



# Northern Bahr el Ghazal Market Assessment

Aweil North, East and West Counties, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State, South Sudan, April 2019

## Introduction

As cash is increasingly considered as a delivery modality in the South Sudan response, there is a growing need for humanitarian organizations and decision makers to understand market dynamics. While residents of Aweil North, Aweil East and Aweil West counties are heavily market dependent, relatively little is known about the region's supply routes and market structures.

To fill this information gap, REACH carried out a rapid market assessment in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, which consisted of 10 focus group discussion (FGDs) with trade unions, 5 FGDs with consumers, additional informal key informant (KI) interviews with traders, local authorities and humanitarian partners, as well as direct observation. Directly assessed marketplaces include Aweil, Wanyjok, Gok-Machar, Nyamlel and Wedweil. These locations were chosen because of their importance to the overall market system in the region, and to adequately represent various sub-systems that exist within the region. Primary data collection took place from 1 to 10 April 2019.

## Key Findings

- **Market functionality in Aweil East, West and North counties is heavily influenced by season and location.** Rural markets often lack capital and access to the same diversity of goods as urban markets, particularly in the wet season, resulting in reduced market functionality for rural households who depend upon these marketplaces.
- **Informal trade routes from Sudan have a high influence on the supply of goods into the Northern Bahr el Ghazal region, particularly in the dry season.** This trade is supplemented by trade from Abyei,<sup>1</sup> Uganda and local production.
- **For rural households, markets are not only used to purchase items but they are also relying on them to sell goods and generate cash income.** A shock on the supply side may have serious adverse effects on household finances and the ability to meet basic needs.
- As reported by KIs, income from livelihood activities have not kept pace with an increase in food commodity prices. **Real income has thus been in decline throughout the region since 2018**, with one KI reporting that the price of sorghum had doubled in comparison to the income generated from selling firewood in this period. Due to high market dependence in the Northern Bahr el Ghazal region, households financial resources are increasingly stretched.

## Context and Background

Northern Bahr el Ghazal is located in the north-west of South Sudan. The region is relatively remote, connected to Sudan predominantly through the contested region of Abyei<sup>1</sup>, and to southern South Sudan through Wau Town. Due to their proximity, markets in the region are heavily reliant upon imports from Sudan, and are impacted by seasonal changes which define both the routes of travel and forms of trade.

Farming is a common livelihood activity in the region, with local production and sale of staple foods increasing rural market food supplies in the harvest season. Most of the population live in rural settings, with only few living in urban areas such as Aweil Town. According to FGD participants in Aweil East, West and North counties, the overall population are highly dependent upon markets.

## Market structure

The market network in Aweil East, West and North counties is complex. The individual characteristics of marketplaces differ as they vary in terms of size, diversity of available goods, accessibility and supply routes.

### Regional structure

The main marketplace in Aweil Town (Aweil West County) is the largest one in the region. Other large marketplaces are found in the county headquarters of Wanyjok (Aweil East) and Gok-Machar (Aweil North), but also in Nyamlel, Ariath (Aweil North) and Warawar (Aweil East) counties. While wholesalers in these large marketplaces supply traders in nearby markets to a certain extent, demand mainly comes from retailers and consumers in their immediate surroundings.

Aweil market only partially supplies the region and mostly serves rural marketplaces nearby. Most large traders in rural marketplaces do not buy stocks from Aweil, but from the supply markets in Khartoum, Ameit (Abyei), East Darfur (Sudan), Kampala and Juba.

**Figure 1: Livelihood and Seasonal Calendar for Northern Bahr el Ghazal<sup>2</sup>**

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Maize harvest								✓	✓			
Sorghum harvest period										✓	✓	
Fishing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Labour peak				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Cattle milk peak							✓	✓	✓	✓		
High staple prices					✓	✓	✓					
Wet season					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Lean Season					✓	✓	✓					

✓ : current

1. Abyei is an area of special administrative status disputed by Sudan and South Sudan

2. FEWSNET Livelihood Zones Map, FEWSNET, August 2018.

## Box 1: Market days

An important characteristic of marketplaces in the Northern Bahr el Ghazal region is the concept of market days (*yom suk*). According to KIs, all the major marketplaces in the region have market days, which take place once per week on a designated day that is well known to the local communities. During market days, activity in marketplaces is typically heightened with an increased presence of buyers and vendors alike. The number of traders may reportedly double or triple. Beyond the regular vendors, two additional categories of traders are present during market day: mobile traders selling non-food items (NFIs) and vendors of locally sourced goods.

On normal days of the week, people from nearby villages may go to the local marketplace to buy basic items for their every day needs (e.g. sorghum, groundnuts, soap). On market day, however, people from the wider region reportedly flock to the marketplace to buy a more diverse set of items, including NFIs and building materials. While many people do not go to the marketplace every day, many plan visits on market days.

Most of the largest marketplaces in the region are located near the main roads along the Aweil, Wanyjok and Gok-Machar triangle, which is where most of the population is concentrated (see Map 1). However, satellite marketplaces, which tend to be smaller in size and less accessible, exist throughout the region and play a critical role in supplying basic commodities to rural communities.

