



Wadakona Rapid Assessment Brief

Manyo County, Upper Nile State, South Sudan, November 2017

Background

Following the beginning of the conflict in South Sudan in 2013, the town of Wadakona, Manyo County, has been contested by various armed actors until March 2015, when it fell under government control. Since then, spillover from fighting in closeby areas of Manyo County has reached Wadakona on occasions, further triggering displacement. In February 2017, fighting reached Wadakona and remaining civilians were evacuated to Renk.¹ Most recently, in June 2017, fighting took place in the nearby towns of Ghabat, Kuek and Kola.²

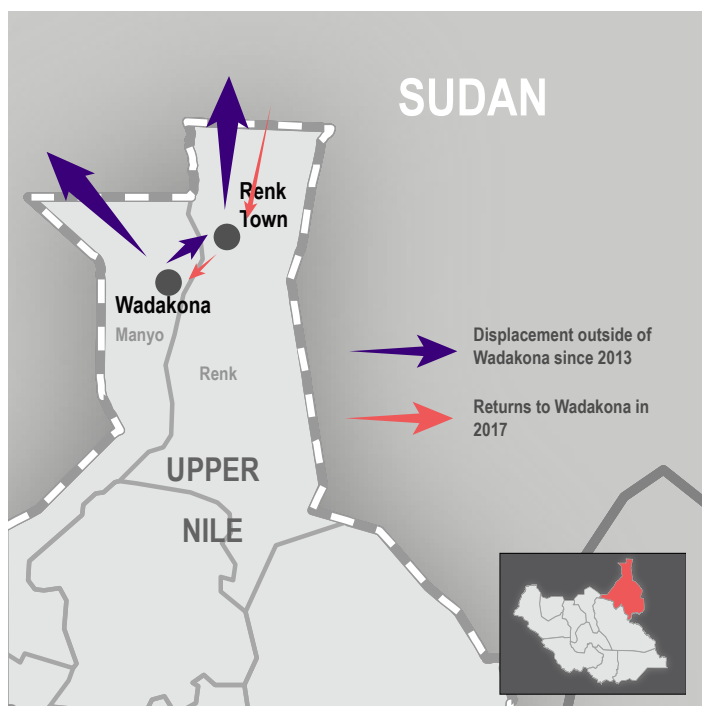
No humanitarian actors have a permanent presence in Wadakona and mobile Food Security and Livelihoods (FSL) and Education support is provided by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) based in Renk who reach Wadakona via speedboat. As a result, civilians have limited access to basic services, especially water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), health and nutrition services.

Following increasing key informants (KI) reports of low access to food and disrupted livelihoods in Manyo County, REACH conducted a rapid assessment in the town of Wadakona. The objective was to understand the scale and severity of humanitarian needs in the area. The assessment was conducted on 9 November 2017 and consisted of 3 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with 23 participants, 5 KI interviews, interaction with community members and general observation of the surrounding areas by foot. Findings should be considered as indicative only.

Population Profile

Local authorities and KIs estimated the pre-crisis population at 30,000 people and the current population at 16,000 people, mostly men. However, FGD participants and KIs estimated the present population to be much lower, around 2,000 people. The vast majority of the

Map 1: Displacement trends



civilian population has left Wadakona toward Sudan or other areas in Upper Nile since 2013 and the few who remained were reported to be mainly elderly people who were not able to travel.

The population of Wadakona was found to be slowly increasing. Of those civilians observed during the visit, many were Arab pastoralists/traders from Sudan. However, KIs reported that civilians from the local community are starting to return (three to five households (HHs) a day) as the area has been calm since July. Most men reported that they had left their families in the refugee camps in Sudan to assess the situation in Wadakona with the view to bring their families back.

In addition, Wadakona reportedly hosts IDPs from areas of Fashoda and Manyo Counties recently affected by clashes including Kodok, Kuek, Megenis and Kaka. However, no reliable estimate of the size of these populations could be collected during the assessment.

Livelihoods

Typical livelihoods

Prior to the crisis the main livelihoods were cultivation and fishing, along with livestock rearing (cows, goats, hens). Those main sources of livelihoods were supplemented by charcoal production and plentiful casual labour opportunities associated with trade.

Shocks

During the crisis, agricultural and fishing tools were reportedly looted or damaged and are no longer accessible. Insecurity caused the displacement of a large proportion of the civilian population and inhibited access to land during the last cultivation cycle (February-September). Moreover, disruption of trade routes from Sudan and lack of financial resources still prevent local communities from purchasing agricultural tools and seeds. Finally, KIs confirmed reports that the Fall Armyworm had devastated part of the little crops that were planted.³

Vulnerability (resilience)

Currently, the main livelihoods in Wadakona are reportedly fishing, production of charcoal, as well as scarce and unsteady casual labour activities such as driving commercial trucks. The few women observed in Wadakona reported to make tea and jewellery to generate income.

Limited gum arabic trade opens up labour possibilities, such as driving trucks, however such opportunities are available in much more limited supply than before the crisis. Some members of the community are able to work on three NGO-supported farms that produce various vegetables such as tomatoes, okra and cucumbers. FGD participants indicated participation in NGO workshops, where small stipends are provided, as one of the main income generating opportunities.

