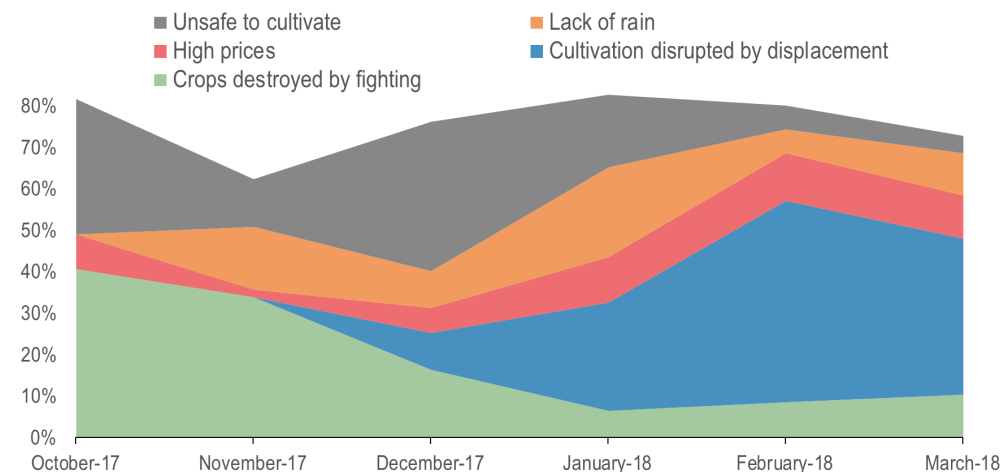


Figure 4: Reported reasons for lack of access to enough food in assessed settlements in WBeG State, October 2017 - March 2018



The conflict that began in April 2017 reportedly prevented most cultivation in assessed settlements in Raja County last planting season, and FGD participants reported that HHs who did cultivate only planted very small plots around their shelters. Consequently, more than half of assessed settlements (53%) reported that the majority of HHs foraged for wild food as their primary food source in March.

Access to markets remained high in Raja County, over 89% through the first quarter; though reliance on markets as the main food source more than halved from 25% of assessed settlements in December 2017 to 12% in March. This was likely due to a combination of increasing inflation, displacement and insecurity in the region.¹⁴ Nearly all (96%) assessed settlements with access to markets reported there was an increase in market prices in March and of those settlements, 65%

reported the increase has had a large impact on their access to food. Without access to formerly relied on food sources, food insecurity will continue to grow in the coming months in Raja County.

Wau County

Reported access to food in Wau County improved over the previous quarter; **in March, 37% of assessed settlements in Wau County reported having adequate access to food, a 20% increase from what was reported in December** (Figure 3). This is likely due to both an improvement in access to markets in Wau Town, in addition to the sustained provision of food aid to the Greater Bagarri region in central and southern Wau County beginning in late 2017.¹⁵

Most (65%) assessed settlements reported acquiring the majority of their food from market purchases. However, market dependence was reportedly high; **between 14% and 25% of assessed settlements reported**

11. The spike in February is likely due to the episodes of displacement in Raja County at the end of January and beginning of February noted in the displacement section

12. IPC, Key IPC Findings: January to July 2018, January 2018

13. Nonviolent Peaceforce, Security Perceptions and IDPs' Return in Wau, March 2018

14. WFP, Market Assessment: Wau Market, South Sudan, November 2017

15. OCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin, February 2018

lacking adequate access to food due to inflated food prices in the first quarter.

In Wau County, the barriers to accessing enough food varied significantly during the assessment period given the diversity of displacement sites in Wau municipality and the Greater Bagarri area. Commonly reported reasons for lacking access to enough food included insecurity, lack of access to land and disrupted cultivation due to displacement.

Jur River County

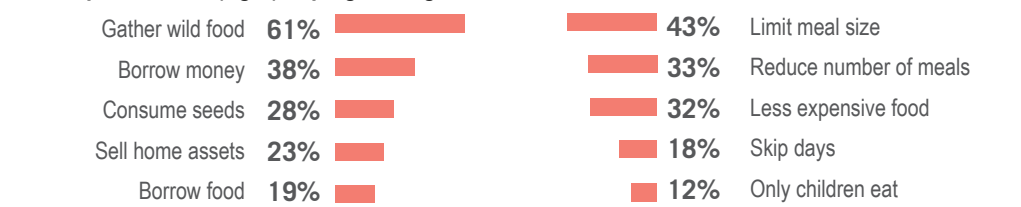
Jur River County consistently reported high levels of access to food during the first quarter, ranging between 64% and 74% of assessed settlements over the first quarter of the year. A lack of conflict in the county in 2017 allowed most settlements to cultivate.¹⁶ Ninety percent (90%) of assessed settlements reported relying on cultivated food as the main food source in March, consistent through the assessment period. Sorghum is harvested 1-2 months later in Jur River than in other parts of WBeG, suggesting that crops are likely to last longer into the lean season than in other parts of the state.