Market functionality and the availability of goods vary substantially between urban and rural marketplaces. As the largest city in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, Aweil is a hub with a lot of trading activity

throughout the year. Many large wholesalers and retailers are present in the main market. These traders reportedly trade high volumes of goods and have enough capital to restock in large quantities, which allows them to balance out temporary bottlenecks in the supply chain and assures ample supply of goods throughout the year.

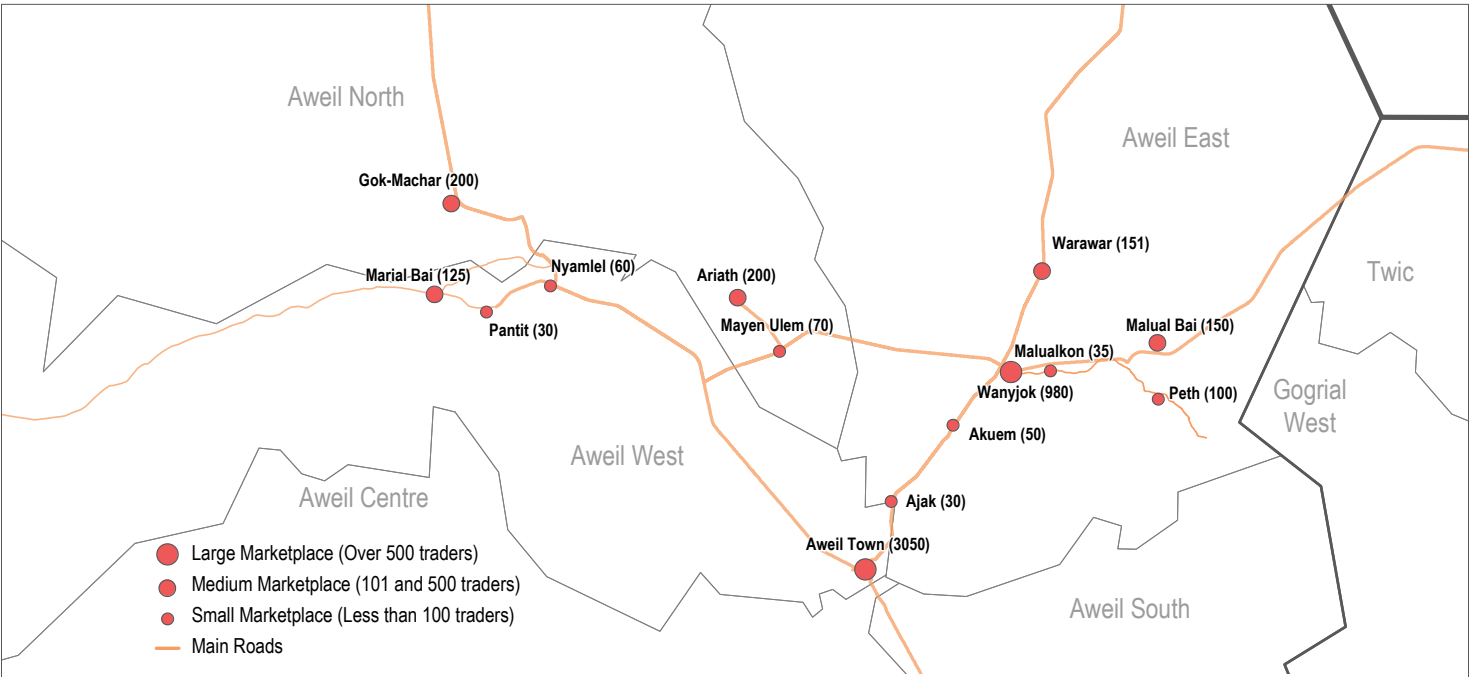
According to KIs, the main marketplace in Aweil has the most stable range of goods in Northern Bahr el Ghazal. The range of goods that is sold in Aweil is much more diverse than in rural marketplaces. Not only is a wide range of dry food available (wheat flour, rice, lentils), but NFIs (cooking utensils, clothing, building materials, school materials), medicine, fruits and vegetables are also sold. This diversity in the marketplace is maintained even in the wet season as most items remain available throughout the year.

Aweil's main market is distinct from rural marketplaces and can therefore not be taken as a proxy for the overall market system in the region. Since the vast majority of the population in Northern Bahr el Ghazal lives in rural settings, most people are reliant on rural marketplaces to buy basic goods.

## Types of traders

Several different types of traders engage with marketplaces throughout the region, each with their own characteristics and critical role in the market system. While most traders can broadly be categorised into one of the following groups, many fall somewhere in between as traders vary significantly in terms of sales volumes, trading capacity, access to capital, integration into local trade networks and the degree to which they are affected by seasonal constraints.

Map 1: Main marketplaces in Aweil East, West and North



This map does not include all satellite markets.

