Kajo-Keji County: Food Security and Livelihoods Profile

Central Equatoria, South Sudan, January 2018

24 Key Informants Interviewed
16 Settlements Assessed
6% of Settlements Assessed in Kajo-Keji County

Methodology

In January 2018, an estimated 48% of the population remaining within South Sudan (over 5 million individuals) was severely food insecure under the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC).[1] To support the humanitarian response and to identify hotspot areas of food insecurity, REACH utilizes the Area of Knowledge (AoK) remote monitoring methodology. Using AoK, REACH reports on needs and access to services in Greater Equatoria, including hard-to-reach areas in Central Equatoria State. In the absence of humanitarian access for nearly all of 2017, preventing service provision and data collection, critical data was lacking to complete an IPC area classification for Kajo-Keji County. At the request of the IPC Technical Working Group (TWG) in South Sudan, REACH increased AoK data collection for the county in January 2018. The data presented in this profile allowed for a minimum IPC classification of acute food insecurity in the area in January and projections of the situation in February-April and May-July. Findings refer to settlements, rather than households, and data was collected through remote interviews with 24 Key Informants (KIs), including those recently displaced from a given settlement, regularly travelling to and from it, or in regular contact with its residents. Data was further triangulated with humanitarian KIs familiar with Kajio-Keji County. This county profile provides a general update to the May-July 2017 Kajo-Keji County Food Security and Livelihoods (FSL) profile.[2] While AoK findings are not statistically significant, they provide an indicative snapshot of the humanitarian situation in assessed settlements.

Food Security and Livelihoods Overview

Pre-crisis Livelihoods[3]

Pre-crisis livelihoods in Kajo-Keji County were heavily agricultural, supplemented by livestock holdings, fishing, and wild foods collection. Lying within the only part of South Sudan with two distinct rainy seasons, an area often referred to as the Greenbelt, multiple harvests of different crops were possible each year. Two-year cassava was generally available year-round and harvested as needed. Border crossings with Uganda, road connections to Juba, and the proximity of main Western Corridor trade routes all contributed to trade. Casual labour was frequently available on the larger farms of relatively wealthy households. More than any other area of South Sudan, the Greenbelt counties were generally anticipated to be self-sufficient in agriculture in a given year.

Hazards (Shocks)

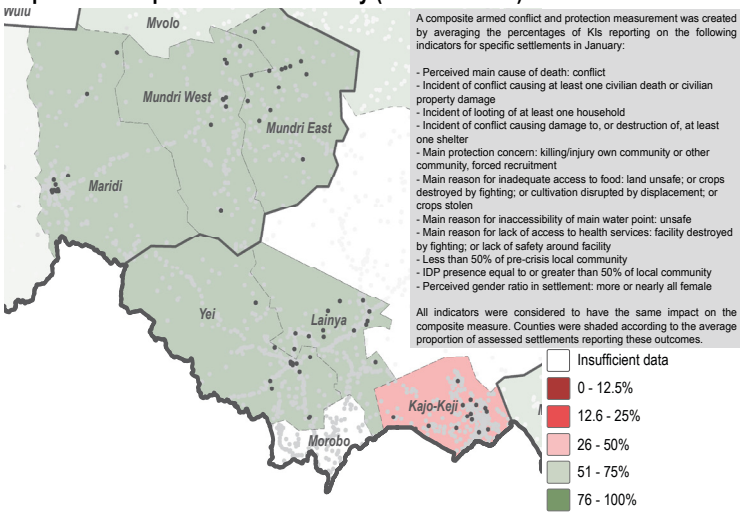
- Armed conflict ongoing since June 2016, high incidence and intensity through end of 2017[4]
- Mass displacement of farming households and large declines in total cultivated area in 2016-2018; shift from regular cereals surplus to deficit[5]
- Continued disruption to key trade routes from late 2016 to present[6]

Vulnerability (Resilience)

Armed conflict remains the primary shock affecting food security and livelihoods in Kajo-Keji County. More than half of assessed settlements (53%) reported an incident of armed conflict causing at least one civilian death and/or property damage within the settlement, while 40% reported armed conflict having caused damage to and/or the destruction of at least one shelter structure within the settlement. Violent incidents and shelter damage appeared to be accompanied by looting, as 60% of assessed settlements reported an incident of looting affecting at least one household. Similar proportions reported a perception that community members feel unsafe all the time (36%) or some of the time (43%).

