

# Situation Overview: Unity State, South Sudan

January 2017

**REACH** Informing  
more effective  
humanitarian action

## Introduction

Displacement trends, population needs and humanitarian access have all been negatively affected by the insecurity resulting from the ongoing fighting in Unity State since July. However, in late December and throughout January, the security situation improved substantially in large parts of the state, as has physical access thanks to ongoing improvements in road conditions. This has allowed humanitarian actors to return to previous catchment areas outside formal displacement sites, and the resultant upscale in humanitarian services appears to have contributed to marked improvements in population trends and access to most services. However, much of the population remains vulnerable and needs continue to be pronounced.

To inform the response of humanitarians working outside of formal settlement sites, REACH is conducting an assessment of 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 9 and 27 January 2017, REACH interviewed 868 Key Informants (KIs) from 378 settlements in 7 of the 9 counties in Unity State. Three hundred and thirty-five KIs were interviewed in the Bentiu Protection of Civilians site (Bentiu PoC), 191 in Nyal, and

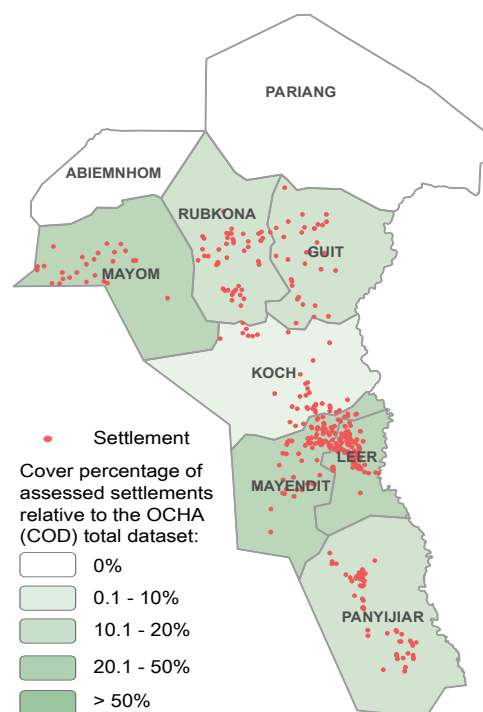
342 in Juba PoCs 1 and 3. Findings have been triangulated using focus group discussions (FGDs), secondary data, port monitoring data collected by REACH in Nyal, and previous REACH assessments of hard-to-reach areas of Unity State.

Ninety-eight per cent of the respondents interviewed had arrived in their displacement location in December or January, and therefore had up-to-date information about the village from which they had been displaced, in order to ensure an accurate understanding of current displacement and population dynamics.

This Situation Overview provides an update to key findings from the December Situation Overview for Unity State. The first section analyses displacement trends in Unity State in January, and 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 population of Bentiu PoC appears to have stabilised since the large influx of new arrivals following an upsurge in fighting in November 2016. At the end of January, the population was 120,011, and throughout the month, the number of entries (1,780), mostly from conflict-



**Map 1: REACH assessment coverage of Unity State, January 2017**

affected Leer, Mayendit and Koch Counties, have largely matched the number of exits (2,187), primarily to stable Rubkona and Guit Counties.<sup>1</sup>

However, it is highly likely that recorded movement to formal displacement sites does not adequately reflect the extent of ongoing displacement in Unity State. The road that traverses Southern Unity State to Bentiu PoC is considered highly risky, with numerous

incidents of looting and physical attacks by armed groups reported by FGD participants in January. Such risks discourage those who are physically unable to travel quickly (due to age, disability or having many small children) from attempting to reach the PoC. For example, nearly 2,000 IDPs have sought refuge in the recently established Temporary Protection Area next to the UNMISS Temporary Operating Base in Leer, and there are currently an estimated 10,000 IDPs hiding in the swamps and islands around Thornyor and Adok in Leer County.<sup>2</sup>

The actual or planned delivery of food aid in Leer and Mayendit Counties in January has drawn many IDPs away from Nyal Town, which is traditionally a common destination for IDPs fleeing conflict in Southern Unity State. REACH recorded 2,380 new arrivals compared to 2,409 departures from Nyal ports in January 2017, marking the first deficit in arrivals since the port monitoring exercise began in November 2016.<sup>3</sup>