## Wholesalers

Wholesalers are important enablers of the market system, reportedly bringing the majority of goods into the market; both from abroad and within the region. Wholesalers are typically large traders, with ample access to capital and means of transport. While some large wholesalers in Aweil can afford to hire their own truck to resupply with, according to KIs most wholesalers, especially in rural areas, pool resources with other traders. Many wholesalers are well connected to the Sudanese supply markets in Khartoum and supply goods to small retailers in a specific geographic area.

## Large retailers

Large retailers are primarily characterised by their relatively high sales volume, but differentiate themselves in many ways from their smaller counterparts. Similar to wholesalers, large retailers can reportedly resupply from markets abroad or nearby border markets. According to KIs, it is very common among large traders in the region to pool resources and place orders jointly with other traders to split transportation costs.

Large traders conduct their businesses throughout the year and tend to have shops in more permanent structures than smaller traders. They typically have better access to capital, due to their higher trade volumes, and are therefore able to restock in larger quantities and with larger vehicles. The ability to restock in higher quantities not only allows larger traders to restock less frequently, but also to stock up before the wet season starts when road conditions worsen - an option that smaller traders normally cannot afford. This leaves large traders less prone to shortages.

## Small retailers

As opposed to the large retailers, small retailers often do not have the means to buy from distant supply markets. Instead, they resupply from a local wholesaler. Some conduct their business throughout the year, especially those in urban settings such as Aweil, while small traders in rural areas often limit their trading activity to the dry season when they can more easily restock. According to KIs, many small traders temporarily cease trading during the wet season and focus on cultivating their fields. As a result, the number of traders in many rural marketplaces reportedly shrinks in the wet season.

## Petty traders

Even smaller in size than the small traders are the petty traders. Though their trade volume is reportedly very low, they tend to be numerous, especially during market days. According to KIs, petty trade is a relevant livelihood activity in the region. Such traders generally do not have any shops to sell from, nor do they have a permanent spot within the marketplace.

Two types of petty traders can reportedly be found. (1) Traders selling their own harvests of sorghum and groundnuts. These traders are reportedly found in the market from November to April. Once their stocks are depleted, they cease trading to pursue other

livelihood activities. (2) The second type of petty traders sells locally produced items, such as firewood, poles, alcohol and wild leaves. This is reportedly a very common livelihood activity among the local community with large numbers of this type of petty trader present on market day.

## Mobile traders

Mobile traders typically source their goods from a wholesaler in Aweil Town and then reportedly move on motorcycles from marketplace to marketplace depending on where market day is taking place. While permanent retailers in a marketplace tend to focus on food items and the most basic NFIs, mobile traders typically sell a more wide range of NFIs, such as cooking utensils and clothing. According to KIs, due to the bad road conditions, mobile traders are often forced to reduce their trading activities on a seasonal basis. As a result, communities that rely on rural marketplaces reportedly have less access to NFIs during the wet season.

## Supply routes

The region is supplied through four different channels: (1) through the Sudanese market via various informal supply routes and unofficial border crossings, (2) a legitimate route through the Sudanese market via Ameit (Abyei), (3) through the Ugandan market via Kampala and Juba, and (4) through local production.

## Informal trade routes

Inflows of goods from Sudan through the informal trade routes are crucial to the functionality of markets in assessed areas of Northern Bahr el Ghazal during the dry season. As the border between Sudan and South Sudan has never officially opened to trade since the separation in 2011, informal trade routes from Sudan are reportedly vital for the functionality of markets.

According to KIs, measures have increasingly been put in place to actively curtail trade towards South Sudan since 2015. This policy shift has remained one-sided, and informal cross-border trade has continued to be legal in South Sudan. In the absence of border demarcation and enforcement, informal trade has flourished and the volume of trade has largely replaced the loss of previously legitimate trade routes between Northern Bahr el Ghazal and Sudan's South Darfur and East Darfur regions.

The degree to which traders throughout assessed areas of Northern Bahr el Ghazal rely on informal supply reportedly varies depending on their geographic location as well as seasonal factors. In Aweil North County, virtually all trade is informal in nature during dry season. In Aweil West County about half of all goods in the market are reportedly supplied via informal routes, while informal trade is reportedly less common in Aweil East County due to the relative proximity to the Ameit market in Abyei. In the wet season, informal trade activities are reportedly drastically reduced due to bad road conditions and flooding.

# Northern Bahr el Ghazal Market Assessment

There are two main informal trade routes to Northern Bahr el Ghazal: From South Darfur (Sudan) to Aweil North and (2) West Kordofan (Sudan) via East Darfur (Sudan) to Aweil East. Other routes have reportedly been used in the past, particularly when there was conflict in East Darfur.

