

# Greater Bagarri Food Security and Livelihoods Update

Wau County, Western Bahr el Ghazal State, South Sudan, November 2017

## Introduction

Following reports of widespread malnutrition in the Greater Bagarri region of Wau County, REACH deployed in November 2017 to follow up on previous REACH assessments of the area in August and September 2017. Despite a United Nations (UN) seed and half-ration General Food Distribution (GFD) and nutrition interventions in September 2017, concerns remained that high levels of malnutrition recorded in previous months might worsen over the coming months and lead to an increase in mortality due to a lack of food, acute malnutrition and disease.<sup>1</sup> To complement existing knowledge and address information gaps, REACH conducted an assessment of food stock exhaustion, displacement patterns, and excess mortality in Mboro, Farajallah and Ngodakala in the Greater Bagarri area as part of a United Nations (UN) led inter-agency mission between 19-21 November 2017. The assessment methodology consisted of 4 food exhaustion focus group discussions (FGDs) with 19 participants, one displacement tracking FGD with 7 participants, 10 Key Informant (KI) interviews on excess mortality, and regular interaction and general observation of community members and the surrounding areas.

## Population Movement and Displacement

FGD participants identified three periods of large-scale displacement in Wau County, similar to previous assessments.<sup>2</sup> In June 2016, tens of thousands of people fled into the protection of civilians (PoC) site in Wau Town or into the remote areas outside settlements of Greater Bagarri. In February and April 2017, episodes of violence in different parts of Wau County led to large-scale displacement. Up to 10,000 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from Greater Bazia, Besellia, and Khorh Ghana areas and settlements located outside Wau town fled into Greater Bagarri and are still residing there (see Map 1). After April 2017, there have been no reported large-scale episodes of violence. However, the security situation in Wau County is reported to have remained volatile, and the conflict dynamics within the county prevented the population in the Greater Bagarri area from accessing main roads and markets, including those into and out of Wau Town.

## Food Security and Livelihoods

Adequate access to food in the Greater Bagarri area declined sharply between 2016 to 2017 due to a combination of both the influx of IDPs in Mboro and Farajallah, and a decrease in access to crops, agricultural tools and markets due to insecurity. According to displacement FGD participants, most IDPs fled without any of their assets, leaving them entirely dependent upon the Host Community (HC) for food, shelter, and Non-Food Items (NFIs), such as cooking equipment and agricultural tools. This rapidly depleted the HCs' food stocks, creating severe food consumption gaps in the Greater Bagarri area.<sup>3</sup>

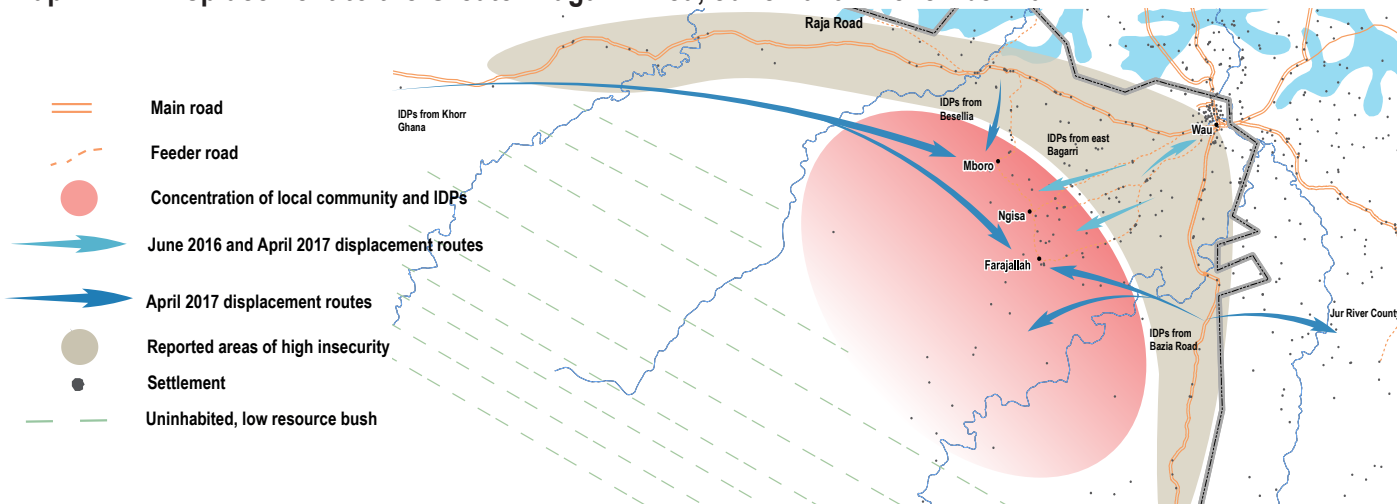
High levels of malnutrition were recorded among 2,369 children between 6 and 59 months who were screened in Mboro and Farajallah during REACH's previous assessment in September 2017. Mboro was reported to be the worst affected assessed area, with a recorded proxy Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rate of 32% and a proxy Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) rate of 12%.<sup>4</sup> However, November's findings suggest that the overall humanitarian situation, especially the nutritional status of children, in both Mboro and Farajallah has improved since REACH's last assessment in September. While the proxy GAM rate in Mboro among 889 screened children decreased slightly to 28%, the proxy SAM rate dropped to 4%.<sup>5</sup>

Table 1: Proxy GAM and SAM rates in Greater Bagarri, 2017

	September 2017		November 2017	
	Proxy GAM	Proxy SAM	Proxy GAM	Proxy SAM
Mboro	32.6%	11.9%	28%	4.1%
Farajallah	17.2%	8.6%	10.1%	2%

Compared to previous occasions where there had been a decrease in SAM cases, likely linked to the death of these cases, excess mortality data collected by REACH in Mboro and Farajallah in November 2017 did not suggest any substantial number of deaths related to starvation among children since September 2017. Most people who had reportedly died between September and November

Map 1: IDP Displacement to the Greater Bagarri Area, June 2016 - November 2017



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2017 belonged to the 60+ age group of which only few deaths could possibly be related to starvation.<sup>6</sup>

The slight improvement in nutrition levels in the Greater Bagarri is likely attributable to a combination of recent harvests, the seed and half-ration GFD and the nutrition intervention in September 2017.