For more information about displacement trends in Unity State, please refer to the December Situation Overview.<sup>4</sup>

1 IOM, Site Profile: Bentiu PoC, 1-15 and 16-31 January 2017.

2 South Sudan Protection Cluster, "Protection Trends South Sudan October-December 2016", February 2017.

3 REACH, Nyal Port Monitoring Factsheet, January 2017.

4 REACH, Situation Overview: Unity State, December 2016.

## METHODOLOGY

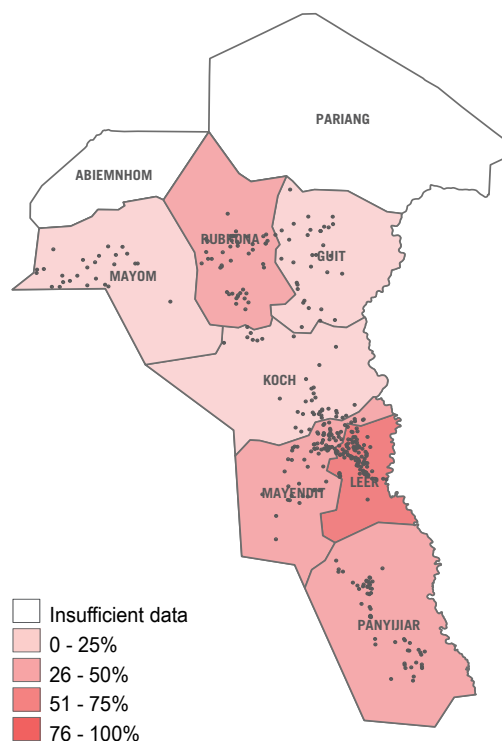
To provide an overview of the situation in largely inaccessible areas of Unity State, REACH uses primary data provided by key informants who have recently arrived, or receive regular information, from their pre-displacement location or “Area of Knowledge”.

Information for this report was collected from key informants in the Bentiu Protection of Civilians (PoC) site and Nyal in Unity State, and Juba PoCs 1 and 3, throughout January 2017.

The first phase of the assessment methodology comprised a participatory mapping exercise to map the relevant settlements in Unity State. 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. Descriptive statistics and geospatial analysis were then used to analyse the data.

It must be noted that this represents a **change in methodology as of December 2016**, as REACH previously analysed data at the community level. This means that **this report is not directly comparable with Situation Overviews from before December 2016**.



**Map 2: % of settlements reporting an IDP presence, January 2017**

## Situation in Assessed Communities

### Demographic profile

#### Remaining population in assessed villages

Although displacement from local communities remains pronounced, improvements were observed across all indicators from December to January. For example, 16% of settlements assessed in December reported that the entire

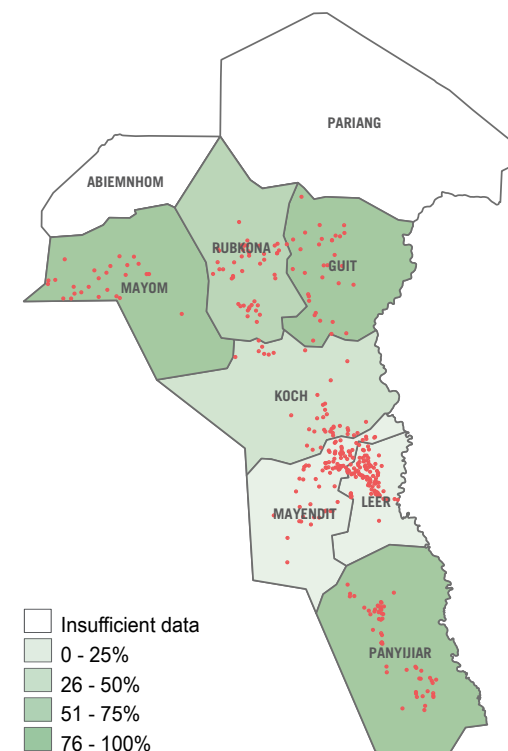
population had left the area, but, in a potentially positive development, only 10% of assessed settlements reported the same in January (all in the conflict-affected counties of Koch, Leer and Mayendit). Similarly, of the settlements assessed in December that reported at least some population remained in the village, 62% reported a population decrease of 50% or more, whereas only 51% reported the same in January.