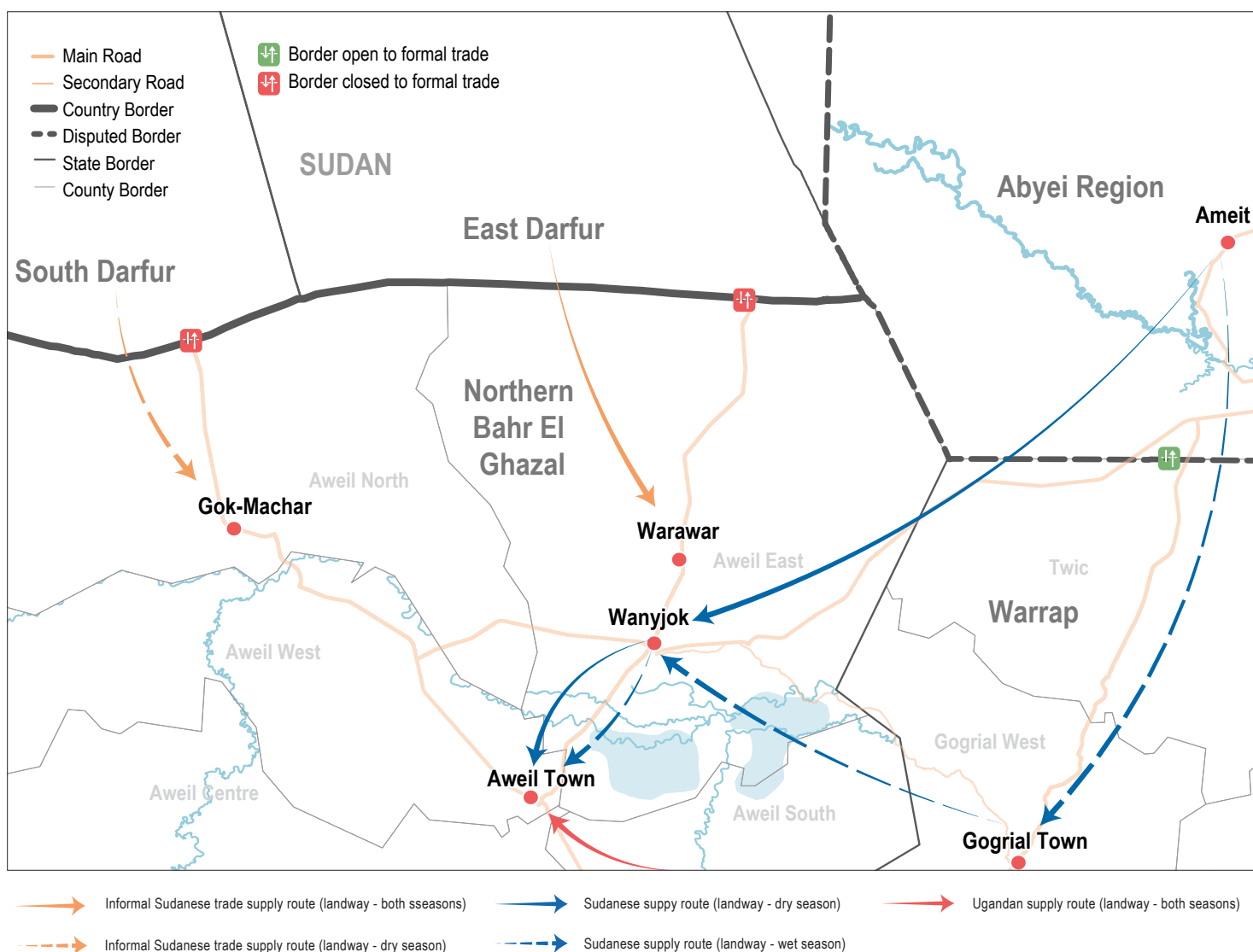
The movement of goods along the informal trade routes involves considerable security risks: the traders, all of whom are Sudanese, reportedly face physical assaults, prosecution and confiscation of goods in Sudan if caught. According to one KI, there is a credible risk of losing all of one's goods to the armed groups operating in the area, which acts as deterrent for some traders due to the severe financial consequences. The traders that do engage in informal trade reportedly drive in the dark and through the bush on unofficial routes to avoid armed groups on the Sudanese border.

## Factors impacting informal trade

In the wet season, the use of the informal trade routes reduces drastically due to the heavy rains, the flooding of Kiir river and the lack of adequate infrastructure. During that time, the legitimate Aweit and Juba routes largely compensate for the reduction in informal trade activity. While the informal routes to Aweil North close during the wet season, the route into Aweil East reportedly remains open for small vehicles. However, trade on this route is reduced during that time as the poor condition of the partially flooded roads create major transport challenges.

The extent to which security threats affect informal trade routes is disputed among traders. KIs noted that the presence of armed actors on the Sudanese border has reduced the movement of goods along the informal trade routes, particularly since early 2019. The potential financial and safety risks of being stopped are deemed too high for some to consider this route. However, other traders reportedly continue to move goods across the border, even in periods of heightened insecurity.

Map 2: Supply routes





**Figure 2: Importance of informal trade on market supply**

County	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Aweil North												
Aweil East												
Aweil West												

Importance is denoted by shade: from high importance (dark red) to low importance (light pink)

## Abyei route

The Ameit route is critical for supplies from the Sudanese market and a key route for the entire Northern Bahr el Ghazal region. It is reportedly particularly important to residents of Aweil East, who depend on it to a larger degree than other areas in the region due to its relative proximity.

