

# Situation Overview: Upper Nile State, South Sudan

October 2017

**REACH** An initiative of  
IMPACT Initiatives  
ACTED and UNOSAT

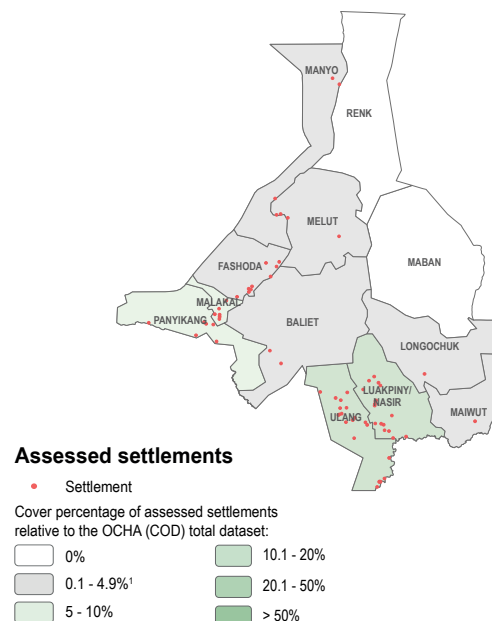
## Introduction

The month of October was characterised by a respite in fighting across the state of Upper Nile.<sup>1</sup> This has created opportunities for increased humanitarian access to areas that have been affected by continued fighting or insecurity for the past months such as the counties located on the western bank of the Nile and the counties of the south-eastern portion of the state.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the humanitarian outlook has yet to improve as the level of access to basic services remains alarmingly low across most sectors.

To inform the response of humanitarian actors working outside of formal displacement sites, REACH has been conducting an ongoing assessment of hard-to-reach areas in South Sudan since 2015, for which data on settlements across Greater Upper Nile, Greater Equatoria and Western Bahr el Ghazal region is collected on a monthly basis.

In October 2017, REACH interviewed 147 Key Informants (KIs) from 71 settlements in all counties in Upper Nile State except Renk and Maban. In order to ensure an accurate understanding of current displacement and population dynamics, all selected KIs had up-to-date information about the village from which they had been displaced, whether because

Map 1: REACH assessment coverage of Upper Nile State



they had reportedly visited it within the last month or had been in contact with someone living in it within the last month. Findings have been triangulated using four Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) conducted in the Abayok displacement site, interviews with humanitarian actors, secondary data, and previous REACH assessments of hard-to-reach areas of Upper Nile State.

This Situation Overview outlines displacement and access to basic services in Upper Nile in October 2017. The first section analyses displacement trends in Upper Nile State. The second section outlines the population dynamics in the assessed settlements, as well as access to food and basic services for both IDP and non-displaced communities.

Due to changes in data collection sites from previous months, the areas for which REACH was able to generalise findings at county-level in October differed from September. **In October, REACH has been able to assess over 5% of known settlements in two counties in the western bank of the Nile (Malakal and Panyikang) and two counties in the south-eastern portion of Upper Nile (Nasir and Ulang) (Map 1).** Counties where the proportion of total settlements assessed is below 5% are not analysed at the county level, but the settlement data is still included in the state-level analysis.

## Population Movement and Displacement

In October, Upper Nile was calm and few security incidents were reported compared to previous months, which prompted timid returns on the western bank of the Nile and generally more fluid movement along the Nile

and across borders. Nevertheless, unresolved intercommunal disputes remained a cause for concern among the population of areas like Maban and Melut. Moreover, control of the territory of multiple areas of Upper Nile was still heavily contested by armed groups. As such, the outlook for long term stability remained highly uncertain and displacement was still rife in October, with IDP presence reported in 44% of assessed settlements. Among REACH KIs, the most frequently cited push factor from locations in Upper Nile in October was the lack of access to health care services (34%) followed by insecurity (22%). Pull factors to areas of destinations of IDPs reflected the same concerns around healthcare services and security.

### Returns to the western bank

The respite in armed clashes led small numbers of persons displaced across Upper Nile and others who had previously lived in Sudan as refugees to come back to their areas of origin on the western bank of the Nile in October.

