

Situation Overview: Western Bahr el Ghazal, South Sudan

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REACH An initiative of
IMPACT Initiatives
ACTED and UNOSAT

Introduction

After conflict erupted across the state of Western Bahr el Ghazal (WBeG) in June 2016 and April 2017 no new large scale episodes of violence were reported. As of September however, insecurity persisted in many parts of the state, limiting humanitarian operations and putting livelihoods of local communities at risk.

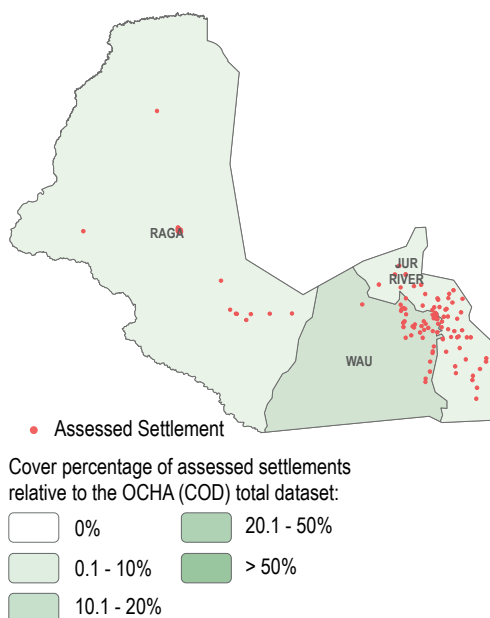
To inform humanitarian actors working outside formal settlement sites, REACH has been conducting an assessment of hard-to-reach areas in WBeG since April 2017. This settlement data is collected across the counties of Raga, Wau and Jur River in WBeG on a monthly basis. Between the 7 and 22 September 2017, REACH interviewed 255 Key Informants (KIs) with knowledge of humanitarian needs in 128 settlements in the three counties of WBeG.

In order to ensure an up to date understanding of current displacement trends and humanitarian conditions in settlements from which displacement took place, new arrivals to camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), representing 19% of KIs, were specifically targeted. The remainder of the interviewed KIs (81%) were not newly arrived IDPs but reported having been in the settlement or having had regular contact with someone from the settlement within the last month.

Furthermore, eight focus group discussions (FGDs) and participatory mapping exercises were conducted throughout September, mostly with newly arrived KIs. Findings were then triangulated with secondary data collected by humanitarian partners.

The first section of this report analyses displacement trends in September and the second section evaluates population dynamics and access to food and other basic humanitarian services for IDPs and local populations in the assessed settlements.

Map 1: REACH assessment coverage of Western Bahr el Ghazal, September 2017



Population Movement and Displacement

Minimal displacement was recorded in WBeG between August and September 2017. Seventy-one percent (71%) of assessed settlements in September indicated that at least half the population had left. This remained unchanged from August, indicating a continuation of similar displacement dynamics. The proportion of settlements reporting the presence of IDPs was similarly unchanged; 20% reported the presence of IDPs in September compared to 17% in August.

For the newly arrived IDPs, the most often reported push factor for leaving their previous settlements was insecurity, cited by 50% of the interviewed new arrivals, while lack of food was reported as the primary reason by 33% of new arrivals. As a pull factor for coming to the Wau Protection of Civilians (PoC) site and the Collective Centres (CCs), where all newly arrived IDPs in September were interviewed, 65% mentioned security and only 12% food, a proportion that decreased from 27% in August. This suggests that food assistance had become less attractive as a pull factor compared to previous months, possibly due to a greater availability of food outside the IDP camps likely due to harvests (see Food Security and Livelihoods sections for more details).

Figure 1: Reported primary reason why newly arrived IDPs left their previous location in WBeG, September 2017

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----|
| 1. Insecurity | 50% |
| 2. Lack of food | 33% |
| 3. Lack of health services | 12% |



Figure 2: Reported primary reason why newly arrived IDPs came to their current location in WBeG, September 2017

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----|
| 1. Security | 65% |
| 2. Lack of health services | 21% |
| 3. Access to food | 12% |



Situation in Assessed Settlements

Demographic profile

Remaining population in assessed settlements

In line with the lack of new displacements described in the previous section, most dynamics remained the same in September, when 67% of assessed settlements reported that the largest proportion of the local community was living in their own homes, a similar proportion to the 60% in August. Wau County reported the highest proportion of assessed settlements (20%) where the majority of the local community was hiding

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 their pre-displacement location or “Area of Knowledge” (AoK).

