



# Flooding and violence drive alarming acute malnutrition levels in Fangak County

March 2026 | South Sudan

This alert summarises conditions in Fangak County in November 2025, when a REACH assessment revealed alarming acute malnutrition levels, elevated morbidity rates, and widespread severe acute food insecurity.

## Key Messages

- **Starting in May 2025, armed violence and catastrophic flooding in Fangak fuelled one of the most severe food crises in South Sudan.** The number of violent incidents in Fangak in 2025 exceeded that in the previous seven years combined, according to data shared by one conflict monitoring organisation. Armed violence killed dozens of people and displaced [38,000 more](#) between May and June. Thereafter, a seventh consecutive year of devastating floods – beginning in August – forced [89,000 people](#) from their homes and submerged 850km<sup>2</sup> of land.
- **An extreme public health crisis was ongoing in Fangak in November 2025.** The number of children admitted for Severe Acute Malnutrition was the highest monthly total since at least 2022, according to the [Nutrition Cluster](#). REACH data collected in November suggested elevated morbidity was driving alarming rates of acute malnutrition. Over half of children under-5 in assessed households (61%) were sick in the fortnight prior to data collection. Furthermore, health facility-level data shared by humanitarian partners revealed consultations for acute watery diarrhea were the highest for any November since at least 2020. Widespread consumption of open water sources and open defecation were other plausible contributing factors to high acute malnutrition and morbidity rates in November 2025.
- **Defunding, logistical obstacles and armed violence may elevate the risk of Famine in Fangak in 2026.** Food distributions, which resumed in August 2025 after a three-month pause, were mitigating the prevalence of catastrophic hunger in Fangak in November, according to REACH data. Though monthly food distributions are planned between January and May 2026, a recent [escalation of violence](#) in central and northern Jonglei – and associated [restrictions on air and river movements](#) – is expected to disrupt these. Similarly, thick vegetation forces the World Food Programme to use [costly airdrops](#), which continued [funding shortfalls](#) could also jeopardize in 2026. Sustained interruptions to food and nutrition services in early 2026 will elevate the [risk of Famine](#) in Fangak, according to FEWS NET.

## Background & Methodology

Conditions in Fangak County, Jonglei State, are among the worst in South Sudan. Since 2020, the [Integrated Food Security Phase Classification](#) (IPC) has classified Fangak in IPC Acute Food Insecurity (AFI) Phase-4 (Emergency) in every analysis period. Furthermore, the rate of Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) in Fangak surpassed the Critical (IPC Acute Malnutrition Phase 4) threshold in every IPC analysis between 2020 and 2024.

In 2025, an upsurge of violence and devastating floods isolated households from food and lifesaving humanitarian services. Meanwhile, mass displacement and poor sanitation fuelled a severe cholera outbreak, with an in-facility Case Fatality Rate [exceeding](#) the emergency threshold the World Health Organization attempts to limit outbreaks to.

Between November 19 and December 3, 2025, REACH conducted **218 quantitative household surveys in three payams in Fangak County (Barbuoi, Manajang and Pulita)**. The team also screened 281 children aged 6-59 months for acute malnutrition, using the Mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC) approach. Findings were triangulated with health and nutrition data shared by humanitarian partners. Households and assessment sites were selected purposively. As such, data are non-representative and indicative only of conditions in assessed locations at the time of data collection.

## Conditions in Fangak were alarming at the start of 2025

Conditions in Fangak have long ranked among the most severe in South Sudan. Six consecutive years of catastrophic flooding (2019-2024) regularly [triggered](#) disease outbreaks, [submerged](#) villages, [displaced](#) thousands, [decimated](#) an entire livelihood system, and [drove](#) catastrophic levels of hunger.

The situation at the beginning of 2025 showed little improvement. Over 60,000 people in Fangak were experiencing emergency levels of acute food insecurity (IPC AFI Phase 4), according to [projections](#) made during the October 2024 IPC analysis.