It was reported by all KIs that cultivation of sorghum and maize had not happened during the last cultivation cycle because of a lack of seeds and agricultural tools as well as insecurity when accessing land. Availability of food from HHs' agricultural production is highly limited. Whereas KIs reported that prior to the crisis they used to rely on harvest reserves for three months on average, HHs were reportedly not able to accumulate reserves following the most recent harvest.

All KIs indicated that the main source of livelihood in the area is

Wadakona Rapid Assessment Brief

currently fishing, yet all reported that the community relies only on two fishing boats and two fishing nets – indeed only two fishing embarkations were observed at the riverside.

FGD participants stated that livestock rearing is no longer a source of livelihood in the area due to insecurity, displacement and theft and that most livestock present in the area belongs to the Arab pastoralists.

Coping strategies

Participants in a FGD on coping strategies explained that because casual labour options are scarce, those who find casual labour or who bring back more fish on a given day then share with the community. Therefore, the main coping strategy adopted by HHs is to rely on friends and family by pooling resources together to have more reliable access to food. In addition, men explained that they are now spending their limited savings, albeit cautiously, in days where supply of fish and casual labour opportunities are scarce.

FGD participants reported that in times of especially limited access to livelihoods the men go on long and physically demanding journeys to the forest to cut wood that they sell at the market. Members of the HHs also migrate seasonally to access casual labour activities in neighbouring areas: recently, some men went to northern Renk County to participate in the “simsim” (sesame) harvest (September–October). All participants in the FGD reported that if seeds and tools were available they would cultivate in Wadakona and bring back their families from the refugee camps in Sudan.

Food Availability and Access

With no reported harvest of sorghum or maize, HHs are currently left without food reserves and therefore depend on scarce day-to-day access to income generating activities and fishing. As such, the main sources of food in Wadakona are fishing products and the market.

FGD participants, who were all involved in fishing, reported that yields vary widely, from 2 fishes to up to 60 fishes a day. Access is uneven and reliance on coping strategies varies from one day to the next.

Upon visiting the main Wadakona market, REACH found mostly abandoned shops. Only a few shops were open and a limited supply of the same products that can be found in much greater quantities and variety in Renk was observed (oil, onions, lentils, rice, sorghum, sugar, groundnuts). Dried mudfish was present in small supply as well. Livestock products such as milk are not available at the market and meat is often available but not every day. Supply to Wadakona is limited to a few barges coming from Renk, which explains availability issues. Insecurity in the area may still inhibit movements of suppliers.

While there is a market in Wadakona, a combination of reported increases in prices and scarce income generating activities makes it difficult for HHs to offset the impact of inhibited livelihoods through food purchases. As a result, availability should not be mistaken for access given the lack of income-generating activities reported by KIs.

HHs were reported to eat between one to two meals a day (depending on the quantity of food that was pooled among community members) as a result of food scarcity, and some mentioned occasionally spending days without eating. FGD participants reported that HHs give priority

to young children over adults for food consumption and that typically workers are then prioritized over members of the HH who are not involved in an income generating activity. They also indicated that HHs reduce meal portions and eat less preferred foods.

Health and WASH

Limited access to food is reportedly compounded by a lack of nutrition services and by limited access to health care services, in addition to an absence of clean water supply. These elements tend to contribute to malnutrition.⁴

While there are no recent Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rates available for Wadakona and the nutritional status of children could not be assessed, KIs reported poor health among the population and severe food consumption gaps among children. Currently, individuals requiring immediate nutrition support or intensive health care have to travel across the river to Renk to access NGO clinics. The County Commissioner reported that medical supplies are among the top humanitarian needs in Wadakona. The Primary Health Care Center (PHCC) is reportedly supplied with drugs once every two months but the facility often experiences shortages. Moreover, one ward of the PHCC has been damaged by fighting and the community reported a lack of financial resources to repair or rebuild it.

KIs familiar with health service provision in Wadakona highlighted that waterborne diseases amount to the second most important health concern in the town after malaria. This can be explained by the fact that the population relies solely on untreated water from the Nile. Wadakona had a large water pump before the crisis but it is reportedly no longer functional as it was destroyed by fighting. KIs also reported that over half the population practices open defecation. Lack of clean water and open defecation increase the risks of waterborne diseases and as such make people vulnerable to malnutrition by inducing poor appetite and nutrients mal-absorption.⁵

Conclusion

Disrupted sources of livelihood make civilians in Manyo highly vulnerable to potential external shocks such as renewed insecurity. With a trend for returns of displaced people slowly starting to take form, it is concerning that Manyo County is expected to continue to be affected by armed clashes as some areas near Wadakona remain contested between different groups. While the dry season has not seen major clashes so far, KIs were only cautiously optimistic about future outlook for stability.

HHs are currently not equipped to recover inhibited livelihoods due to a lack of access to tools, equipment and agricultural inputs and thus food access could remain minimal in spite of renewed stability.

Endnotes

1. Radio Tamazuj. Civilians evacuated from Wadakona after clashes: official. 2 February 2017.
2. Eye Radio. SPLA and opposition forces clash in Upper Nile. 13 June 2017.
3. World Vision International. Special report on Armyworm infestation of crop fields in some of World Vision South Sudan operational locations. 4 August 2017.
4. UNICEF. Nutrition - WASH Toolkit Guide for Practical Joint Actions. 2016.
5. Ibid.