Growing crops for sustenance decreased in prevalence from 94% in assessed settlements in January to 48% in March, while fishing and hunting increased as a primary livelihood activity from 49% in December to 74% in March. FGD participants reported that major livelihoods activities often shift from cultivation to fishing and hunting around this time as crops from the last year's harvest deplete.

Coping Strategies

Given the continued lack of access to food in

Figure 6: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting engagement in livelihoods* (left) and consumption-based (right) coping strategies, WBeG State, March 2018**



most assessed settlements in WBeG, short and medium term coping strategies were commonly used between January and March 2018 (See Figure 6). Most concerning was the increasing reliance on seed consumption as a coping mechanism in Jur River County. Despite Jur River having the highest reported access to food in the state, there has been a consistent increase in seed consumption in assessed settlements since November 2017. **While in November only 9% of assessed settlements in Jur River used seed consumption as a coping mechanism, 43% reported the same in March.** See the November Situation Overview for more information on seed consumption as a coping strategy.¹⁸

The lack of sufficient food across most of WBeG was also reflected in the reported consumption-based coping strategies; limiting meal sizes remained the most commonly cited food coping mechanism across assessed settlements at 43% in March, closely followed by limiting the number of meals (33%) and eating less expensive food (32%).

Assessed settlements in Wau County reported that most households relied on social networks for food and resources in the first quarter; 26% of assessed settlements in Wau County reported borrowing

food and 27% reported borrowing money as the most common coping mechanisms in March. The assessed settlements in Wau also reported sending family members into displacement camps to receive food aid to cope with the lack of access to food. The prevalence of this mechanism is evident in the disparity between the number of IDPs living in the sites and the number of beneficiaries of food aid in the sites. In March 2018, a head count in Cathedral Collective Centre indicated fewer than 6,000 people resided in the camp; however, humanitarian partners reportedly provide food aid to roughly 18,000 ration-card holders in Cathedral.¹⁹ Thus, it is evident that in the first quarter of 2018, thousands of individuals relied on food aid and protection from displacement sites who did not physically live at those sites.

Protection

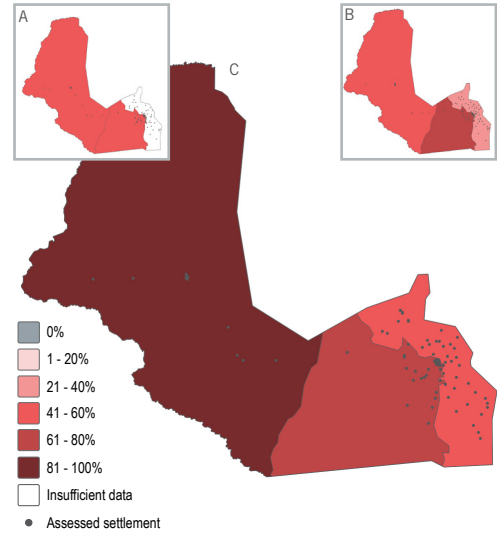
Conflict-related protection issues accounted for the majority of assessed settlements' protection concerns during the first quarter of 2018.

Looting was reported by assessed settlements as a major protection concern across WBeG during the assessment period (Map 3). Incidents of looting increased state-wide

from 45% in January to 61% in March. This was likely linked to the outbreaks of conflict in Raja County in January and February, which reportedly caused theft and the destruction of property, combined with the continued deterioration of the economy country-wide, which has impacted individuals' ability to meet basic needs, especially in urban centres.²⁰

The conflict was also linked to a variety of other protection concerns, including sexual violence against women and girls, which was reported by 41% and 40% of assessed settlements in March in Wau and Raja counties, respectively. **Sexual violence against women was reported to have increased in WBeG State over the assessment period from 16% in January to 47% in March.** FGD participants from both Raja and Wau Counties reported that

Map 3: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting incidents of looting in WBeG, January (A), February (B) and March 2018 (C)



16. Only 2 payams in Jur River were affected by the outbreak of conflict in April 2017: Kuarijina and Rocrocdong, both in the southern portion of the county
17. Reported by FGD participants from Jur River County in January 2018
18. REACH, Situation Overview WBeG, November 2017
19. Nonviolent Peaceforce, Context Analysis on Security and Displacement Dynamics in Wau, March 2018
20. WFP, Market Assessment: Wau Market, South Sudan, November 2017
***KIs were able to select multiple responses for these indicators.