Humanitarian KIs familiar with the area further explained that shifts in areas of influence contested by various armed actors continue to severely limit who is able to travel and access sources of livelihood and where,

Map 1: Level of protection vulnerability (armed conflict)

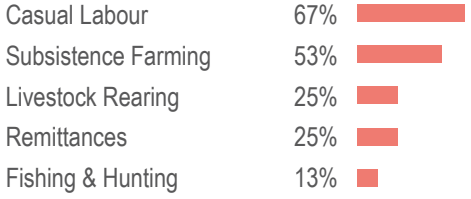


how, and when they are able to do this, with constraints on accessing sources of livelihood differing among household members. This appears to be supported by the highly gendered main safety concerns for men and women reported by assessed settlements. Sexual violence was reportedly the main safety concern for women in 69% of assessed settlements, while the main safety concerns for men included killing or injury by a member of another community (33%), forced recruitment (17%), harassment by armed actors (17%), and looting, including of cattle (16%). As shown on Map 1, assessed settlements in Kajo-Keji County show the most severe combination of various proxies of armed conflict incidence and intensity across conflict-affected Greenbelt counties.

The effect of armed conflict on livelihoods is most clearly seen in disruption to agriculture, especially the completion of the second harvest and the storage of harvest production from both the first and second harvests of 2017. The annual Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) to South Sudan undertaken by the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP) shows cereals production down from a 40% surplus in 2017 to a 12% deficit in 2018, with total area planted for cereals decreasing by 74% from 2016 to 2017. CFSAMs also reported a reduction in the proportion of households remaining within Kajo-Keji engaged in farming, falling from 90% in 2013 to 62% in 2016.[7] FAO also estimated the displacement of up to 75% of pre-crisis farming households as of the 2017 planting season (March-May).[8] The large contraction in total planted area and the reduction in the proportion of households engaged in farming likely account for the loss of surplus production, though a reduction in area planted per household is also possible. As poor harvests continue over successive years, two-year cassava, often kept in reserve as insurance against low yields of cereals and pulses, may be unsustainably harvested for consumption and sale.[9]

Most pre-crisis livelihoods sources still appeared common, though with shifting importance. Casual labour was reported as a currently practiced source of livelihood in 67% of assessed settlements, alongside a relatively low 53% of assessed settlements reporting cultivation for own consumption. A marginally higher proportion reporting casual labour than cultivation for own consumption as livelihood sources may be indicative of displaced populations working on the farms of local communities in other

Figure 1: Most commonly reported livelihoods sources



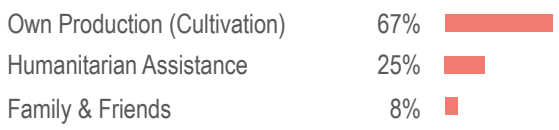
settlements. Atypically, no assessed settlements reported the sale of crops as a currently practiced livelihood source. Displacement appears to have had a mixed impact on livelihood sources. Potentially showing a loss of farming households but an increase in land availability for remaining households, 54% of assessed settlements reported that 50% or less of the local community population remained in the settlement. IDPs appear concentrated within 29% of assessed settlements, where their presence was reported as equal to half or more of the local community population. Humanitarian KIs noted that many IDPs within Kajo-Keji are able to integrate into local communities and engage in casual labour for in-kind payments of food, often on the farms and gardens of local community households. While increased production in the local community due to the high availability of casual labour may increase food availability by season, constraints on physical access to land and access to agricultural inputs would likely reduce the impact of more labour and higher land availability. Lack of access to agricultural inputs was reported in 88% of assessed settlements and lack of physical access to land for cultivation in 19%. Additionally, the main reasons given for inadequate access to food in 81% of assessed settlements were a lack of safety in accessing land (53%) and disruption to cultivation due to displacement (43%).

Assessed settlements also reported livestock rearing (25%), remittances (25%), and fishing and/or hunting (13%) as currently practiced sources of livelihood. In stark contrast to other Greenbelt counties, 94% of assessed settlements reported at least some community members owning cattle and having physical access to cattle owned by community members. In general, humanitarian KIs explained that prior to the outbreak of armed conflict in the county, wealthier households in Kajo-Keji had been selling surpluses in cereals and other crops and acquiring cattle varieties common to northern Uganda. These cattle are generally tolerant of the local environment and livestock diseases of Kajo-Keji County and the plentiful, nutritious grass available largely obviates the need for migration, allowing cattle to generally remain close to settlements. This asset accumulation may account for the high proportions of assessed settlements reporting cattle ownership and physical access to cattle, but a lower proportion reporting livestock rearing as a commonly reported source of livelihood given the small number of wealthy households involved. A large increase in cattle possession from May-July 2017 (average of 36%) to January suggests the spread of cattle-owning households and cattle throughout the county through displacement, barter and sale, and efforts to protect remaining assets. As seen in Map 2, nearly all Greenbelt counties considered showed 51-75% of assessed settlements reporting positive results across several livelihoods indicators. However, the connection between livelihoods and adequate access to food appears disrupted.