REACH road monitoring in Renk town revealed a trend of returns from the refugee camps in White Nile (Sudan) toward areas of the western bank such as Kodok, Fashoda County, that were reported to be safe by local authorities.<sup>3</sup> Participants in FGDs held in Wadakona have also reported returns to Manyo County, albeit

1. OCHA. Humanitarian Snapshot. October 2017.

2. See REACH. Upper Nile Situation Overview. July-August 2017; Reach. Upper Nile Situation Overview. September 2017.

3. REACH. Renk Road Monitoring Factsheet. October 2017.

## METHODOLOGY

To provide an overview of the situation in largely inaccessible areas of Upper Nile 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 overview was collected from key informants in Renk County, Upper Nile, Akobo, Jonglei, and the Juba Protection of Civilians (PoC) sites, Central Equatoria.

The first phase of the assessment methodology comprised a participatory mapping exercise to map the relevant settlements in Upper Nile 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.

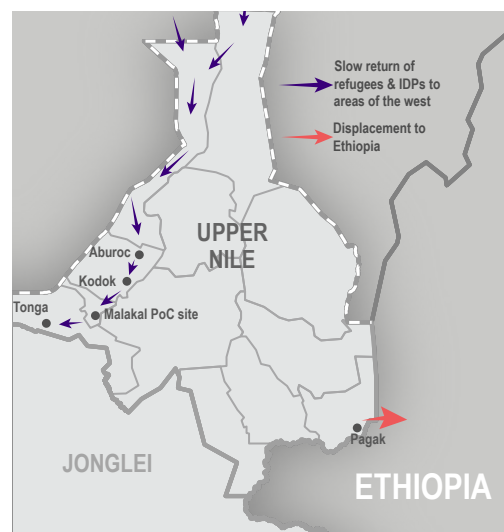
After data collection was completed, all data was examined at the settlement level, and settlements were assigned the modal response. When no consensus could be found for a settlement, that settlement was not included in reporting. Descriptive statistics and geospatial analysis were then used to analyse the data.

Please note that REACH is in the process of establishing sustained data collection in Upper Nile State. As a result, the current coverage is limited. The conclusions drawn are therefore indicative of likely trends in the state.

still on a small scale. Non-governmental organisation (NGO) KIs operating in areas surrounding Malakal have confirmed that a perceived increase in safety around the Aburoc displacement site has translated into slightly more fluid movement of IDPs between Aburoc and areas heavily affected by armed clashes and insecurity in the first half of 2017 such as Wau Shilluk, in Malakal County.

The same trend was also confirmed in Panyikang County, where an assessment team led by the World Food Programme (WFP) found that most of the displaced population of Tonga had returned over recent months.<sup>4</sup> Participants in FGDs conducted in the Abayok displacement site, near Renk town, explained that they would go back to their area of origin in Panyikang if they could confirm that the area was secure, but

**Map 2: Returns to the western bank of the Nile and displacement into Ethiopia**



lacked the necessary communication channels to do so.

## Displacement into Ethiopia

While the south-eastern portion of Upper Nile was more calm in October than it was in the previous months, 2,342 people were still registered as refugees in the Gambella region during the month, for a total of 418,892 South Sudanese refugees hosted in Ethiopia as of 31 October 2017.<sup>5</sup> The majority of refugees entering Gambella tend to be from south-eastern counties of Upper Nile (Maiwut, Longochuk, Ulang and Nasir).<sup>6</sup>

