

Situation Overview: Unity State, South Sudan

December 2015

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Introduction

This situation overview examines the humanitarian situation in Unity State, South Sudan, where over half a million individuals are estimated to be internally displaced, as of December 2015 (IOM).¹ Many of these areas are largely inaccessible to humanitarian actors due to ongoing conflict and logistical constraints, resulting in a lack of comprehensive knowledge of the situation outside major displacement sites. In particular, this study focuses on the situation in villages or host communities from which many individuals have fled, but where some families remain.

Findings presented in this document are drawn from primary data collected from key informants between September and November 2015, and have been triangulated with available secondary data.

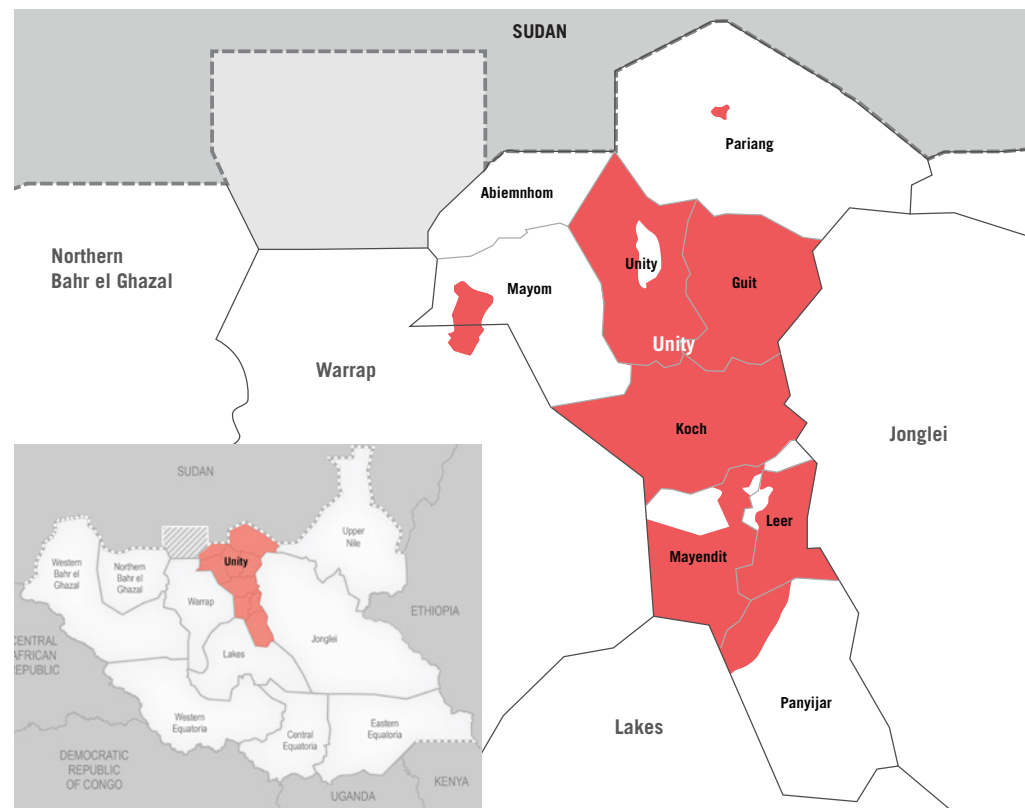
Context

Conflict in Unity State broke out in late December 2013, only days after fighting began in the capital, Juba. Unity State stretches from the Sudanese border in the north, towards Lakes State in the South, and includes many of the country's oil fields. Despite numerous ceasefires since January 2013, conflict has continued in Unity. Over the past 23 months, most of its nine counties have continued to be contested.² As a result, Unity state has been one of the worst affected by the conflict, and

currently hosts the highest reported numbers of internally displaced persons. Communities in Unity have suffered not only as a result of clashes between the two main parties to the conflict—the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army-in Opposition (SPLA-IO)—but also due to violent cattle raids and the presence of other armed groups, including cross-border actors.³

In 2015 alone, Unity state has seen intermittent clashes around the state capital, Bentiu, spreading south between January and May towards the counties of Guit, Koch and finally Leer. By the end of May, ongoing conflict had disrupted the planting season, leaving fears of a lower than usual annual harvest, and having caused the displacement of an estimated 100,000 people.⁴ Simultaneously, conflict spilled over from neighbouring Lakes state, affecting communities in Mayendit and Panyijar in the south. In late June, cattle herders raided villages in Guit, Koch and then Leer, reportedly burning shelters and supplies, targeting civilians, and leading to further displacement.⁵