Furthermore, 73% of settlements with some population remaining reported that most of the local community continues to live in their normal residences, which also represents a positive trend compared to December (63%). Conversely, 17% of assessed settlements, primarily in conflict-affected Leer and Mayendit Counties, reported that most of the local community is currently living in the bush, and this is again an improvement compared to December (27%).

#### IDP population in assessed villages

Thirty-six per cent of assessed settlements reported that they were hosting IDPs in January, with nearly half of these (48%) reportedly arriving following the upsurge in violence in November. This suggests that despite apparent improvements in population and displacement dynamics, high levels of displacement remain an ongoing trend in Unity State.

Most of the settlements reporting an IDP presence were located in southern Unity State, where widespread destruction and continuing insecurity on the mainland have led most people



**Map 3: % of settlements reporting adequate access to food, January 2017**

to seek shelter deep in forests or on islands in the Sudd, the large swamp that covers much of eastern and southern Unity State.

### Food security

**Forty-seven per cent of assessed settlements reported that they had adequate access to food in January.** Although extremely low, this represents a marked improvement over December, when 38% reported the same. This is likely chiefly attributable to a large ongoing

increase in humanitarian access and services outside formal displacement sites, including in Leer County, where general food distributions were conducted in December for the first time since the July crisis.

However, the ongoing violence continues to be the reported most important obstacle to food security for the majority of settlements that are unable to access adequate amounts of food. Half of those settlements reported that it is too unsafe to access their land for cultivation or harvest, and a further 16% reported that their crops had been destroyed by fighting.

As a result, foraging was the most commonly reported source of food (36% of assessed settlements, which is comparable with December), with cultivation not far behind at 34% (representing an increase compared to the 23% of assessed settlements who reported this in December). FGD participants reported a heavy reliance on water lilies and fish for survival, which become harder to find from January onwards as most water sources dry up.

It is widely predicted that food security conditions in Unity State and other parts of the country will deteriorate in early 2017, as the February-May period is traditionally the lean season in South Sudan. FEWS NET and FAO have warned that the impact of the conflict, restricted livelihoods, depleted household food stocks, hyperinflation and market failures will contribute to an elevated risk of famine in many parts of the country in the coming months, and particularly in conflict-affected communities

such as those in Central Unity.<sup>5</sup> Targeted humanitarian support is therefore urgently required, and currently being upscaled, in order to address an imminent exacerbation of already high levels of food insecurity in these parts of Unity State.

## Livelihoods

Seventy-five per cent of assessed settlements reported that land was available for cultivation in January, representing an increase compared to December, when 61% of assessed settlements reported the same. However, thousands of IDPs from Unity State have fled fighting between communities over land since July<sup>6</sup>, and many FGD participants in Nyal have reported that they are unable to return to their land because it had been occupied by members of armed groups.

Other livelihoods trends observed in January are comparable with those reported in the November Situation Overview, including low access to agricultural inputs, extremely few casual job opportunities, and a relatively high incidence of aggressive cattle raiding.<sup>7</sup>

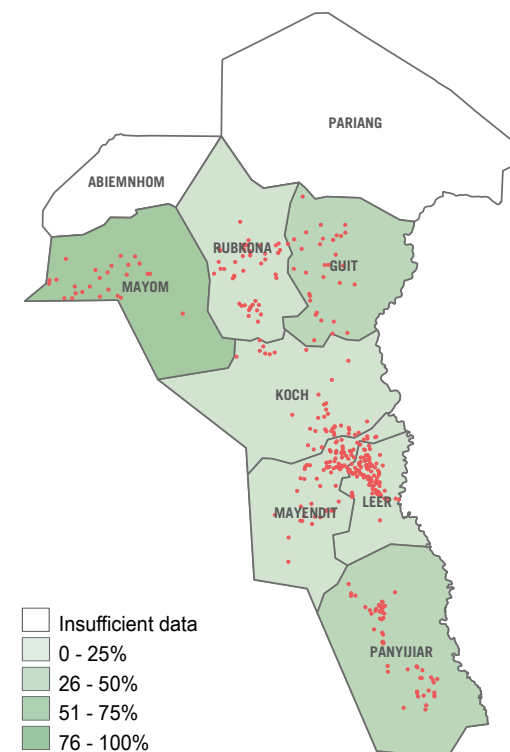
## Health

**Although still very low, access to health services in Unity State appears to be continuing to improve**, with 56% reporting no access in January compared to 66% in December, itself an improvement on previous months. At the time of writing, comprehensive data on functioning health services in Unity State was not available for verification.