## Situation in Assessed Settlements

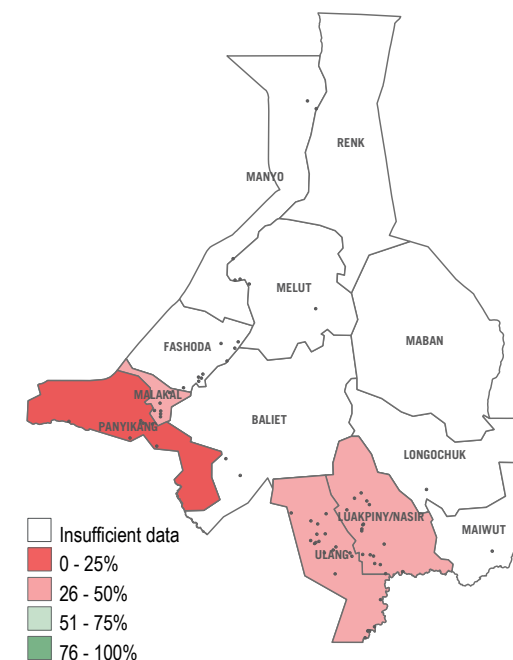
### Food security and livelihoods

Despite seasonal harvests, only 39% of assessed settlements reported adequate access to food in October. While reported levels of adequate access to food have remained stable over recent months in Upper Nile, settlements were not able to gain better access over the reporting period. September usually marks the beginning of harvest season and therefore households (HHs) would typically gain greater autonomy over food consumption by relying on their own reserves yet a low proportion of assessed settlements in both the western bank and south-eastern counties reported adequate access to food in October. However, reported causes for ongoing food insecurity differed, as outlined below.

## Along the western bank of the Nile

In the western bank of the Nile, only 25% of assessed settlements in Panyikang and 50% in Malakal reported adequate access to food. Among those reporting inadequate access to food in Panyikang County and Malakal County, respectively 100% and 50% cited the destruction of crops by fighting as the main barrier to adequate access to food, echoing reports of a disruption of the present cultivation cycle due to conflict along the western bank. According to humanitarian partner KIs and to FGD participants from Malakal and Panyikang, the armed clashes that affected settlements in

**Map 3: Proportion of settlements reporting adequate access to food**



4. WFP. Rapid Appraisal: Tonga, Panyikang. 4 October, 2017.

5. UNHCR. Data: South Sudanese Refugees in Gambella Region. 29 October 2017.

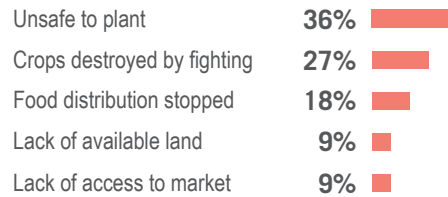
6. UNHCR. South Sudan Situation: Bi-weekly Ethiopia Situational Report. 1 – 31 October 2017.

the western bank in the first half of 2017 have destroyed crops and prevented communities from preparing the land in February to allow for harvests in September and October.

As a result, settlements assessed in the western bank of the Nile reported very little agriculture for subsistence to be taking place, only 17% of assessed settlements in Panyikang and 20% in Malakal. Instead, HHs in Panyikang relied almost entirely on fishing or hunting as a source of livelihood, as reported by 80% of assessed settlement. In Malakal, 50% of assessed settlements also reported that people were relying on fishing or hunting but in contrast with Panyikang, half of assessed settlements also reported relying on casual labour, which, FGD participants explained, refers to the collection of charcoal and firewood and brewing of alcohol.

Livelihoods in the western bank of the Nile remained heavily inhibited by months of conflicts. Communities that used to cultivate and rear livestock in order to access food were found to be heavily dependant on income generating activities, and therefore on market functionality. Further, nearly all assessed settlements reported that prices of basic staples such as

**Figure 1: Proportion of assessed settlements across Upper Nile reporting barriers to food access**



oil, sugar and sorghum had increased over the previous month, in line with the continued hyperinflation induced by a persisting economic crisis, suggesting even more precarity for those relying on limited income generating activities to access food.<sup>7</sup>

**In the south-eastern counties**

A low proportion of assessed settlements in the south-eastern portion of the state reported adequate access to food, only 31% of assessed settlements in Nasir and 50% in Ulang. Whilst in most assessed settlements in the western bank inadequate access to food appeared to be associated with conflict, assessed settlements in the south-eastern part of Upper Nile revealed a different narrative.

In Nasir county, for example, all assessed settlements reporting a lack of adequate access to food pointed to the lack of access to markets as the primary reason. A low proportion of assessed settlements in Nasir and Ulang reported market availability in their area in October (respectively 12% and 14% of assessed settlements) and no settlements reported relying primarily on purchased food. Assessed settlements in Ulang and Nasir rather mostly reported reliance on cultivated products (38% and 32% respectively), products of fishing and hunting (25% and 15%) and NGO distributions (13% and 26%) as primary sources of food. Contrarily to most western bank settlements, most south-eastern settlements were not entirely dependent on one source of food and therefore less vulnerable to external shocks.