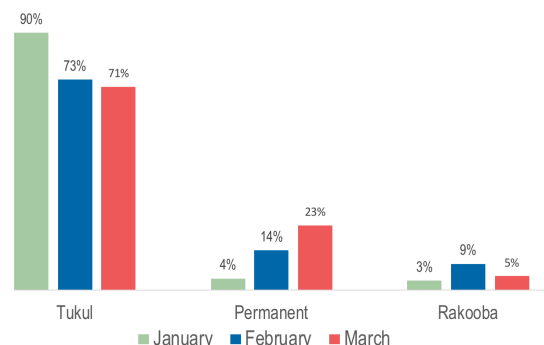
the increase in concern over sexual violence was likely due to declining food security, as more women were reported to be collecting firewood in forests to make money to buy food.

Protection incidents were reported to have had a direct impact on food security; FGD participants noted that conflict was often accompanied by the destruction of crops and looting of food stores and livestock. In February 38% of assessed settlements in Raja County and 31% in Wau County reported that incidents of conflict and looting had a large impact on their access to food in the settlement. For more information on the reported impact of looting on access to food in WBeG, refer to the REACH Situation Overview of WBeG from November 2017.²¹

Shelter and Non-Food Items (NFI)

Shelter conditions improved during the first quarter of 2018 both for host communities and IDPs. Additionally, reports of damaged shelters were far lower than at any point during 2017, reported by only 2% of assessed settlements in March. The vast majority (over 70% each month)

Figure 7: Primary shelter types for host communities in assessed settlements in WBeG, January - March 2018



of host communities identified tukuls as the main shelter type in assessed settlements in WBeG, and urban centres reported an **increase in concrete shelters in host communities from 4% to 23% between January and March 2018** (Figure 7). The increase in reported permanent shelters and decline in shelter damage suggests that areas less affected by conflict, such as Jur River and parts of Wau County, are rebuilding following the successive clashes that destroyed many of the shelters in 2017.

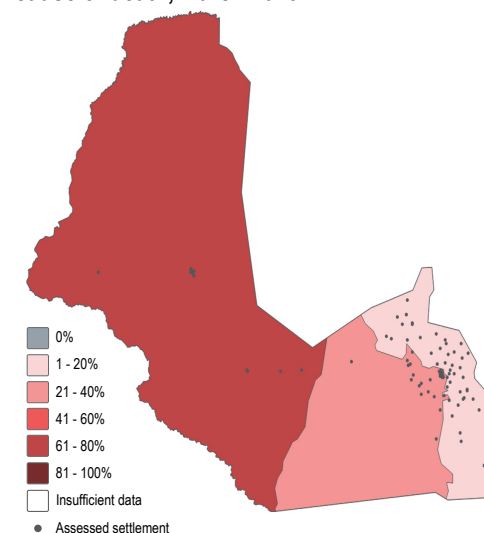
Most assessed settlements (60% in March) reported that a majority of IDPs were staying in either improvised shelters or rakoobas. This likely indicates that the IDPs in assessed settlements during the assessment period had been displaced recently given the impermanent shelter types; tukuls take more time to build and often denote a long-term residence.

Access to NFI's remained restricted, especially in areas most affected by conflict; **plastic sheeting, mosquito nets and blankets were consistently reported as high-priority needs** in assessed settlements in WBeG in the first quarter of 2018.