Furthermore, the number of children admitted for acute malnutrition in March 2025 reached a [3-year high](#), more than doubling the rate in March 2024. This was likely driven by poor sanitation and elevated morbidity, including a severe cholera outbreak whose in-facility Case Fatality Rate (CFR) at the end of March (3.1%) [tripled](#) the emergency threshold the World Health Organization attempts to limit outbreaks to.

Conditions in early 2025 were especially concerning among returnees from Sudan, some of whom were experiencing catastrophic levels of hunger (IPC AFI Phase 5) at the end of February, according to an [integrated public health assessment](#) conducted in Old Fangak.

## Violence early in 2025 displaced thousands of people

2025 was the most violent year in Fangak since the end of the civil war (2013-2018). The number of incidents in the first eight months of 2025 outstripped that in the previous seven years combined (2018-2024), according to data shared by one conflict monitor.

On May 3, 2025, airstrikes in Old Fangak [killed](#) at least seven people and [damaged](#) a hospital managed by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) – an attack the UN Commission on Human Rights [said](#) may constitute a war crime.

A bombing campaign soon targeted multiple locations in Fangak. The violence, which included several [armed clashes](#), centred on Phom Payam in the northeast. The main population centre there, New Fangak, was [reportedly](#) “burned to the ground” in May.

The violence displaced at least [38,000 people](#) within Fangak in May, according to local authorities. Another [4,000](#) fled south to neighbouring Ayod County. Many of the displaced relocated to remote islands where the availability of food and shelter was [extremely limited](#).

The violence also disrupted humanitarian services, a [lifeline](#) in Fangak. Airstrikes forced the World Food Programme to [suspend](#) food distributions between April and July. Similarly, the attack on Old Fangak on May 3 forced MSF to [shutter](#) the hospital, the only facility providing basic and emergency medical treatment to 110,000 people.

## Another season of extreme flooding followed the violence

The violence de-escalated through July. However, heavy rainfall and major waterways’ limited absorptive capacity soon unleashed a seventh consecutive year of catastrophic flooding on Fangak, compounding the crisis. Flood extent in Fangak more than doubled between August and September 2025, according to satellite imaging. [Flood mapping](#) revealed widespread inundation at the end of September, when waters breached dykes in Barbuoi, Manajang and Old Fangak payams and forced an estimated 40,000 people from their homes. This added to the tens of thousands already displaced in Mareang, Paguir and Toch, where most bomas were underwater.<sup>1</sup>

By October 17, 2025, flooding had displaced [89,000 people](#) in Fangak: the highest number of flood-induced displacements of any county, and approximately one-quarter of all flood-related displacements in South Sudan in 2025.

## Flooding and violence fuelled one of the most severe food crises in the country

In October 2025, when the full impact of the flooding and violence materialised, the [IPC](#) estimated four of every five people in Fangak – 182,000 people – were experiencing life-threatening hunger (IPC AFI Phase 3 *or worse*). This was the highest prevalence of severe acute food insecurity in the country, alongside that in Nasir. The IPC also estimated 11,000 people in Fangak (5% of the population) were experiencing catastrophic food insecurity (IPC AFI Phase 5) in October.

### 132,000

people in Fangak were experiencing life-threatening food insecurity at the beginning of 2025

### 5,369

children in Fangak were acutely malnourished in March 2025, over twice the number in March 2024

### 3.1%

The cholera Case Fatality Rate (CFR) in March 2025 more than tripled the WHO emergency threshold (1%)

### 89,000

people were displaced by flooding in Fangak between August and October 2025, over one-in-three people

<sup>1</sup> Interagency Rapid Needs Assessment (IRNA) Report on Flood-Affected and Displaced Populations in Paguir, Toch, Mareang, Pulita, Barbuoi and Manajang, Fangak County. 20-29 September.