Since then, ongoing insecurity is reported to have caused further hardship to communities in central Unity, and has hampered the delivery of humanitarian assistance to those who remain or return. With aid actors forced to evacuate or relocate, and the cancellation of numerous



Map 1: Unity State location and assessment coverage

rapid response missions, humanitarian access is becoming increasingly restricted.⁶ As a result, up to date information about affected communities is becoming increasingly difficult to access, affecting the ability of aid actors to effectively plan and advocate for assistance. This study examines the situation in 38 of a total of 82 communities in Unity State, using information provided by a network of 391 key informants. These communities are located

1. IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix, as of 11 December 2015
2. Small Arms Survey, Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA) for Sudan and South Sudan Unity State, July 2015
3. Ibid.
4. USAID, South Sudan Crisis Factsheet #8, 29 May 2015
5. Small Arms Survey, Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA) for Sudan and South Sudan Unity State, July 2015
6. Medecins Sans Frontieres, South Sudan: Rape and killing in Unity state, December 2015; USAID, see note 4.

METHODOLOGY

In order to provide an overview of the situation in largely inaccessible areas, the study uses primary data provided by key informants, who periodically report on the situation in their area of origin or pre-displacement location. The study uses REACH's "Area of Origin" methodology, first developed to monitor the Syria crisis from neighbouring countries.

Information for this study was collected from key informants in Bentiu Protection of Civilians (PoC) site, Rubkona County, between September and November 2015; and from islands in Panyijar County in October 2015.

A two-stage methodology was employed, beginning with the identification of key informants and participatory mapping, followed by in-depth interviews with selected participants to understand the current situation in their areas of origin.

During the first stage, potential participants were identified from records of new arrivals kept by camp management. Based on information about their area of origin, subsequent location(s), and level of contact with family of friends remaining there, each participant was matched with a geographic area about which s/he could provide information. During the second stage, key informant interviews were conducted with selected participants. A standardised survey was used to collect information about the situation and needs of the remaining host community and any displaced persons residing there.

within eight of Unity's nine counties: Guit, Koch, Leer, Mayendit, Mayom, Panyijar, Pariang, and Rubkona, as shown on Map 1.

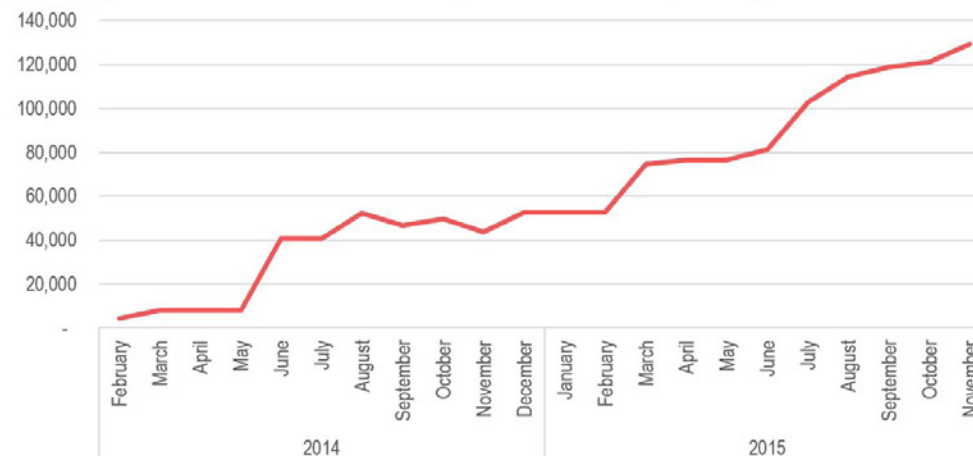
Throughout this document, findings are triangulated with primary data from assessments and intentions surveys conducted by REACH in 2015 in IDP sites, together with secondary data from a variety of humanitarian information sources including the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), Initial Rapid Needs Assessments (IRNAs), and agency needs assessments.

Due to the purposive selection of key informants, data presented here should not be considered as statistically representative of the population at either county or state level. Rather, findings are intended to convey broad themes and trends and identify key areas of humanitarian need.