Information for this situation overview was collected from key informants in the Wau Protection of Civilians Area Adjacent (PoCAA) site and in the Collective Centres (CCs) of Hai Masna, Cathedral, Lokoloko in Wau town, throughout September 2017.

The first phase of the assessment methodology comprised a participatory mapping exercise to map displacement routes of IDPs 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. Descriptive statistics and geospatial analysis were then used to analyse the data.

in the bushes rather than within the village. A higher proportion of local community hiding in the bushes is indicative of greater levels of perceived insecurity in Wau County, due to which populations try to avoid villages which are easily accessible by armed actors.

Of the assessed settlements in September, 59% reported that the local community was composed by more women than men or women only, suggesting that generally, assuming that most settlements are of a similar size, the female population in WBeG is possibly larger than the male population. According to FGD participants, this is because men had traditionally been more exposed to risks related to conflict and therefore have a higher mortality rate.

IDP population in assessed settlements

In 57% of assessed settlements that reported the presence of IDPs, it was reported that the local communities and the IDPs were sharing the same shelters. The rest of the IDPs were staying in spontaneous settlements. In Wau County, however, 20% of the assessed settlements reported that IDPs were staying in the bushes outside the assessed settlements. This is the same proportion as settlements reporting that the local community was staying in the bushes, indicating that high levels of perceived insecurity are forcing IDPs and local communities to hide outside the settlements in Wau County. The main area where people were forced to hide in the bushes is western Bagarri, southwest of Wau Town, where persisting insecurity has led to high levels of food insecurity and wide destruction of settlements.¹

Protection

In the absence of major episodes of violence since April 2017, it can be said that the general security situation across WBeG has gradually stabilised. However, in many remote areas of Wau and Raga Counties, perceived insecurity still persisted and remained the same as compared to previous months.

For women, being killed or injured by perpetrators from outside the community was reported as the primary safety concern in 30% of assessed settlements and sexual violence in 29% of assessed settlements (similar to August, where 25% and 27% reported the same, respectively). For men, the risk of being killed or injured by perpetrators from outside the community was reported as the primary risk in 64% of assessed settlements in September, a slight increase compared to 51% in August, indicating that even though no major security incidents were reported in September, perceived insecurity continued to persist in some areas.

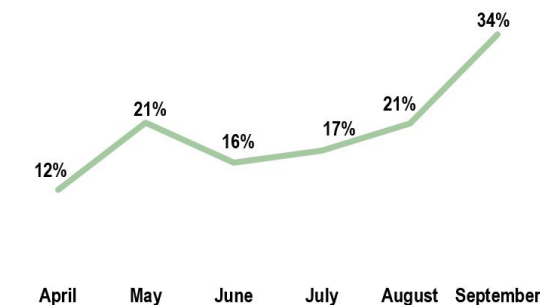
The relationship between host community and IDPs was reported as good or very good in all the assessed settlements in September, suggesting a lower risk of acts of violence between people within the same settlement, indicating security threats are perceived as perpetrated by individuals outside of settlements’ immediate community.

Food security

Thirty four percent (34%) of assessed settlements in WBeG reported adequate access to food in September. This proportion marks the first improvement since REACH started data

collection in April and a 13-percentage point increase from August (see Figure 3). While reported adequate access to food increased across the state, the extent of it differed considerably between the three counties.

Figure 3: Proportions of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food in WBeG from April to September



Jur River County experienced the highest increase in reported adequate access to food. In September, 62% of assessed settlements reported to have adequate access to food, which represents a considerable increase from 36% in August and marks the highest proportion of adequate access to food ever reported to REACH in WBeG. This sudden increase is attributable to the beginning of the harvest season in September and suggests that the populations in Jur River County were able to plant during cultivation season because of a predominantly secure environment.

In Wau County, reported adequate access to food also increased. Although still extremely low, 17% of assessed settlements in September reported adequate access to food, an increase from the 4% in August. This likely indicates

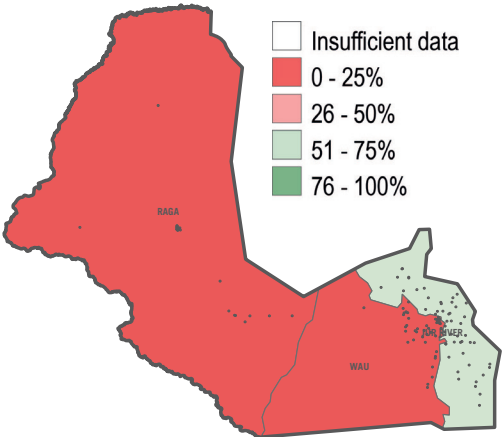
¹ REACH Bagarri Displacement and Food Security and Livelihoods Brief Sept. 2017.

that communities in some of the settlements in Wau County were able to plant in the cultivation season and harvest in September. Adequate access to food is also likely to have temporarily increased because of a brief window of humanitarian access allowing for one-off distributions outside of Wau town.² However, the reported proportions suggest that the majority of settlements in Wau County were not able to cultivate or receive sustained humanitarian assistance, resulting in limited adequate access to food.