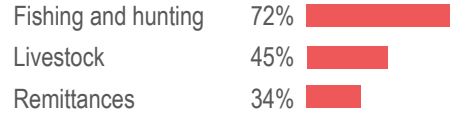
Accordingly, the livelihoods landscape reported by settlements assessed in the south-eastern counties of Upper Nile was different than that outlined for the western bank settlements, with much higher proportions of settlements reporting that members of the community were engaging in the main seasonal livelihoods (fishing, cultivation, livestock rearing). Fishing was especially reported to be a prominent source of livelihoods, with 65% of settlements assessed in Nasir and 85% in Ulang reporting that members of the community were engaged in fishing in the month prior to data collection. Moreover, cultivation was also reported in 41% of assessed settlements in Nasir and 53% in Ulang. Finally, 71% of assessed settlements in both Nasir and Ulang reported that the community was relying on livestock as a source of livelihoods. This suggests that sources of livelihoods were relatively more diversified than in the western bank.

Despite these relative positive livelihood trends and diversified food sources, the high proportion of assessed settlements reporting inadequate access to food in Ulang and Nasir suggests that the harvests, humanitarian assistance and levels of fishing were not sufficient to meet immediate consumption needs. This is of particular concern given the reported lack of access to markets and the scarcity of livelihood sources such as casual labour to supplement agricultural production and other livelihoods.

**Coping strategies**

Faced with inadequate access to food, a large proportion of assessed settlements in Upper

**Figure 2: Top 3 main reported sources of livelihood in settlements assessed across Upper Nile**



Nile reported reliance on numerous coping strategies, amongst them severe measures, to deal with a lack of access to food. In October, 25% of assessed settlements reported to be consuming seeds in order to increase their food intake. Additionally, more than half of assessed settlements (58%) reported HHs reducing the number of meals consumed and 45% reported HHs were reducing meal sizes. Moreover, 38% of assessed settlements reported that adults were skipping meals so that children could eat. Further, 26% of assessed settlements reported that HHs were spending whole days without eating, which is both indicative of highly constrained access to food and suggestive of severe food consumption gaps. Such a restriction of food consumption is especially concerning given that only 12% of assessed settlements reported access to feeding programmes that provide nutrition supplements for undernourished children and/or lactating women.

In addition to strategies adopted to cope with inadequate access to food, assessed settlements also reported employing strategies to cope with disrupted livelihoods. The most frequently cited was gathering wild foods (32% of assessed settlements), mainly in the south-

7. WFP. South Sudan Monthly Market Price Monitoring Bulletin. August 2017.



eastern portion of Upper Nile where wild fruits are more readily available.

FGD participants from Panyikang explained that faced with the lack of income-generating activities coupled with difficulties to produce food within the HH, members of the community relied on bartering objects such as clothes in exchange for food. This paves the way to the depletion of personal assets owned by HHs and as such, general impoverishment.

Protection

In spite of a reduction of incidents related to armed clashes in Upper Nile in October, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting that members of the community never felt safe in their settlement during the month remained relatively high (25% of assessed settlements), which indicates that the reduction in security incidents had yet to translate into a steady sense of safety.<sup>8</sup> As such, none of the assessed settlements in Panyikang and Malakal reported that people felt safe all the time, which again confirms that the population of these areas remained cautious about prospects for long term stability. Low perception of security may also be related to reports of looting in 39% of assessed settlements in October, suggesting that insecurity remained pervasive (see Figure

Figure 3: Reported incidents during which property was looted in the assessed settlements

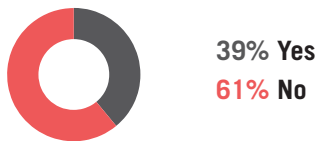


Figure 4: Main protection concerns reported in the assessed settlements

Women		Men	
1	Sexual violence 33%	1	Killing/injury by other community 45%
2	Domestic violence 13%	2	Cattle raiding 23%
3	Killing/injury by other community 12%	3	Looting 8%
4	Family separation 5%	4	Killing/injury by same community 5%
5	Harassment to disclose information 3%	5	Forced recruitment 3%