From Khartoum, goods are reportedly trucked to the Sudanese border with Abyei, from where they reach Ameit. Ameit market is located roughly 10km north of Abyei Town in the Abyei region. Abyei is the only connection between Sudan and South Sudan where traders can officially cross over legally - both from Sudan to Abyei and from Abyei to South Sudan. No other border crossing has remained open since South Sudan's separation in 2011.

The Khartoum-Ameit road reportedly remains open throughout the year. The road conditions allow for trucks to bring in large shipments to Ameit market, even in the wet season. Goods are then typically sold at Ameit market to traders from Northern Bahr el Ghazal. In some instances, traders from Aweil Town reportedly

### Box 2: Road access and market functionality

The importance of road access for market functionality is well illustrated by the case of Mayom Angok. As a remote settlement near Lol river in Aweil North, roughly 20km east of the county capital Gok-Machar, Mayom Angok has a marketplace that used to face severe supply constraints, reportedly attributable to the poor road infrastructure. As a result, traders often struggled to resupply in wet season. By August each year, the marketplace was typically cut off and trading would almost come to a halt. Consumers would reportedly walk to Gok-Machar to buy basic goods.

In 2018, a road was built, connecting Mayom Angok with Gok-Machar. The opening of the road has had major positive effects on market functionality. In an area where access routes would typically be flooded during the wet season, the new road has improved access, which allows traders to resupply in Gok-Machar with bodas and bicycles, even during the height of the wet season. Though some supply challenges remain, households now have access to a nearby marketplace to buy food during lean season.

**Figure 3: Seasonal Calendar of Supply Routes**

Supply route	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Illicit routes	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)	✓
Abyei	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Uganda	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)	(✓)	✓
Local Produce	✓	✓	✓	✓	(✓)	×	×	×	×	(✓)	✓	✓

✓ : open normally (✓) : open irregularly × : unavailable

order supplies from Khartoum directly, without supplying through traders in Ameit market.

There are two different routes from Ameit to Aweil Town. In the dry season, transporters drive from Ameit directly to Wanyjok, Aweil East, and then to marketplaces in the area. In the wet season, however, this road reportedly becomes impassable for larger vehicles and drivers cross into Gogrial West County, Warrap State instead. Once they reach Gogrial Town they head north to Wanyjok from where they reach Aweil and marketplaces further to the west. The drive from Khartoum to Aweil reportedly takes about four to five days. From Ameit to Aweil it takes reportedly one day in dry season, and two to three days in wet season. Trucks and cars frequently get stuck in wet season due to poor road conditions, which may cause delays and additional costs (e.g. payment to trucks for recuperating stuck vehicles).

According to KIs, transportation costs on both routes are high. Along the road from Ameit to Northern Bahr el Ghazal, there are between 10 and 15 checkpoints on the way, each of which charge fees for passage. Transport costs (price of truck and fuel) from Ameit to Aweil are reportedly around 220,000 SSP per truck in dry season, and 300,000 SSP in wet season. On top of that, around 170,000 SSP per truck is reportedly charged at various checkpoints along the way in the dry season and 190,000 SSP in the wet season. There is also a tax on goods in Sudan, where 5,000 SDG (roughly 110 USD) is charged at each checkpoint.

As the other supply routes close or become less functional, and stocks from local production typically become depleted at the time of the onset of the wet season, the Abyei route is critical for the continuity of market functionality in the region in wet season.

## Ugandan supply

While the majority of goods sold in local marketplaces reportedly originate from Sudan, goods are further supplemented with items from the Ugandan market. Wholesalers in the region occasionally restock from suppliers based in Kampala or Juba (which in turn derive goods from Kampala). Goods are reportedly transported to the region via Rumbek and Wau.

According to KIs, the Ugandan supply increases in importance during the wet season as the informal routes become impassable and even supplies through the Abyei route become less regular.

# Northern Bahr el Ghazal Market Assessment

While the distance from Kampala to Aweil is roughly the same as the distance from Khartoum to Kampala, the Uganda route is considerably more challenging.

Crime and looting along the road from Nimule to Juba, and from Juba to Aweil, are common. Additionally, road conditions deteriorate in wet season, making it difficult for large trucks to transport goods on the Ugandan route. While a tarmac road connects Kampala with Nimule and Juba, the Juba-Aweil stretch consists of dirt roads with large potholes that are prone to flooding.

In addition to the bad road conditions, transporters are reportedly charged fees at checkpoints. According to FGD participants, border controls in Nimule charge 240,000 SSP per truck, while the official checkpoints in Rumbek, Wau and Aweil reportedly charge 145,000 SSP per truck.

## Local production

Around Northern Bahr el Ghazal, most people typically plant sorghum, groundnuts and sesame, which are staple foods in the region, both for their own consumption, but also for income generation. In many cases, people migrate seasonally to areas with better farming conditions, depending on the fertility of the land, access to water and protection from flooding.