In Raga County, reported adequate access to food did not increase in September. Seventeen percent (17%) of assessed settlements reported adequate access to food, which is similar to 23% in August. The lack of increase in access to food during the harvest season may be linked to the inability of a large part of the population to engage in agriculture during the cultivation season due to insecurity and lack of seeds and tools (see Livelihoods section for more details).

Indicative of the positive impact of the cultivation season on adequate access to food in parts of WBeG, the most often reported main food source in September was cultivation, as reported by 36% of assessed settlements. Comparatively, in August, the most often cited main food source was foraging wild foods, as reported by 50% of assessed settlements, which dropped to 33% in September, suggesting a growing reliance on cultivation.

Map 2: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food, Sep 2017



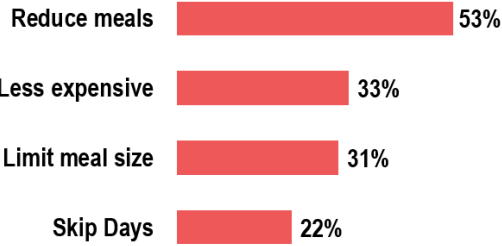
However, in Wau County cultivation was reported as the main food source by only 8% of assessed settlements (2% in August), while foraging wild foods was reported as the main food source by 58% of assessed settlements in September (comparatively higher than the statewide proportion of 33%). Apart from indicating a lower engagement in agriculture, FGD participants in Wau town indicated that the rainy season led to a greater availability of wild foods towards the end of August and September.

In the settlements that reported no adequate access to food, the most often reported primary reason continued to be the destruction of crops during episodes of violence, reported by 51% of assessed settlements in September, same as in August. The destruction of crops had occurred during the months prior to September but

continued to negatively affect access to food. Alongside the destruction of crops, insecurity had been reported as the primary cause for no adequate access to food by 22% of assessed settlements in July and 13% in August, but only by 2% in September, suggesting the day-to-day security situation has improved to a degree across all counties of WBeG.

Whenever no adequate access to food was reported, assessed settlements resorted to a range of unsustainable food consumption coping mechanisms such as reducing meals, buying less expensive foods, and limiting the size of meals in 53%, 33% and 31% of assessed settlements, respectively.

Figure 4: Most often reported food consumption strategies in assessed settlements in WBeG in September 2017



Livelihoods

In WBeG, traditional livelihoods consist of agriculture for sustenance and for cash. An improved perceived security situation and the beginning of the harvest season positively affected some livelihood activities in WBeG in

September. Across WBeG, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting access to land for cultivation increased from 70% in August to 81% in September. However, a closer look at the county level data shows that the increase differed between the regions. In Jur River, 98% of assessed settlements reported access to land for cultivation, a similar percentage to 92% in August. Wau and Raga Counties, both saw an increase in settlements that reportedly had access to land in September. In Wau County, 73% of assessed settlements reported access to land, compared to 61% in August and in Raga County, 62% compared to 46% in August. The increase in the proportion of settlements with access to land is likely attributable to an improved security situation in Raga and parts of Wau County.

In line with the high proportions of access to land, Jur River County reported the highest involvement in agriculture, with 83% of settlements assessed in September reporting farming for sustenance as a livelihood source. However, in the remaining parts of the state, increased access to land did not directly translate into greater engagement in agriculture. In Raga and Wau Counties, only 56% and 43% of assessed settlements in September reported that members of the community were engaging in agriculture for sustenance. According to these proportions, increased access to land did not positively

2 In September 2017, WFP, FAO and UNICEF responded with Nutrition, Food, Seeds, and Tools to 16,000 vulnerable people in Western Bagarri, Wau County.

affect traditional livelihood sources in Wau and Raga Counties. The lack of increase in farming for sustenance in September is due to the seasonality of the agricultural cycle in WBeG. Cultivation usually takes place during the rainy season from April to August. From September onwards, rainfall reduces, communities cease cultivation and start harvesting. Those who did not cultivate during the rainy season and have nothing to harvest have to wait several months until the next cultivation season.³ According to these dynamics, it can be expected that in the coming months, the proportions of settlements where communities reportedly engage in agriculture will remain the same even if access to land, tools and seeds increase.