3). In October, the most frequently cited primary safety concern among women in the assessed settlements was sexual violence (33%) followed by domestic violence (13%), both pointing at the prevalence of sexual and gender based violence as a key issue for women (see Figure 4). Among men the main concern remained the same as in the previous month: 45% of assessed settlements reported that men were mostly afraid to be killed or injured by someone of a different community, which once again indicates that the population does not consider the recent diminution of armed clashes as a promise of safety in the long run. Among men, this concern was followed by cattle raiding (23%), a concern mostly reported in Nasir (40%) and Ulang (42%) where cattle possession is much higher than in the western bank of the Nile and where cattle raiding is also more frequent. Among both girls and boys, the protection concern cited most often by assessed settlements was recruitment by armed groups (respectively 17% and 18% of

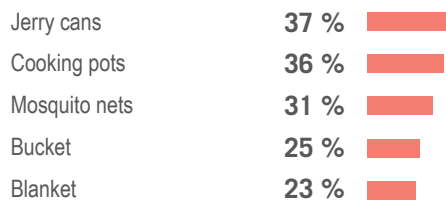
assessed settlements).

Shelter

In October, the vast majorities of assessed settlements reported that host communities were living either in tukuls or rakoobas (94% of assessed settlements), while less settlements reported the same for IDPs (62%), suggesting more precarity in terms of access to shelter. The proportion of assessed settlements reporting that both host communities and IDPs lived in improvised or abandoned shelter remained stable from the previous month (2% for host communities and 21% for IDPs), reflecting limited reports of new shelter damages in the assessed settlements in October.

Among the 21% of assessed settlements reporting that IDPs were living in improvised or abandoned shelters, most were in Nasir and Ulang. As of October the two counties were reportedly hosting newly arrived IDPs from Maiwut and Longochuk who may not yet have had access to permanent shelter solutions. This may also be an indication that local communities' capacity to absorb IDPs' shelter

Figure 5: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting that IDPs have access to selected NFIs



needs is inadequate.

Across Upper Nile, only small proportions of settlements reported that IDPs had access to key non-food items (NFIs) such as jerry cans and cooking pots, respectively 37% and 36% of assessed settlements, indicating further precarity among IDPs (see Figure 5).

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

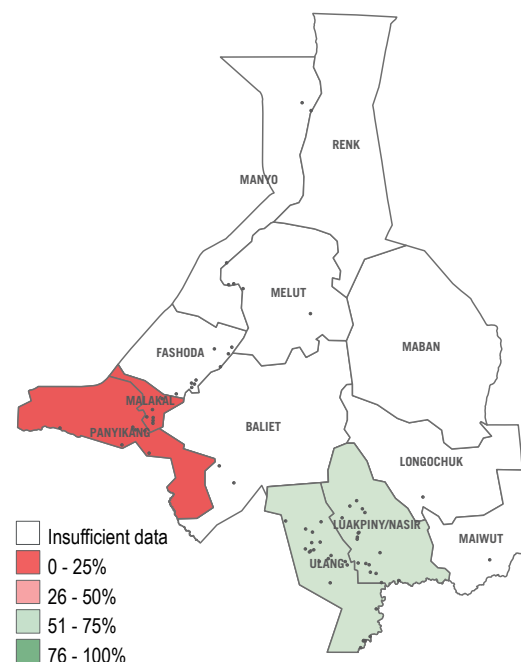
While access to clean water and sanitary facilities remained heavily inhibited in all assessed settlements in October, the outlook was relatively more positive in the assessed settlements in the south-eastern counties than on the western bank.