Key findings

This section provides an overview of key findings related to the characteristics of displacement and the situation in assessed communities. The first section examines displacement trends within Unity State and the push and pull factors that shape observed patterns of displacement. The second section examines the current situation of displaced and non-displaced communities, their reported access to food, and the functionality of basic services across Unity State, including water, sanitation, health and education. Within each section, trends across the state are identified and mapped at county level, with differences

Figure 1: Population of Bentiu PoC Site between February 2014 and November 2015 (IOM DTM)⁸



explained in further detail, where possible.

Population Movement and Displacement

The number of displaced people in Bentiu PoC has continued to rise throughout 2015, increasing from a population of 43,718 in December 2014, to 121,340 in November 2015.⁷ Outside the PoC, due to the difficulty of collecting data, and the significant amount of secondary and tertiary displacement, trend analysis should be considered carefully.

At the time of writing, some 569,099 individuals are estimated by IOM to be displaced in Unity state.⁸ Ongoing conflict, insecurity and a lack of access to food and basic services has forced people from their homes, while

the hope of better security and humanitarian assistance have acted as pull factors towards other communities and formal displacement sites.

Key informants who had been displaced to Bentiu and Panyijar were asked about their own displacement, and also about their pre-crisis location. In order to report on the current situation in their pre-crisis community, key informants used information from friends and family remaining in their area of origin, and in the case of those who had returned to visit since their displacement, from their own first-hand observation.

Key displacement trends

Map 2 shows the three main observed displacement trends in Unity state: those in the

7. IOM registration figures.

8. IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, <http://www.iomsouthsudan.org/tracking/dtm>

northern counties of Rubkona, Guit and Koch typically fled towards Bentiu PoC in the north; those in the southern counties headed further south towards Panyijar, while those in Mayom had typically been displaced elsewhere within the same county.

While the geographic split between displacement trends in Unity's northern and southern counties is fairly clear, the Residents of Koch, Mayendit and Leer can be seen to have travelled both northwards and southwards, often taking the same routes in opposite directions.

Displacement phases

Based on the information collected and from participatory mapping with key informants, the broad displacement trends shown in Map 2 can be examined in more detail, taking into account the characteristics and timing of displacement. The majority of key informants interviewed for this study reported having left their homes in January 2014, during the first weeks of the conflict.⁹ Reported travel times to their final destination range from 1 and 40 days, with almost half reporting multiple displacement prior to their arrival in Bentiu PoC.

As illustrated in the accompanying maps, observed displacement to Bentiu and Panyijar can be grouped into two phases: direct displacement to a major site; two stage displacement to a major site; or multiple displacements.

Direct displacement to a major site (map 3)

With the sudden eruption of violence in December 2013, many were taken by surprise, fleeing instinctively to the nearest safe place they knew.