Better access to markets and potential food surplus due to higher agricultural output are likely to explain why 43% of assessed settlements in Jur River reported that communities were farming for cash in September, when only 7% in Raga and 5% in Wau reported the same.

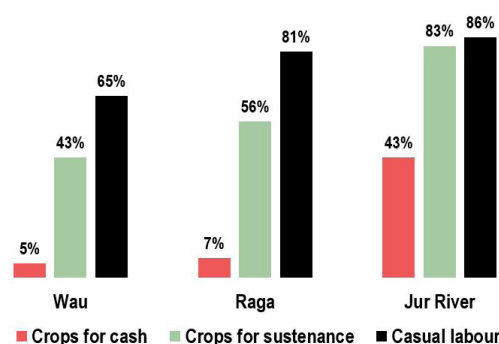
In September, 77% of assessed settlements reporting casual labour as a livelihood source, an increase compared to the 67% in August. The high proportions of casual labour are attributable to the beginning of the harvest season, during which many community members and IDPs work on the fields of other members of the community in exchange for cash or food.⁴

When agricultural or related activities were not possible, communities in assessed settlements reported to resort to a range of livelihood coping

strategies to meet immediate household needs. The most often reported livelihood coping strategies were borrowing food, foraging wild foods and borrowing money, reported by 49%, 46% and 41% of assessed settlements in WBeG in September, respectively.

Gathering wild food was particularly prevalent in Wau County, where 61% of assessed settlements reported that people in the community were gathering wild foods. According to Food Security and Livelihoods (FSL) FGD participants, the gathered wild foods mainly consisted of cassava leaves and roots.

Figure 5: Most often reported livelihood activities in assessed settlements in the three counties of WBeG in September 2017



Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

In September, 85% of assessed settlements reportedly had access to boreholes, which is a higher proportion than the countrywide AoK average of 75%. However, only 76% of these settlements reported that the boreholes were functioning, which is below the countrywide AoK average of 92%, indicating that although

there is high access to boreholes, lack of functionality suggests populations are resorting to collecting water from unimproved sources. In line with this, the proportion of settlements reporting boreholes as the primary source of water also decreased from 76% in July to 65% in August and 54% in September. Although further research and exploration is needed, the decrease of boreholes as the primary water source may be attributable to the dry season and reduced water tables.

The reduction of rainfall in the beginning of the dry season decreased the reported travel distances to improved water sources. In September, 95% of assessed settlements reported to being able to reach the water source, fetch water, and return within maximum one hour walking distance, compared to 79% reporting so in August. According to FGD participants, the travel distance decreased because rains slowed down in September, as compared to August, resulting in slight improvements of the road conditions.

Open defecation continued to be widespread with 59% of assessed settlement reporting that no one in the settlement was using latrines, a percentage which was similar to August, when 60% reported the same. A low use of latrines is related to poor hygiene and may contribute to the rise of waterborne diseases.

Health

Overall, reported access to healthcare has remained unchanged over the months from April to September with approximately 70%-75% of assessed settlements reportedly having

access to healthcare. In August, this proportion dropped to 60% but increased again to 70% in September, indicating an overall similar proportions over time. The primary reported reasons for no healthcare were the absence of facilities and that there were no healthcare workers, both reported by 26% of assessed settlements in September. Insecurity, which was the most often reported primary reason for no access to healthcare in 35% of assessed settlements in August, decreased to only 22% in September. This suggests that negative effects of insecurity on healthcare decreased, possibly due to an improved security situation across the state.

The reported travel distance to healthcare facilities diminished. The proportion of settlements which had access to a healthcare facility in the vicinity of a one-hour walking distance increased from 51% in August to 61% in September. This improvement is likely attributable to improved road conditions due to decreasing rains.

Malaria continued to be the most often reported primary health concern across WBeG as reported by 40% of assessed settlements in September but decreased compared to August, when 62% reported the same. According to FGD participants, this was attributable to fewer mosquitos in September due to reduced rainfall. Malnutrition was reported as a primary health concern by 16% of assessed settlements, indicating that part of the assessed settlements continued to face severe food insecurity. In Wau County, where access to food was reportedly the lowest, as many as 24% of assessed

³ According to Key Informants and members of FSL Cluster in Wau County.