## Food Exhaustion

According to REACH findings from the assessment conducted in September, most sources of food were projected to be exhausted within the period of January/February 2018. In November, REACH re-assessed the same area's reported levels of food sources and food stocks exhaustion. Based on the assessment, most stocks and sources of food were expected to last two months longer than reported in September (see Table 2 on the right). According to food exhaustion FGD participants, harvested sorghum, vegetable and groundnut stocks were predicted to be exhausted in March or April of 2018. **Compared to pre-crisis years, the exhaustion of these three sources of food is anticipated to occur one to three months early. While this harvest was reportedly better than expected, it is reduced compared to a typical year.**<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, cassava, a staple food for most HHs in the area, was exhausted by November 2017 in assessed areas. FGD participants noted that the primary reason for the exhaustion of cassava, which is typically expected to remain available year-round, was overconsumption during the 2017 lean season and looting during episodes of violence in 2016. This is particularly alarming because cassava is often held as a reserve crop by many households in Western Bahr el Ghazal State; it is kept in the ground for periods of time when food is scarce. According to FGD participants, the cassava that is still in the ground is not expected to be ready for harvest for another two years, limiting its usefulness as a staple food and coping strategy during future lean seasons.<sup>8</sup>

**The predicted early exhaustion of these stocks and sources of food suggests that the lean season of 2018 will start earlier than in a typical year and will likely last longer.**

In Greater Bagarri, normal ways to cover hunger gaps were to buy food at markets and consume cassava. As of November 2017, both were not an option due to insecurity and exhaustion of stocks, respectively. Therefore, populations in the area had to resort to other food consumption coping strategies. FGD participants mentioned the consumption of wild ambeshe, a root similar to cassava used as an alternative source of food. However, ambeshe only grows in areas that are currently insecure, making it difficult to gather. Hunting and fishing were reportedly possible throughout the year, but the lack of tools needed for both activities have limited both practices as sustainable solutions for reducing food consumption gaps.

**Table 2: Estimated period of exhaustion of food sources based on September and November assessments**

Food Type	September 2017	November 2017
Sorghum	September 2017	March/April 2018
Cassava	January/February 2018	November 2017
Ground-nuts	November 2017	March/April 2018
Vegetables	November 2017	March/April 2018
Fishing/ Hunting	Never; but limited tools and access	Never; but limited tools and access
Wild Foods	January 2018	Only Ambeshe; available only in insecure areas

## Conclusion

It is possible that food stocks and sources in the Greater Bagarri area will be sufficient through the first quarter of 2018 due to a combination of humanitarian assistance and better than expected harvests among the HC. However, GAM rates remain high and some staple foods, such as cassava, are exhausted and will not be available for an extended period. Minimal cultivation has taken place, and **without continued humanitarian support, it is unlikely that food stores will last the duration of the dry season.** With limited coping strategies available and a lack of alternative food sources aside from cultivation, it is unclear how long improved food security and livelihoods conditions will persist, particularly if there were to be a negative shock that rapidly depleted current food stocks.

Increased humanitarian assistance in Greater Bagarri will potentially lead to a substantial improvement of the overall humanitarian situation. However, due to the volatile security situation in the region, access to populations in need remains at risk of deteriorating again.<sup>9</sup>

### Endnotes

1. A half-ration corresponds to an amount of food to cover 15 days. During the distributions in September, high levels of malnutrition were recorded, based on which the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) declared Greater Bagarri at elevated risk of famine. REACH had previously assessed Greater Bagarri in August and September 2017 as part of two UN-led inter-agency missions. During the mission in September, food, seeds and tools were distributed to 16,000 people in the area.
2. REACH previously assessed the area and conducted 10 interviews in August and in September. See REACH Bagarri FSL Brief, September 2017.
3. REACH Bagarri Displacement and Food Security and Livelihoods Brief September, 2017.
4. Nutrition rates based on screening of 2,369 children by UNICEF and WFP on September 20-21, 2017.
5. Nutrition rates based on screening of 2,445 children by UNICEF and AFOD on November 20-21, 2017.
6. The excess mortality data was collected by the REACH team through KIs and health facility records in Mboro and Ngodakala. The data is indicative for general trends in the but was potentially not able to capture all cases of death in the area.
7. FEWSNET South Sudan Livelihood Zones and Descriptions, August 2013.
8. WFP/FAO CFSAM, 2011.
9. Due to continuous displacement in Greater Bagarri, the distinction between HC and IDPs is often blurry and further investigation is needed to establish the proportions of how many households were able to cultivate and how many depend on those who cultivated.
10. Following REACH's assessment, in November, another GFD, targeting approximately 5,000 people in Mboro and 12,000 people in Farajallah with a 30 days, full-ration took place. Impacts of the November GFD are not reflected in this brief.