On the western bank, only 17% of assessed settlements in Panyikang and 20% in Malakal reported boreholes as their primary water source. Instead of relying on safe water obtained through boreholes, assessed settlements in Malakal relied largely on donkey carts (60%) while settlements in Panyikang relied on water yard (67%). Moreover, following from trends outlined in past Situation Overviews, settlements on the western bank of the Nile have reported especially high rates of open defecation.<sup>9</sup> While no cases of active transmission of cholera were being monitored in Upper Nile in October, other more common waterborne diseases such as diarrhoea can have a devastating impact on a population that is struggling with both low food intake and difficult access to healthcare facilities.<sup>10</sup>

While rates of open defecation were only slightly better in the settlements of the south-eastern

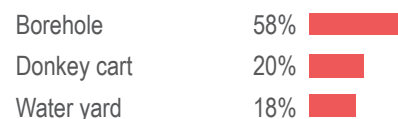
8. Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), Dataset - South Sudan, April 2017-November 2017. Accessed in December 2017.  
9. REACH. Upper Nile Situation Overview. June 2017; REACH. Upper Nile Situation Overview. July-August 2017; REACH. Upper Nile Situation Overview. September 2017.  
10. Republic of South Sudan. Cholera Situation and Response Updates. 27 October 2017.

**Map 4: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting access to boreholes**



portion of Upper Nile than in the western bank, assessed settlements reported much better access to boreholes in Nasir and Ulang than on the western bank (respectively 55% and 63% of assessed settlements). Therefore, settlements assessed in those counties relied on improved

**Figure 6: Three main reported sources of drinking water in the assessed settlements**



water sources and the risk of waterborne disease transmission is relatively lower. However, based on assessments conducted by other agencies in neighbouring Maiwut and Longochuk it appears that many boreholes have been damaged in the areas that were recently affected by heavy armed clashes.<sup>11</sup>

## Health

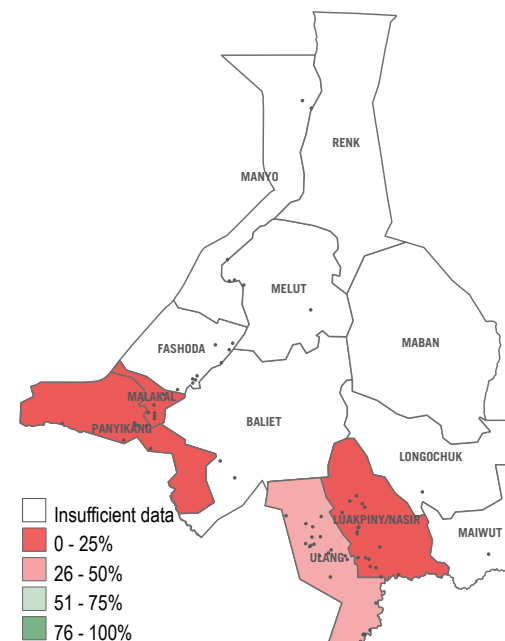
A decline in the proportion of assessed settlements reporting access to healthcare compounded severe WASH concerns in October. Only 22% of assessed settlements reported that healthcare services were accessible whereas 38% had reported the same in September. None of the assessed settlements in Malakal and Panyikang reported access to health facilities (see Map 5). While 33% of assessed settlements in Panyikang reported that facilities were never present in their area, it appeared that many existing facilities had also been deserted by their staff (33%) or damaged by clashes (33%). While the population of Panyikang was said to be returning to the area of Tonga following months of armed clashes, basic services were likely not yet in place to ensure a safe reintegration.<sup>12</sup>

Access to healthcare services was more positive in the assessed settlements in the south-eastern counties of Upper Nile, with 25% of settlements in Nasir and 33% of settlements in Ulang reporting that services were available in October. Half of assessed settlements in Nasir and 25% in Ulang reported that the main

impediment to availability of healthcare services was that health facilities were never there in the first place. The area has a lower humanitarian presence compared to other parts of Upper Nile, further explaining low access.

The proportion of assessed settlements reporting malaria as the primary health concern declined from 78% of assessed settlements in September to 31% in October, likely linked to the end of the rainy season. While malaria nonetheless remained the most frequently cited primary health concern, malnutrition was also cited as the primary health concern in 17% of assessed settlements. Limited access to

**Map 5: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting access to healthcare services**



healthcare services and to food as well as poor sanitation and hygiene conditions coalesced to create strong underlying causes for malnutrition.