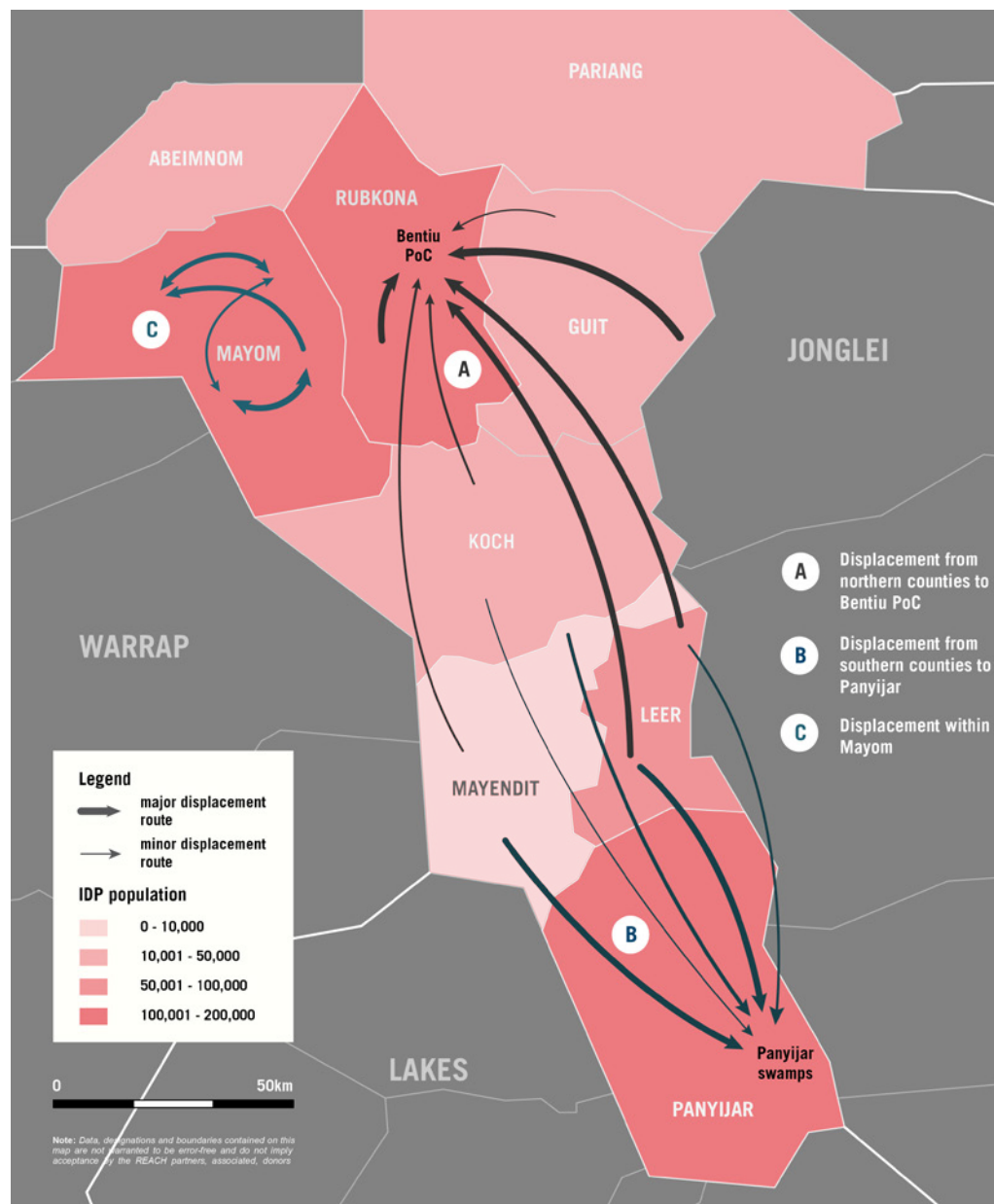
For many of those in Bentiu Town or surrounding Rubkona County, the base of United Nations peacekeeping forces (UNMISS) was the closest safe location. Accordingly, around half of key informants in Bentiu reported direct displacement to the PoC from their pre-crisis home, the vast majority of these arriving between December 2013 and January 2014. Interviews with IDPs in the PoC and elsewhere suggest that the UNMISS site was seen as a particularly attractive option to IDPs from urban settings, who had fewer links to their ancestral homelands, and less desire to travel into the bush, far from the town with which they were familiar.¹⁰

Primary displacement to a major site was much more commonly reported by key informants displaced to Bentiu PoC, than in Panyijar.

Two-stage displacement to a major site (map 4)

Other key informants reported a journey of two stages, having fled initially to rural areas, before travelling to Bentiu PoC or Panyijar. Those who escaped "into the bush" typically travelled towards their ancestral homelands or other areas known to be safe.¹¹ Having found relative safety in this first location, their few supplies became quickly exhausted and priorities began to shift. With food now the

Map 2: Overall displacement trends in Unity State



9. It should be noted that the large number of recent arrivals in Bentiu is likely to have changed the profile of displaced households in Bentiu somewhat since the data collection period.