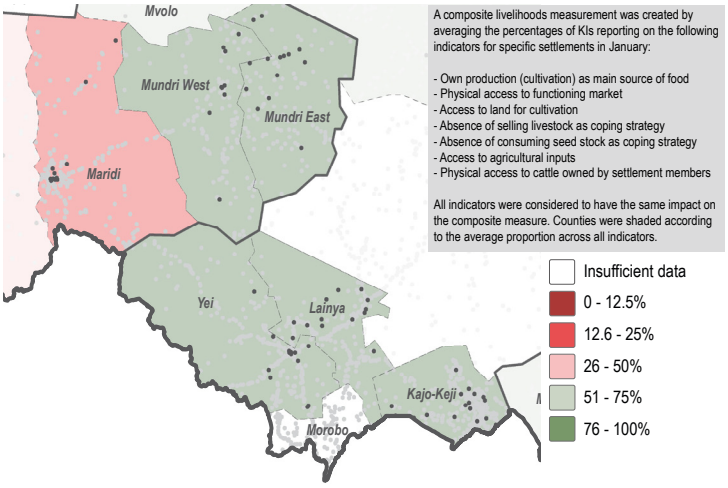
Food Access

Inadequate access to food was reported by 81% of assessed settlements near the end of the second harvest season (January), with no substantive change from the 79% reporting this in the lean season in May-July 2017. As this indicator is based on respondent perceptions and experiences of hunger, rather than direct measures of food consumption, inadequate access to food reported by assessed settlements has been interpreted as suggestive of food consumption gaps consistent with at least Crisis (IPC Phase 3), where households are expected to begin facing daily shortfalls in caloric intake.[10] However, experiential indicators may have a high benchmark in Greenbelt counties, where populations may have grown accustomed to high food availability following large increases in total area planted for cereals and county-level net production of cereals after South Sudan's independence in 2011. It is possible that reported experiences of hunger now may be reflective of higher relative deprivation but lower absolute deprivation when analyzing access to food in assessed counties. Map 3 shows a comparison of the food access composite in assessed

Figure 2: Primary source of food in assessed settlements



Map 2: Level of livelihood vulnerability



settlements in conflict-affected Greenbelt counties, where access to food in Kajo-Keji County appears similar to Yei County, while Mundri West appears to show the lowest access to food. Given the potential for a lag between livelihoods disruption and a negative impact on adequate access to food, the full effect of reportedly more frequent and intense conflict in this period in Kajo-Keji may manifest in a worse outcome on the this composite measure in the next six months before the first harvest.

Own production (cultivation) was the primary source of food for most settlements (67%). One-third (33%) of assessed settlements appeared reliant on alternative primary food sources to their own cultivation, including 25% of assessed settlements reporting humanitarian assistance as a primary food source and 8% reporting family and/or friends. Humanitarian KIs indicated that this is potentially a combination of religious and other community groups and household members returning from refugee camps in northern Uganda with partial food rations, which potentially also accounts for part of the reporting of remittances as a commonly reported livelihoods source. The small proportion of assessed settlements where family and friends are the primary source of food may suggest a more vulnerable proportion of the assessed population experiencing relatively larger food consumption gaps. No assessed settlements reported market purchase as a primary food source and only 25% reporting physical access to a functioning market, both similar to May-July 2017. This proportion was one of the four lowest among assessed counties in Greater Equatoria in January. This was comparable to Kapoeta East and Kapoeta North County in Eastern Equatoria State, where road access is limited by severe criminality, and Nagero County in Western Equatoria State. This lack of market access is highly atypical for Kajo-Keji County and likely resulted from insecurity and the loss of formal trade through the Jale border crossing.