After conflict (see protection section below), malaria was reportedly the most common cause of death in Unity State in January, as reported by 30% of assessed settlements, of which an average of 7 malaria-related deaths was reported per settlement within the past month. Prior to December 2016, REACH asked respondents about the most important “health concerns” in their community rather than causes of death, and in recent months malaria was overwhelmingly reported as the primary concern (e.g. 97% of assessed communities in October<sup>8</sup>). The very different findings in January compared to previous months are likely partly attributable to the change in questioning, and partly to the fact that mosquito populations decrease substantially in the dry season as water sources dry up.

In a possible reflection of the disproportionate impact of the current cholera outbreak on Unity State, cholera was the third most reported primary cause of death, as reported by 12% of assessed settlements, of which an average of 7 cholera-related deaths within the previous month were reported per settlement. However, it must be noted that these responses reflect KI perceptions only, as medical confirmation that cholera was the actual cause of death is likely impossible in most of these cases.

In January, active transmission of cholera in South Sudan was occurring primarily in Unity State (in Benti Town, Benti PoC and Leer County), and the majority of new cases of cholera across the country in the last quarter of 2016 were reported in Benti.<sup>9</sup> This is largely



**Map 4: % of settlements reporting access to health services, January 2017**

attributable to case spillover from new arrivals from Leer, Mayendit and Panyijar Counties, where responding to the outbreak has been particularly challenging due to restricted humanitarian access, especially in December when aid workers were forced to relocate from Nyal and Ganyiel.<sup>10</sup> Staff were again forced to relocate in mid-January, which contributed to the outbreak of cholera in Nyal Town, where it had previously been contained.

For more background information about the

5 FAO, “South Sudan: Escalating food crisis in 2017”, November 2016; FAO, “South Sudan Situation Report”, 31 January 2017; FEWS NET, “Food Security Outlook Update: Extreme levels of food insecurity expected across South Sudan in 2017”, December 2016.

6 South Sudan Protection Cluster, “Protection Trends South Sudan: April-September 2016”, November 2016.

7 REACH, Situation Overview: Unity State, November 2016.

8 REACH, Situation Overview: Unity State, October 2016.

9 OCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin: South Sudan, Issue 1, January 2017.

10 WHO, Cholera Brief, 9 February 2017.

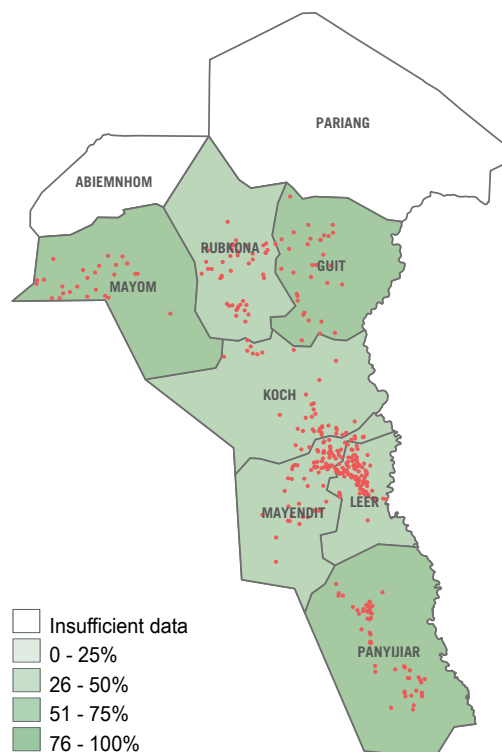


ongoing outbreak of cholera in Unity State, please refer to the October Situation Overview.<sup>11</sup>

## Shelter

**Shelter conditions also appear to be continuing to improve for local communities compared to previous months.** For the first time since the outbreak of fighting in July, traditional, permanent tukuls (47%) slightly outnumbered temporary rakoobas (44%) as the most commonly reported shelter type in December. Although this may be partly attributable to the change in REACH methodology that was first implemented in December, the shift towards tukuls was already a clear ongoing trend in previous months. In January, the reported proportion of tukuls increased even further to 56%, compared to 37% of rakoobas. The proportion of assessed settlements reporting that most local community members are not living in shelters has also decreased slightly, from 4% in December to only 2% in January.