**11,000**

people in Fangak were projected to face an extreme lack of food, death and destitution until July 2026

**1,983**

children in Fangak were severely malnourished in November 2025, over four times the rate in October

**2x**

The number of cases of Severe Acute Malnutrition recorded at three mobile nutrition sites doubled between October and November 2025

**61%**

of children under five in assessed households were sick in the fortnight prior to data collection

This marked the end of a 2-year period of relative “improvement” in Fangak (September 2023 to September 2025), during which acute food insecurity remained alarmingly high but IPC Phase 5 was not reported and overall severity declined compared with the period between 2022 and 2023. IPC Phase 5 is characterised by “[an extreme lack of food](#)” as well as “death, destitution and extremely critical acute malnutrition levels”.

## An extreme health crisis was still ongoing in November

In its October-November 2025 analysis, the Needs Analysis Working Group – the primary intersectoral mechanism for monitoring needs in South Sudan – assigned Fangak the highest needs severity score of any county since at least 2023, affirming that extreme humanitarian needs were widespread.

Data collected by REACH and other humanitarian partners in November further underscored an extreme public health crisis in Fangak, including alarming acute malnutrition rates, elevated morbidity levels, and widespread severe acute food insecurity.

## Mass displacement was ongoing and set to continue

By end-November, Fangak was home to over one in ten people displaced [nationwide](#) in 2025, according to UN OCHA.

REACH data collected in November confirmed that widespread and mostly flood-induced displacement was ongoing: 39% of assessed households identified as displaced at the time of data collection in November. And the large majority of these (73%) reported flooding was the main reason for their displacement.

At the time of data collection, flood water had corralled many of the displaced onto congested land with extremely inadequate shelter. Conditions were especially concerning in Kuernyang, the headquarters of Barbuoi payam, which was reduced to a network of islands housing hundreds of conflict-affected and exceptionally vulnerable people recently displaced from New Fangak town.

REACH data collected in November also indicated that widespread displacement was set to continue. The vast majority of displaced households (89%) reported they would not relocate or return until the beginning of 2026, at the earliest.

## Alarming rates of acute malnutrition were reported in November

Available data revealed alarming acute malnutrition rates in November 2025 in much of Fangak County:

- Non-representative mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC) screening in six locations in three payams in November 2025 (n=281) revealed a proxy GAM rate that exceeded the ‘extremely critical’ threshold consistent with IPC Acute Malnutrition (AMN) Phase-5, by MUAC.
- The number of new admissions for Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) in November (1,983) was the highest monthly total on record, according to the [Nutrition Cluster](#). The SAM admission rate in November 2025 was over four times the rate in October (441), and almost three times that in November 2024 (719).
- The number of recorded SAM cases at six mobile nutrition sites in November (240) increased by 38% from October. Results were especially concerning in Kuerbuay, Kuernyang and Wunkok, where the number of recorded SAM cases doubled between October and November 2025.
- At all but one of the twenty-six nutrition sites in Fangak, non-representative screening (by MUAC and Weight-for-height) conducted in November (n=13,118) revealed alarming proxy malnutrition rates, some exceeding 30%.

## Elevated morbidity was likely a proximate driver of acute malnutrition

Survey data collected in November revealed widespread morbidity in multiple locations in Fangak, especially among children. In assessed households, REACH asked about the health status of 518 children under-5 in the fortnight prior to data collection:

- Almost two-thirds (61%) of these children were sick in the two weeks prior to data collection.
- Among all individuals in assessed households who were reportedly sick in the two weeks prior to data collection, the most commonly reported symptoms included fever (68%), acute watery diarrhoea and pneumonia (both 18%).

**87%**

of households assessed in November reported consuming water from open or unprotected sources

**73%**

of households assessed in November reported defecating in open spaces

**99%**

of households assessed in November were experiencing life-threatening hunger, according to the Household Hunger Scale (HHS)

**38%**

of households assessed in November exhibited a "Poor" Food Consumption Score, indicative of poor quality diets lacking in nutrition foods

Health facility-level data also indicated an elevated prevalence of communicable diseases in November, mainly malaria, acute respiratory infections and acute watery diarrhoea:

- The number of confirmed cases of malaria in Fangak increased by 44% between October (4,713) and November (6,784).
- Consultations for acute respiratory infections in November (4,514) increased by 55% from October (2,908), and were the highest number for any November since at least 2020.
- Consultations for acute watery diarrhoea in November (1,707) increased by 55% from October, and were also the highest number for any November since at least 2020.