⁴ According to FGD participants interviewed in Deim Zubier, Raga August, 2017.

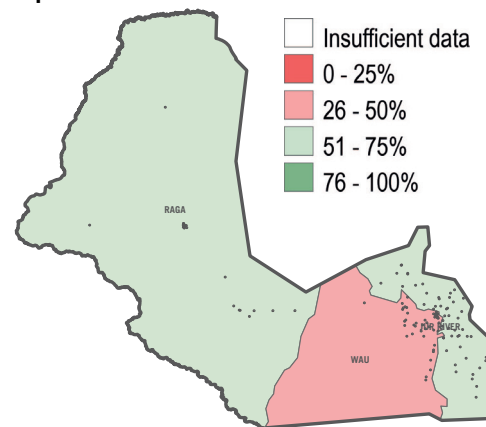
settlements in September reported malnutrition as the primary health concern.

Education

Since April 2017, access to education across WBeG has been on a slight, but consistent, decrease. However, between August and September there has been a slight increase of the proportion of assessed settlements reporting access to education (36% to 49%, respectively, although still lower than 71% in July). The likely reason for a slight increase in access to education in Raga and Jur River Counties in September is the improvement in security, which was reported as the primary reason for no access to education by 37% of assessed settlements in August but only by 21% of those in September. In Wau on the other hand, insecurity continued to be the primary reported reason for no access to education in 35% of assessed settlements in September (which is similar to 32% in August), which may explain why Wau County was the only part of WBeG that did not experience an increase in access to education in September and continued to report comparatively lower levels of access to education, as displayed in Map 3.

In September, there was little gender disparity between reported school attendance among children between the age of 6-17, with 36% of assessed settlements reporting that more than half of the boys were attending schooling and 33% reporting that more than half of the girls were doing the same. Comparatively, the proportion of assessed settlements

Map 3: Percentage of assessed settlements reporting access to education in WBeG, September 2017



reporting access to schooling for boys was below the countrywide AoK average of 46% while schooling for girls was above the 13% average reported in countrywide AoK data. This suggests that in WBeG, different socio-cultural dynamics prevail which enable an above-the-average proportion of girls to attend schooling.

When schooling was available but students were not attending, the reported primary reason was the cost of schooling fees. This was reported for girls in 63% of assessed settlements and for boys in 50%. Fewer settlements reported that boys were not attending school due to high fees. This may be because 43% of assessed settlements reported that the primary reason for boys not attending schooling was that they were needed for agriculture related work. Notably however, none of the settlements in Wau County reported so, which is likely due to Wau County's low levels of farming, as elaborated upon in the Livelihoods section.

Shelter

In September, the majority of assessed settlements (78%), reported that tukuls were the main shelter, a continuation of trends observed in previous months. Indicative of the stabilising security situation, the proportion of settlements that reported that shelters in their communities were damaged by fighting gradually decreased from 77% in July to 58% in August and 37% in September. Wau County reported the highest proportion of assessed settlements with destroyed shelters. Of those settlements that reported shelter damage in Wau County, as many as 95% reported that between half and all of the shelters in their community were destroyed. This proportion is comparatively much higher than the 43% in Raga and 50% in Jur River Counties, and suggests that as of September, Wau County continued to be the most conflict and insecurity affected area of WBeG.

Conclusion

Over the months, WBeG has gradually experienced a decrease in displacement due to the absence of large-scale episodes of violence. While many parts of the state have witnessed a stable security environment, in other areas insecurity continued to persist, resulting in smaller harvests and lower access to services.

In September, the most notable development was the increase in reported adequate access to food, which is linked to the rise in cultivation reported as the main source of food as the harvest season began. The rise in adequate

access to food was especially reported in Jur River County. In the coming months, reported adequate access to food is expected to see a further increase in those settlements that were able to cultivate in the planting season. However, for settlements in areas where cultivation was not possible due to security reasons, food insecurity can be expected to remain alarmingly high, especially in certain parts of Wau County that continued to be affected by insecurity in September.⁵

Although many sectors have seen improvements over the month of September, humanitarian needs across Western Bahr el Ghazal State remain pronounced. A stabilising security situation has allowed for the harvest season in Jur River and Wau Town to commence and people have begun returning to their normal lives. However, security in parts of Wau and Raga County has continued to deteriorate, restricting access to food and limiting access to services in most areas.

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.

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

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⁵ According to REACH assessments, FGDs and reports from humanitarian partners, the most insecurity affected areas in Wau County are Bazia and Greater Bagarri.