Shelter conditions have also reportedly improved for IDPs. Although the most commonly reported shelter type for IDPs remained the rakooba (as reported by 40% of assessed settlements with IDPs), only 39% reported that at least 50% of IDPs were sharing shelters with the host community, compared to 48% in December. This may be a consequence and reflection of the improved displacement trends described above.



**Map 5: % of settlements reporting tukuls as the primary shelter type for the local community, January 2017**

## Water and Sanitation

Sixty-four per cent of assessed settlements reported access to safe drinking water (usually a borehole), representing an increase compared to December (52%). However, of these, only 42% reported that the safe water could be accessed, collected and brought home in less than 30 minutes, compared to 60% in December. These numbers, along with FGDs conducted with new arrivals, suggest that the majority of the population of Unity State

likely obtains their drinking water from unsafe sources such as rivers and swamps. For example, IDPs and local community on islands in northern Panyijar County were observed defecating directly into the swamp, which also served as their primary drinking water source.

Latrine use remains extremely low in Unity State, with only 7% of assessed settlements reporting that at least half of the population uses them.

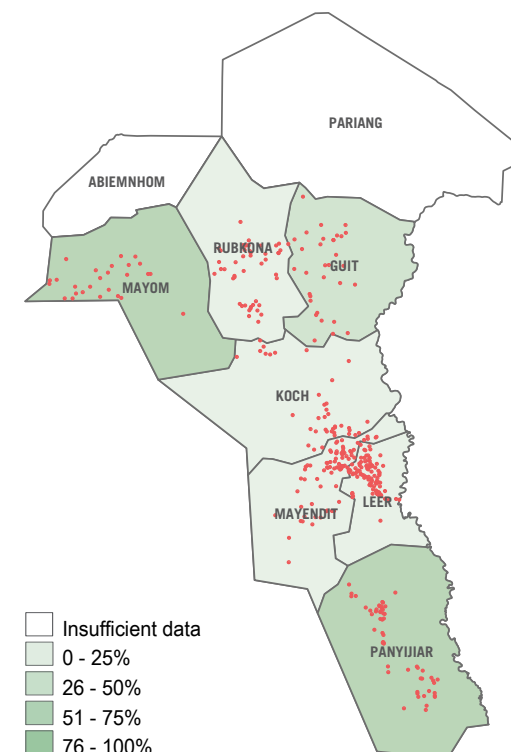
For more information about the general WASH context in Unity State, please refer to the October Situation Overview.<sup>12</sup>

## Education

**Only 24% of assessed communities reported access to education services in January,** which represents a decrease compared to December (36%).

Overall, access to education remains extremely low, and appears to vary widely by county. Assessed settlements in Mayom County reported the highest levels of access to education at 64% (in December it was Panyijar County with 81%), which is likely attributable to increased humanitarian services there through education actors such as INTERSOS. Leer County, which has the lowest access to education, reported even less access than in December (from 10% to 6%).

Nearly half of assessed settlements in Leer County reporting no access cited the destruction of schools by conflict as the most important reason. Most schools that do exist



**Map 6: % of settlements reporting access to education, January 2017**

in conflict-affected areas are often held under trees in remote displacement sites, and lack adequate school supplies or qualified teachers.

Reported attendance rates are comparable to those described in the December Situation Overview, with fewer girls reportedly attending school than boys.

## Protection

In what is likely a clear indication of the current protection situation in Unity State, and