Health and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

Access to health care facilities remained consistently high through the first quarter of 2018 across all three counties in WBeG, likely due to a more stable security environment in most areas. Assessed settlements in Jur River and Wau counties each reported around 70% access to healthcare facilities

Map 4: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting hunger or malnutrition as leading cause of death, March 2018



in March. While access to health facilities was reported to be the highest in Raja County (96% of assessed settlements in March), FGD participants from Raja County noted that most clinics were experiencing drug shortages, including malaria pills. The drug shortages are likely due to constrained humanitarian access reported in parts of Wau and Raja counties.²²

Malaria was reported to be the primary health concern in assessed settlements in WBeG, though its reported prevalence declined across settlements between January (46%) and March (28%) in line with the dry season, when the decline in stagnant water deposits limits the number of malaria vectors. **Over 50% of assessed settlements across the state reported not having access to mosquito nets, particularly in Wau and Jur River counties.**

Particularly concerning, food insecurity in Raja County has significantly impacted the health condition of populations in assessed settlements during the assessment period. **Malnutrition was reported as the most common health problem in 41% of assessed settlements in Raja County in March**, which was a sharp increase from the 9% reported in January. Reports of hunger-related deaths also spiked in the first quarter; in January 26% of assessed settlements reported hunger or malnutrition as the primary cause of death, which spiked to 73% in February and was 48% in March. These sudden increases in reported malnutrition and hunger-related deaths are likely an outcome of ongoing insecurity, missed harvests, displacement and price inflation.

Waterborne diseases, particularly typhoid, were reported to be a serious concern in Jur River County, where the percentage of assessed settlements reporting it as the primary health concern rose from 6% in January to 26% in March. This was likely due to poor hygiene practices; in March, 47% of assessed settlements in Jur River reported that individuals do not wash their hands. In addition, 90% of assessed settlements in Jur River County reported that no one in the settlement was using latrines, the highest in the state. The primary reason reported for not using latrines was a lack of access, reported by 73% of assessed settlements in March.

Boreholes continued to be reported as the primary source of drinking water in WBeG; 72% of assessed settlements reported having access to a borehole in March and nearly all (between 84% and 94%) of assessed

21. REACH, Situation Overview WBeG, November 2017

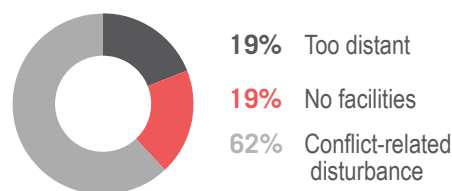
22. OCHA, South Sudan: Humanitarian Access Snapshot, February 2018

settlements reported that a clean water source was accessible within or under a one hour walk from the settlements.

Education

Improved security across WBeG State reportedly also led to an increase in access to education. **Reported access to education increased from 57% in December 2017 to 71% in March.** The assessed settlements

Figure 8: Reported barriers for access to education services, March 2018



that still lack access to education reported the lasting effects of the conflict were the primary barrier, including destroyed school facilities, continuing insecurity, and teachers being displaced (Figure 8).

Conclusion

The lasting effects of the outbreak of conflict in April 2017 continued to negatively impact food security and livelihoods, service access and protection in WBeG in the first quarter of 2018. Much of the cultivation was disrupted in 2017 due to the conflict, and the subsequent waves of displacement have prevented communities from planting adequate amounts of crops and recovering livelihoods. Meanwhile, increasing market prices have obstructed access to alternate sources of food. As a result, the

reliance on coping mechanisms such as foraging for wild foods and consuming seeds has become commonplace in parts of WBeG. Because of this, food insecurity is beginning to have long-term impacts on health, such as increases in reports of malnutrition as the primary cause of death in the first quarter, which should be monitored closely.

Episodes of armed conflict in Raja County in January and February triggered displacement and decreases in host populations in some assessed settlements in Raja County, which will also likely exacerbate food insecurity in the coming months given that the planting season is nearing and the displaced populations will likely be unable to cultivate. Food distributions aimed at alleviating hunger gaps have already been disrupted by subsequent conflict. Additionally, many of these recent IDPs remain in remote locations and have limited access to basic services due to the insecurity.

However, despite insecurity in Raja County, there has been a gradual stabilisation in the security environment in the rest of WBeG State, which has allowed for some improvements in the humanitarian situation, specifically to shelter conditions and access to education, water and health care between January and March. Increases in the humanitarian response in the Greater Bagarri region and other parts of the state have also helped improve access to some basic services.

With the onset of the rainy season, malaria cases are expected to rise and the unexpected reported rise in waterborne diseases as the most common health concern in assessed

settlements in Jur River seen in the first quarter may increase given the already poor hygiene and sanitation practices. Thus, there is high vulnerability to disease epidemics.

Overall, while security has improved and conflict has decreased in much of WBeG in the first quarter of 2018, the biggest ongoing threat in the state is the acute food insecurity, which will likely continue to deteriorate in the coming months as trends continue. Whether or not populations are able to cultivate in the planting season of 2018 will highly impact the future food security and livelihoods in the state.

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.

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