Following the harvest of sorghum and groundnuts in October and early November, local traders typically buy stocks from producers in the region. Traders with cultural ties to Sudan normally keep relying on supplies from Sudan, as they reportedly tend to be less connected to local producers.

According to KIs, local supplies reach the market through two channels. Permanent traders that run their shops throughout the year buy the majority of their sorghum and groundnut stocks from large-scale farmers, as well as a substantial amount from small-scale farmers. The latter group typically consists of regular households that engage in farming as one of many different seasonal livelihood activities. The amounts they produce are often too low to be sold to traders. Small-scale farmers therefore reportedly sell directly to consumers in marketplaces during the dry season.

Since a large portion of local production is reportedly used for own consumption, local supplies normally only last until April/May. By then, the market supply typically shifts back to supplies from the Sudanese (and to a lesser degree Ugandan) markets, and small-scale farmers selling their produce disappear from marketplaces.

## Market Functionality

### Prices

Besides availability, prices are a critical indicator of market functionality and depend on various factors. Fundamentally, retail prices in the region (i.e. the prices at which goods are sold to consumers) are restricted by the prices set in the supply markets

in Khartoum, Kiir Adem, Ameit, Juba and Kampala. On top of that, transportation costs, taxation, and finally demand and supply factors are reflected in retail prices.

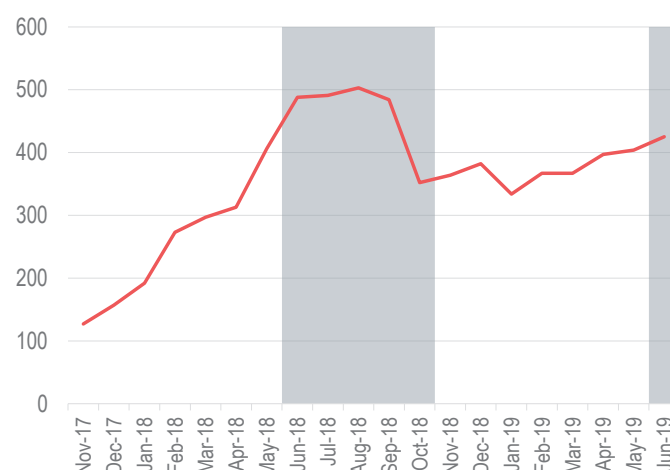
Across the region, there is some difference in sorghum prices according to quotations gathered by REACH during the assessment. While a malwa<sup>2</sup> of sorghum reportedly costed around 450 SSP in marketplaces in Aweil West as well as Aweil Town in 2019, it cost only 400 SSP in Aweil North. Sugar, groundnut and soap prices, however, did not show the same discrepancy.

In most marketplaces, there are reportedly no price regulations, and traders are free to set prices as they choose. In a few locations, however, prices are regulated. In Wanyjok, the main marketplace in Aweil East, all prices are reportedly regulated by the Chamber of Commerce, which ratifies prices on a regular basis after consulting with trader representatives. The Chamber of Commerce reportedly aims to keep prices within a reasonable range, and to ensure they do not rise uncontrollably throughout the region. It is unclear, however, to what extent these regulations are enforced. While some traders confirmed the existence of a regimented price system others claimed that they were free to set prices as they wished. Price regulations are also in place in Marial Bai and Pamat (Aweil North), where the local trade unions set prices for locally produced food items (e.g. sorghum, groundnuts, sesame).

Prices are further determined by demand and supply. Prices tend to fall as demand decreases or supply increases. Supplies in the Northern Bahr el Ghazal region are largely driven by the seasonal supply chain dynamics previously outlined. During the wet season, some supply routes are reportedly suspended while others become disrupted due to bad road conditions, so supply tends to be lower.

In rural areas, where people commonly engage in subsistence farming, demand for food items changes seasonally. Most households draw from their own stocks following the harvest of

**Figure 4: Sorghum price over time in Northern Bahr el Ghazal<sup>3</sup>**



The price trends of a Malwa (3.5kg) of white sorghum in Northern Bahr el Ghazal, with grey areas denoting the wet season as reported by FGD participants.

<sup>2</sup> A unit of measurement for grain used throughout South Sudan, its content fluctuates by trader and by region though is typically between two and four litres

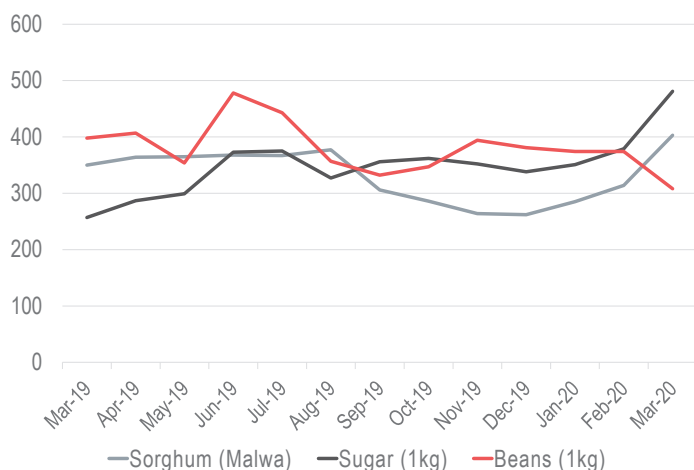
<sup>3</sup> Climis Dashboard, FAO, <https://climis-southsudan.org/markets>.