## Education

Access to education services remained severely hindered in Upper Nile with only 13% of assessed settlements reporting access in October, in line with September levels. Reports of limited access were generalised to all the counties of Upper Nile where REACH had sufficient coverage, albeit with a slightly less negative outlook in the south-eastern portion of Upper Nile. Whereas on the western bank all settlements in both Malakal and Panyikang reported no access to education services, 18% of assessed settlements in Ulang and 13% of assessed settlements in Nasir reported access (see Map 6).

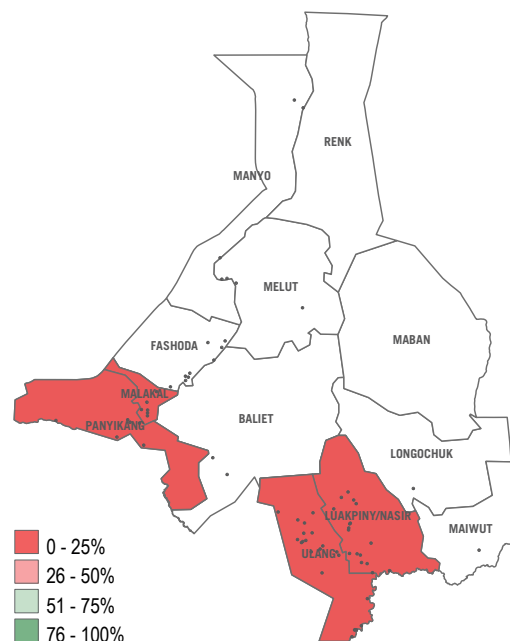
Among settlements that reported a lack of access to education services, the most frequently cited reason was that education facilities were never present in the area (49% of assessed settlements), highlighting that Upper Nile already had low education service provision prior to the conflict. In Nasir specifically, the vast majority of assessed settlements (77%) reported that there were no facilities to begin with in their area. Destruction of facilities by conflict (23% of assessed settlements) and insecurity (11%) were the other most cited reasons for low access to education services in Upper Nile.

Following trends observed over previous months, in the few settlements where education

11. Nile Hope. Situational Update on Greater Maiwut and Greater Longochuk. October 2017.

12. WFP. Rapid Appraisal: Tonga, Panyikang. 4 October, 2017.

**Map 6: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting access to education services**



was found to be available more boys were reported to be attending school than girls, which highlights the existence of stronger barriers to access to education for females.<sup>13</sup> Whereas 75% of assessed settlements which reported that education was available indicated that more than half of boys were attending school, the same proportion of assessed settlements reported that only half of girls were in school. Where education services were available, 78% of assessed settlements reported that the main reason why boys were not going to school was the need to do agricultural work, while reasons

cited for girls ranged from menstruation-related issues (29% of assessed settlements) to school fees (29%) and the need to work in the HH (14%).


## Conclusion

The month of October was characterised by relative calm all over Upper Nile, with only isolated clashes and skirmishes early in the month in and around Pagak. Nevertheless, access to essential services has yet to improve in most assessed settlements.

A trend of returns towards areas of the western bank of the Nile impacted by armed clashes in the first half of 2017 appeared to take shape in the past few months. Increasingly fluid movements on the roads of Fashoda, Malakal and Panyikang and on the Nile was reported as civilians begun to take advantage of a general calm in the area in order to return to their areas of origins.

Resources remained scarce in Upper Nile in October as a result of months of instability. Access to food was found to be severely hindered in both the western bank and the south-eastern counties of the Nile, while livelihoods such as agriculture were found to be more inhibited in the western bank of the Nile. In line with trends from previous months, access to clean water and sanitation remained restricted in the western bank and as such, population in this area were found to be at high risk of waterborne diseases. Moreover, access to basic services such as education and healthcare has not improved compared to the

previous month in spite of a respite in armed clashes, suggesting limited capacity of existing service providers to support the reintegration of returnees in their settlements.

 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development  
and Cooperation SDC



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

### 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](mailto:southsudan@reach-initiative.org) or to our global office: [geneva@reach-initiative.org](mailto:geneva@reach-initiative.org).

Visit [www.reach-initiative.org](http://www.reach-initiative.org) and follow us @REACH\_info.