### Poor sanitation likely also contributed to alarming acute malnutrition levels

The absence or destruction of boreholes and latrines in Fangak – something that long [preceded](#) the latest round of violence and flooding – continued to drive extremely poor sanitation in much of Fangak County:

- The large majority of households assessed by REACH in November (87%) reported consuming water from open or unprotected sources, mainly neighbouring flood water.
- Almost three-quarters of assessed households reported defecating in open spaces (73%), including in nearby flood water, in the absence of accessible or functional latrines.

The likelihood that many households were defecating in and consuming the same water sources underscored a heightened risk of contaminated water sources and, in turn, elevated disease prevalence.

### Food distributions were mitigating the prevalence of catastrophic hunger

The IPC analysis (October 2025) projected 80% of the population in Fangak would continue to experience life-threatening food insecurity (IPC AFI Phase-3 *or worse*) between November 2025 and July 2026, including 11,000 in IPC AFI Phase-5 (Catastrophe).

REACH data collected in November revealed widespread severe acute food insecurity, largely corroborating the latest IPC analysis:

- Almost every assessed household (99%) exhibited levels of hunger indicative of IPC AFI Phase-3 *or worse* in the month prior to data collection, according to the Household Hunger Scale (HHS).
- More than one-third of households (38%) exhibited a "poor" Food Consumption Score (FCS) in the week prior to data collection, indicative of poor quality diets lacking in nutritious food sources, including beans, meat and vegetables.

Almost every household (96%) reported that wild foods – specifically water lilies, which households pursued arduous journeys to collect from the flood water and grind into an edible paste – were their primary or secondary food source in the week prior to data collection. Previous [studies](#) have documented the limited nutritional value of water lilies, which were likened to "eating mud".

Despite this, REACH data collected in November suggested humanitarian food distributions were mitigating the prevalence of catastrophic hunger:

- Almost half (46%) of assessed households reported receiving humanitarian assistance in the three months prior to data collection. The majority of these households (93%) accessed general food distribution.
- The percentage of households reporting 'severe' and 'very severe' levels of hunger in November – according to the HHS indicator – was small (5%).

However, the following suggest that food distributions are a fragile lifeline that may struggle to mitigate an increased prevalence of severe acute food insecurity in 2026:

- The sheer remoteness of Fangak – including [dense](#) vegetation – forces the World Food Programme to use [costly](#) airdrops, which funding [shortfalls](#) could jeopardize in 2026. The organisation will face significant obstacles to distributing food in remote parts of Manajang and Pulita payams, in particular, many of which are accessible only via canoe.
- Simmering tensions in northern Jonglei, including recent [evacuation orders](#), [flight suspensions](#) and [armed violence](#), are [expected](#) to prevent meaningful improvements in food security and continue to disrupt food distributions in the region, including Fangak, in 2026.

## Conclusion

Available information suggest extreme humanitarian needs were widespread in Fangak in November 2025, including alarming acute malnutrition rates, elevated morbidity levels and severe acute food insecurity.

A scale-up in humanitarian services in August – including humanitarian food distributions and emergency nutrition services – likely mitigated a continued deterioration at the end of 2025. However, this is a fragile lifeline in

2026 amidst widespread flood water, immense logistical obstacles, defunding, and a recent escalation of violence in counties directly nearby (Nyiröl) and neighbouring (Ayod) Fangak.

Were conflict to escalate and impact Fangak in 2026, further isolating households from food and lifesaving humanitarian services, the number of households experiencing catastrophic food insecurity would [increase](#), and Famine would become an increasingly [probable scenario](#).

Figure 1: Assessment areas visited by REACH between November 19 and December 3, 2025