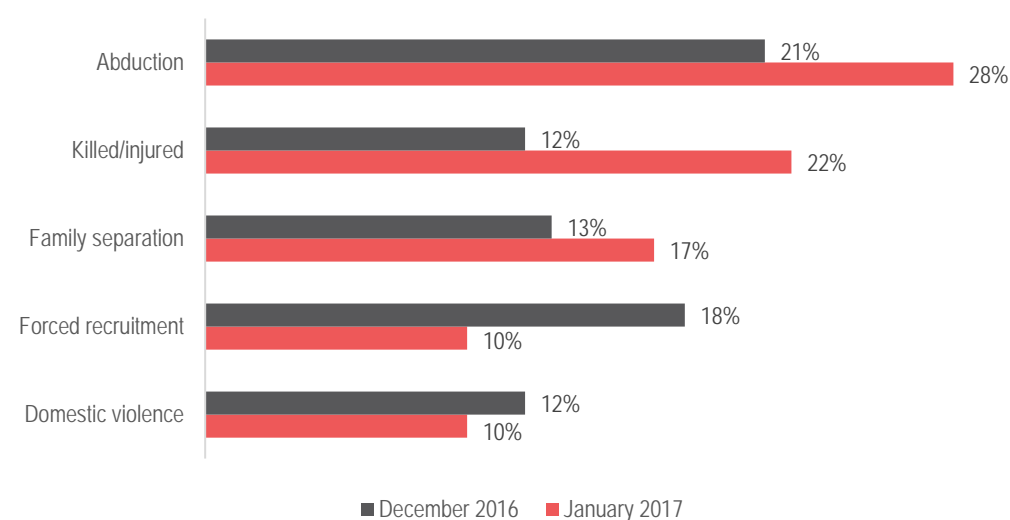
11 REACH, Situation Overview: Unity State, October 2016.

12 REACH, Situation Overview: Unity State, October 2016.

despite a relative stabilisation of the security situation in large parts of the state compared to November and early December, **conflict was reported to be the biggest cause of death by 49% of assessed settlements in January**, of which an average of 17 conflict-related deaths was reported per settlement within the past month. The protection context in Unity State has changed in highly concerning ways since the month of July, with an increase in 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, this trend has continued into January, with the burning of homes, looting, rape and targeted killings all reportedly triggering new displacement to formal displacement sites.

Protection trends for men and women are comparable to those reported in the November Situation Overview, with killing or injury being the primary concern for men and sexual violence being the most important concern for women.<sup>13</sup> Forced recruitment continues to be a clear post-July Crisis trend with regards to protection concerns for men, as reported by 19% of assessed settlements in January.

Abduction remained the most commonly reported protection concern for children in January. However, killing/injury and family separation reportedly increased in importance, while forced recruitment appeared to decrease substantially as an important concern. Nearly half (48%) of the assessed settlements in Panyijiar reported killing or injury as the most



**Figure 1: Top 5 most reported protection concerns for children, as reported by assessed settlements**

important protection concern for children (compared to less than 20% reported by other counties), which may be attributable to aggressive cattle raiding that occurred around Ganyiel from late December through early January.

## Conclusion

Displacement trends, population needs and access to services in Unity State appear to have improved in January, likely thanks to a relative improvement in the security situation in parts of the state, and improved humanitarian access to locations outside formal displacement sites.

Nevertheless, overall access to services in Unity State is still low, and protection findings suggest that the situation remains volatile and could deteriorate again in the future. Population

needs and humanitarian access to hard-to-reach areas of Unity State are therefore likely to continue to be highly dependent on and affected by the volatile context.

Furthermore, it is expected that the onset of the lean season will exacerbate current food insecurity and malnutrition rates. Humanitarian actors are now rapidly upscaling their services beyond formal displacement sites, but the extent to which this increased effort can and will be sustained remains to be determined. **Food security is therefore currently the priority humanitarian need in Unity State, particularly in the conflict-affected counties of Leer, Mayendit and Koch.**

Despite apparent improvements in both sectors, WASH and health needs also represent major concerns. Based on FGDs, direct observations

and the large proportion of settlements reporting either no access or distant access to boreholes, it is highly likely that the vast majority of assessed populations in Unity State are obtaining their water from unsafe sources, and open defecation remains a widespread practice. Similarly, the majority of assessed settlements continue to report a lack of access to health services, which is of particular concern in light of the ongoing cholera outbreak.

Finally, access to education remains extremely low in conflict-affected areas of Unity State, and particularly so in Leer County.

A sustained, large-scale humanitarian effort will be required to address these needs, and most importantly to stem and reverse the impact of long-term food insecurity on conflict-affected populations.

### 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.

For more information, you can write to our in-country office: [southsudan@reach-initiative.org](mailto:southsudan@reach-initiative.org) or to our global office: [geneva@reach-initiative.org](mailto:geneva@reach-initiative.org).

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<sup>13</sup> REACH, Situation Overview: Unity State, November 2016.