Dietary diversity indicators suggest that assessed settlements are generally able to acquire staple foods and to supplement them with some amount of wild foods. Food groups reported as regularly consumed in assessed settlements included cereals and tubers (100%), fruits (67%), vegetables and/or leaves (60%), pulses (47%), fish (6%). No assessed settlements reported the regular consumption of meat or dairy products. Protein and iron intake have decreased substantially from May-July 2017, with assessed settlements showing large drops in regular consumption of dairy products (71 percentage points), meat (43 percentage points), and fish (37 percentage points). However, 69% of assessed settlements reported that one meal was typically eaten per day while 31% reported two meals, indicating that residents in over two-thirds of assessed settlements may still be consuming insufficient quantities of these foods.[11]

Coping Strategies

High proportions of assessed settlements reported low severity consumption-based coping strategies in common usage, including reducing meal size (73%) and reducing meal frequency (81%), while few assessed settlements indicated that severe strategies were in common

usage, including not eating for an entire day (6%).[12]

Usage of unsustainable livelihoods-based coping did not generally appear to improve access to food from inadequate to adequate among assessed settlements. High proportions of assessed settlements were also selling livestock (47%) and/or slaughtering livestock (40%) due to a lack of access to food. While a sign of distress, humanitarian KIs did not view these strategies as severe as they are generally considered to be in more northern areas of South Sudan with differing normative views on the appropriate utilization of livestock, especially for slaughter. Livestock slaughter does not appear to be translating into regular meat consumption among assessed settlements, suggesting that the community members salughtering may be few and that the amounts of meat available may be limited. The migration of settlement members or entire households from the settlement to displacement camps in northern Uganda specifically due to a lack of food access reported by 19% of assessed settlements is likewise difficult to interpret. While some households are thought to be engaging in distress migration in a final effort to obtain food, other households are using this strategy to maintain current food access. The proximity of the camps also makes a less severe usage of migration from Kajo-Keji County possible, unlike other areas of South Sudan.

Other strategies in common usage within assessed settlements included borrowing food (53%) and gathering wild foods (56%), often fruits. While 40% of assessed settlements reported that wild foods were commonly part of every meal/eaten all the time, with 53% reporting some of the time, no assessed settlements reported the common consumption of wild foods that made people sick, often indicative of severe food insecurity.[13]

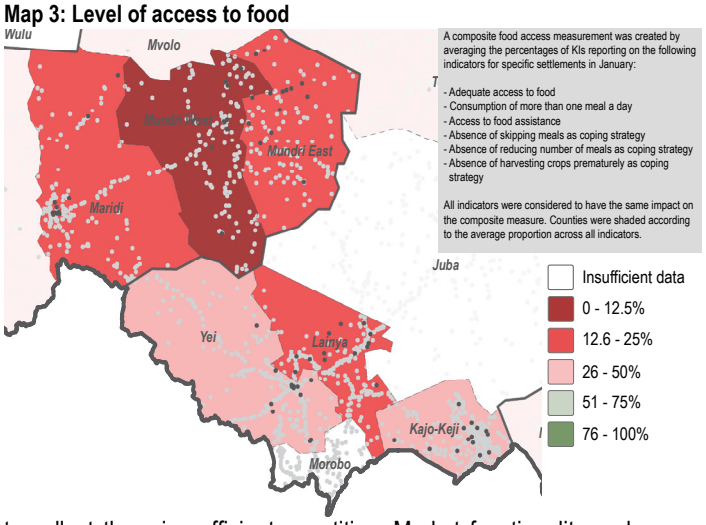
Health and Nutrition

Perceived main causes of death reported by assessed settlements included malaria (47%), armed conflict (40%), hunger and/or malnutrition (7%). While malaria deaths may be occurring among severely food insecure populations, there was limited attribution of hunger and/or malnutrition as the proximate cause of these deaths in assessed settlements. While deaths due to armed conflict may also be related to food insecurity, such as the killing of individuals undertaking livelihoods activities, this attribution is difficult.[14] The most commonly reported main health problem in assessed settlements was also malaria (81%), with none reporting malnutrition as a main health problem. Nearly all assessed settlements (94%) indicated no access to a nutrition feeding programme of any kind in the settlement, while only 40% reported physical access to health services. Nutrition Cluster programme reporting also indicates that all nutrition programme sites in the county were inactive.[15] Lack of access to these services could raise the risk of mortality among community members suffering from malnutrition, especially among children less than five years old. Humanitarian KIs regularly asserted that the lack of access to basic services constitutes a greater issue than hunger for the remaining population of Kajo-Keji, similar to Yei and Morobo Counties.[16]