sorghum and groundnuts in October. However, many reportedly run out of stocks by February, and almost all by May. Thereafter, they become fully market dependent, which increases the overall demand during lean season. The consolidated effect of the previously outlined demand and supply dynamics results in the price fluctuation depicted in Figure 4. Typically, the price of a malwa of white sorghum grain trends upwards during lean season, as market dependency increases and supply becomes limited.

Prices in Aweil East, West and North have been rising substantially since 2013. The depreciation of the SSP, driven by the conflict, the reduction in oil output and a lack of foreign reserves, reportedly continues to drive prices up since the vast majority of goods sold are imported from abroad. While a malwa of white sorghum grain (*feterita*) cost 19 SSP in June 2013, the price in June 2019 was 368 SSP on average in Aweil East, West and North.<sup>4</sup> These price increases have reportedly had ramifications for households, who have increasingly been losing purchasing power. Over the years, the price increases have had cumulative effects on households ability to derive basic goods from the market, leaving them more vulnerable.

As reported by KIs, financial constraints are the main limiting factor limiting access to markets as income from livelihood activities has not been kept up with the increase in food commodity prices since 2013. For instance, one KI reported that while she was able to sell two bundles of firewood per day last year and earn 100 SSP, which would buy 1 malwa of sorghum, she is able to generate 200 SSP this year. With the simultaneous increase in sorghum prices, she can now only afford half a malwa with the same amount of firewood sold. Other KIs reported similar patterns related to selling of alcohol and wild foods, as well as other livelihood activities involving natural resources. This loss in purchasing power has reportedly affected welfare throughout the region as household's resources are increasingly stretched.

**Figure 5: Food prices over time since March 2019 in Aweil North, East and West counties<sup>4</sup>**



4. Climis Dashboard, FAO, <https://climis-southsudan.org/markets>.

5. Area of Knowledge (AoK), is a monthly data collection with the aim of monitoring the humanitarian situation in South Sudan. The AoK terms of reference can be accessed [online](#).

When asked how they would cope if the current situation continued to worsen and if prices remained unaffordably high in the long run, many KIs responded that they would consider migrating with their households. Some indicated that they would move to refugee camps in Sudan, where they hope they would get assistance.

Since April 2019, prices have somewhat stabilised, with the average price of a malwa of sorghum in Aweil East, West and North counties increasing by 350 to 403 SSP between March 2019 to March 2020, with the wet season not causing as much a disruption to prices as reported in 2018 (see Figure 5). An upward spike is reported in March 2020 in sorghum and sugar prices, possibly due to a limited supply of imported goods due to heightened border restrictions after the emergence of the Coronavirus pandemic.<sup>4</sup>

## Decreased market functionality in wet season

Due to the aforementioned seasonal aspect to the accessibility of supply routes, market functionality reportedly decreases in wet season, particularly in rural areas, while the activity of Aweil market is reportedly more stable throughout the year. Many of the local traders in rural areas reported that they struggle to resupply during wet season, and thus decide to seasonally leave their trading business and to focus on cultivation of their fields instead. It is common among rural marketplaces that the number of active traders reduces by half in wet season.

Rural traders reportedly lack the capital for larger orders, and as a result are rarely able to stock up before supply routes break down. While large traders in the main marketplaces only restock on a bi-weekly or monthly basis, small traders in rural areas have to restock multiple times per week to sustain their businesses. As a result, supply bottlenecks can reportedly cause shortages in rural marketplaces within days. The local population is reportedly most affected by these fluctuations, as they either face exorbitantly high prices or may not be able to find certain basic items.

Any future disruption to the main supply routes may cause a rapid decline in market functionality and further price increases. Sudanese supplies, which account for the largest market share, have been fairly stable but remain vulnerable. The Sudanese government reportedly continues to regard cross-border trade from South Darfur as informal. The only official trade route to South Sudan crosses through the Abyei region, which remains an area with high political tension and volatile markets. Going forward, the key supply chains need to be closely monitored.

## Demand side

### Market dependence

For most communities, markets are critical to meet basic needs. Even though subsistence farming is widespread throughout the Aweil East, West and North counties, most households depend on markets to mitigate food production gaps. According to REACH Area of Knowledge (AoK)<sup>5</sup> data, 99% of all assessed settlements



**Figure 6: Most Commonly Bought Food and Non-food Items**

## Food Items:



Sorghum



Sugar



Salt

## Non-food Items:



Soap



Mosquito net



Jerrycans

reported that most members of the community commonly derived food from markets in April 2019. Virtually all consumer KIs reported that they depended on markets. Households from urban areas, such as Aweil, Wanyok and Gok-Machar, often do not engage in farming activities and their market dependence reportedly remains high throughout the year.