Stability of Food Access: Looking to July 2018

The stability of food access will most likely be at its lowest from May-July, prior to the completion of the first harvest, with a heightened risk of 20% or more of the county population experiencing large food consumption gaps, a rising prevalence of acute malnutrition among children under five years old, and mortality consistent with Emergency (IPC Phase 4). Reduced access to agricultural inputs and reductions in physical access to land for cultivation will most likely continue to limit the total area planted for cereals and other crops. First season planting and growing (approximately April-August, depending on the crop and the onset of rains) will most likely face similar conflict-related constraints to the previous year, with reserves of two-year cassava likely continuing to gradually deplete as consumption and sales outpace replanting. Household food stocks from their own cultivation will most likely be maintained at low and inadequate levels, placing further strain on social support networks and the casual labour market. Wild food consumption will likely increase through the end of the dry season and early rainy season, especially of mangos, for those able

Map 3: Level of access to food



to collect them in sufficient quantities. Market functionality and access are unlikely to improve without improvement in the security environment. Humanitarian access is not expected to improve, disallowing the provision of any substantial humanitarian assistance. In a worst-case scenario, insecurity would inhibit cross-border movements to and from Uganda and reduce remaining two-year cassava reserves in rural areas, with humanitarian access further constrained. An increasing proportion of the population in rural areas unable to access main staples and pulses and engage in migration would likely face large food consumptions gaps.

Endnotes

1 South Sudan IPC TWG, IPC Key Messages: January 2018.

2 REACH Kajo-Keji Food Security and Livelihoods Profile, May-July 2017.

3 Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), South Sudan Livelihood Zones and Descriptions, August 2013.

4 Human Rights Watch (HRW) "Soldiers Assume We Are Rebels": Escalating Violence and Abuses in South Sudan's Equatorias August 2017; Armed Conflict Location and Event (ACLED) project real-time dataset 12/2017.

5 FAO South Sudan Crop Watch: March-July 2017, South Sudan Crop Watch: August-September 2017; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) South Sudan Regional Update December 2017; WFP/FAO, CFSAM, 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018.

6 In the October 2017 South Sudan Food Security Outlook, FEWS NET noted "minimal or no" "market and trade route activity" on the Kaya-Morobo-Yei road and "some disruption and/or reduced activity" on the Nimule-Juba road due to armed conflict, both key sections of the Western Corridor.

7 WFP/FAO, CFSAM, 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018.

8 FAO March-July 2017; August-September 2017.

9 Consider the following from the 2011 CFSAM from FAO/WFP: "Cassava represents an important food safety net throughout the Green Belt areas in three Equatoria States...the crops are left for the forests to close around them during the third year (24-36 months) when harvesting is completed plant-by-plant as needed...The cassava crop translates to substantial reserves of carbohydrates for consumption from Raja to Kajo-Keji and Yei."

10 Inadequate access to food is interpreted here roughly as a settlement-level version of Moderate and above on the Household Hunger Scale (see Ballard et al, Household Hunger Scale: Indicator Definition and Measurement Guide, August 2011). Phase 2 food consumption is defined in IPC Manual 2.0 as minimally adequate, while Phase 3 food consumption is the beginning of inadequate, assuming this component of the phase definition refers to both caloric deficits and experiences of hunger.

11 The proportions of assessed settlements reporting inadequate access to food, various primary sources of food considered against disruption to livelihoods and the negative trends in cereals production, an inferred relative decline in the number of food groups reported as regularly consumed compared to pre-June 2016, and the absolute number of food groups reported as regularly consumed in assessed settlements collectively suggested food consumption gaps and dietary diversity consistent with Crisis (IPC Phase 3) as the indicative phase for food consumption for Kajo-Keji County. Up to 10% of households may have experienced large food consumption gaps consistent with Emergency (IPC Phase 4).

12 Consumption-based coping analysis supported Crisis (IPC Phase 3) as the indicative phase for food consumption for Kajo-Keji County, with up to 10% of households experiencing large food consumption gaps consistent with Emergency (IPC Phase 4).

13 Overall, livelihoods-based coping, considered against shocks, appeared most consistent with Crisis (IPC Phase 3) as the indicative phase for livelihood change in Kajo-Keji County.

14 Consider the arguments made on the attribution of conflict deaths to hunger in Office of the Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator in South Sudan, 'Crisis Impacts on Households in Unity State, South Sudan, 2014-2015', 2016 and de Waal, Alex, 'More than Malnutrition: Famine as Social Crisis', Interrnational Peace Institute 2017.

15 Nutrition Information System 2017 site reporting, accessed 01/2018.

16 While the AoK indicators in this section were not used to infer indicative phases for nutritional status or excess mortality, low reporting of hunger/malnutrition as a perceived main cause of death, even with a reported lack of access to health and nutrition services and protein and iron consumption, supported an area classification of Crisis (IPC Phase 3).