Reported increases in market dependence during the lean season coincides with the previously described seasonal upward spikes in market prices. As a result, households that are already vulnerable as their food stocks are depleted, are additionally faced with a price shock, which lowers their purchasing power and thus creates additional vulnerabilities during the lean season.

The most commonly bought food items are sorghum, sugar, groundnuts and salt, both in the dry and wet seasons. Sought-after NFIs are soap and jerrycans, and mosquito nets during the wet season. Most interviewed consumer KIs indicated that they spend the majority of their resources on the most basic food items. In most cases, NFIs are bought on an irregular basis and only after basic food needs are met. Sorghum was widely named as the item that households would give up last in case of a sudden market shock and additional price increases.

Spending patterns in urban areas differ from those reported in rural areas. While many rural households largely restrict their

consumption to sorghum and sugar, urban households tend to buy a more diverse basket of goods. This may be due to the fact that some urban households are relatively better off.

## Market access

### Income generating livelihood activities

Since the October harvest typically lasts only a few months (December for some households, March or April for households with better crop stores) households reportedly engage in a variety of market-based livelihood activities to generate a cash income, and to sustain financial market access. Over the year, income from such activities often accounts for a larger share of a household's food consumption than stocks from own production.

Livelihoods activities that were frequently named in consumer KI interviews and FGDs were casual labor (in construction, brick production and farming) in urban settings, and selling of natural resources in rural settings. Typical rural activities include collection of firewood and wild foods, as well as poles and dry grass. Production of local alcohol and selling of livestock (chicken and goats) were also frequently named.

All of these activities are reliant on a functioning market system, as households need to sell the gathered or produced commodities in a marketplace. Therein lies an often neglected key aspect of how rural households interact with markets: not only do they use markets to buy commodities (demand side), but they crucially also require them to sell goods and to generate cash income (supply side), which they in turn use to buy goods. A shock on the supply side may have serious adverse effects on household finances and the ability to meet basic needs.

### Physical market access

Market penetration is high in the Northern Bahr el Ghazal region and, as discussed, marketplaces are found even in remote, rural areas. As a result, according to REACH Area of Knowledge (AoK) <sup>6</sup> data, 97% of settlements across Aweil East, West and North had physical access to a marketplace in April.

According to REACH AoK data, only 60% of settlements in the region have access to a marketplace within half a day's travel. Thus, any marketplace visit reportedly involves a considerable amount of effort and takes up a lot of time spent unproductively

### Box 3: Cash vs. in-kind assistance

Perceptions of cash assistance differed in urban compared to rural locations. FGD participants in Aweil Town pointed to the benefits of both cash as well as in-kind assistance, and where split as to which modality they would prefer.

KIs in rural areas, however, typically preferred in-kind assistance over cash. Many highlighted that they would primarily use cash assistance on food (sorghum) anyway. Others stated that they may be tempted to use cash on other, less essential goods, or that the money may be stolen. Some were furthermore concerned that the cash assistance may not be sufficient and that the rising prices would reduce its effectiveness. Instead, KIs in rural areas indicated that they would rather have a stable supply of food through in-kind distributions.

<sup>6</sup> Area of Knowledge (AoK), REACH. The AoK terms of reference can be accessed [online](#).



while not engaging in any livelihood activity. During wet season, the reduced capacity of more remote markets reportedly forces the local population to visit larger marketplaces, which are further away and requires significantly more effort and time to reach.

Consumers generally reported feeling safe accessing marketplaces. Only a few KIs reported that women, who are typically in charge of marketplace visits within a household, have been harassed while travelling to a market place. KIs highlighted that even though markets are typically accessible within walking distance, particularly vulnerable groups within communities for which marketplace access is limited remain. Such groups namely include the elderly and the disabled, who often rely on neighbours to fetch basic items for them.

## Conclusion

The dependence upon markets for food and income generation in Aweil North, Aweil East and Aweil West continues to make populations in these areas susceptible to shocks in supply and price of goods. The region's supplies are highly reliant upon imports from Sudan and border closures or increased security concerns for traders along the Sudanese border may have a serious effect on food security, especially in the wet season.

As has been highlighted, there is a stark difference between urban and rural market supply lines, as rural populations are at higher risk to market shocks, particularly in the wet season when markets become less functional due to a lack of local supplies and reduced availability of imported goods. Due to these circumstances humanitarian assistance could be applied to increase capital for traders in rural markets, as this would enable traders to stock more goods before the start of the wet season, maintaining access to goods for a longer period of time in rural areas.

Along with supply side issues, KIs highlighted a lack of income as one of the main limiting factors to market usage in the region. Commodity prices have increased in relation to income generated from livelihood activities, suggesting that humanitarian assistance addressing financial needs could be impactful in addressing market barriers for vulnerable households.