10. Huser, Cathy, Displacement: An Auto-Protection Strategy in Unity State, March 2015.

11. Ibid.

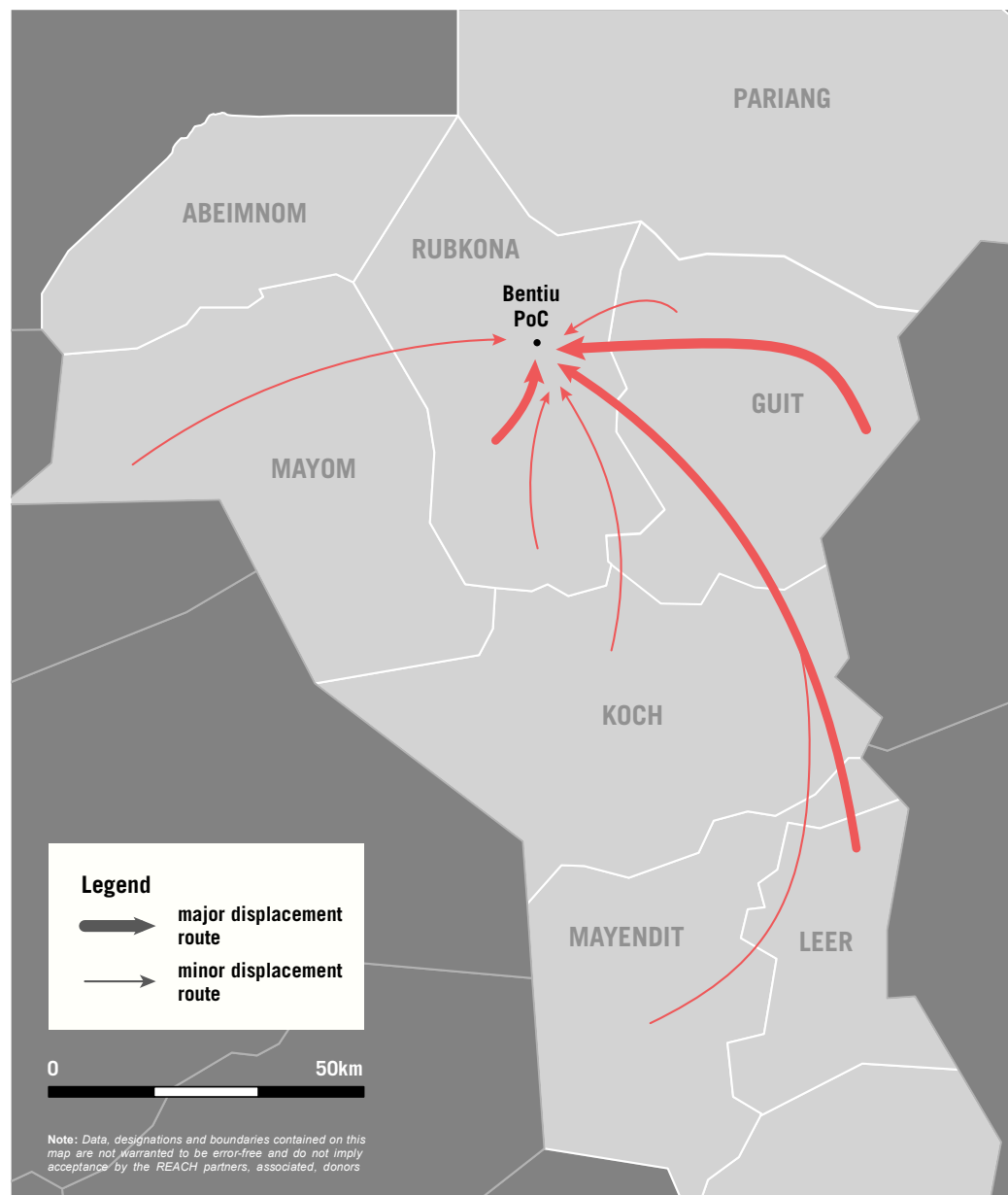
most pressing need, and their area of origin considered too unsafe to return, these IDPs made for major displacement sites such as Bentiu PoC, in search of humanitarian assistance.

The vast majority of key informants in Panyijar reported having experienced two-stage or multiple displacements. The first phase was generally more localised, between Mayendit and Leer Counties; and the second a longer journey southwards into Panyijar.

Most key informants interviewed for this study (80%) reported that they were already living in their ancestral homelands prior to displacement. A higher proportion of these IDPs reported multiple displacements, suggesting that many fled first to the bush, only moving to Bentiu PoC or Panyijar later on, once other protection strategies were exhausted.

Multiple displacements: While a significant number of key informants reported having experienced two-stage displacement, relatively few reported having been displaced three or more times. In these cases, IDPs reported a range of routes prior to arrival in either Bentiu or Panyijar. Several reported pendular movements, travelling between a few different locations and often taking the same routes in opposite directions. The chaotic and sometimes contradictory nature of the displacement observed is indicative of the multiple, competing push and pull factors at play.

Map 3: Primary displacement to a major site (Bentiu PoC)



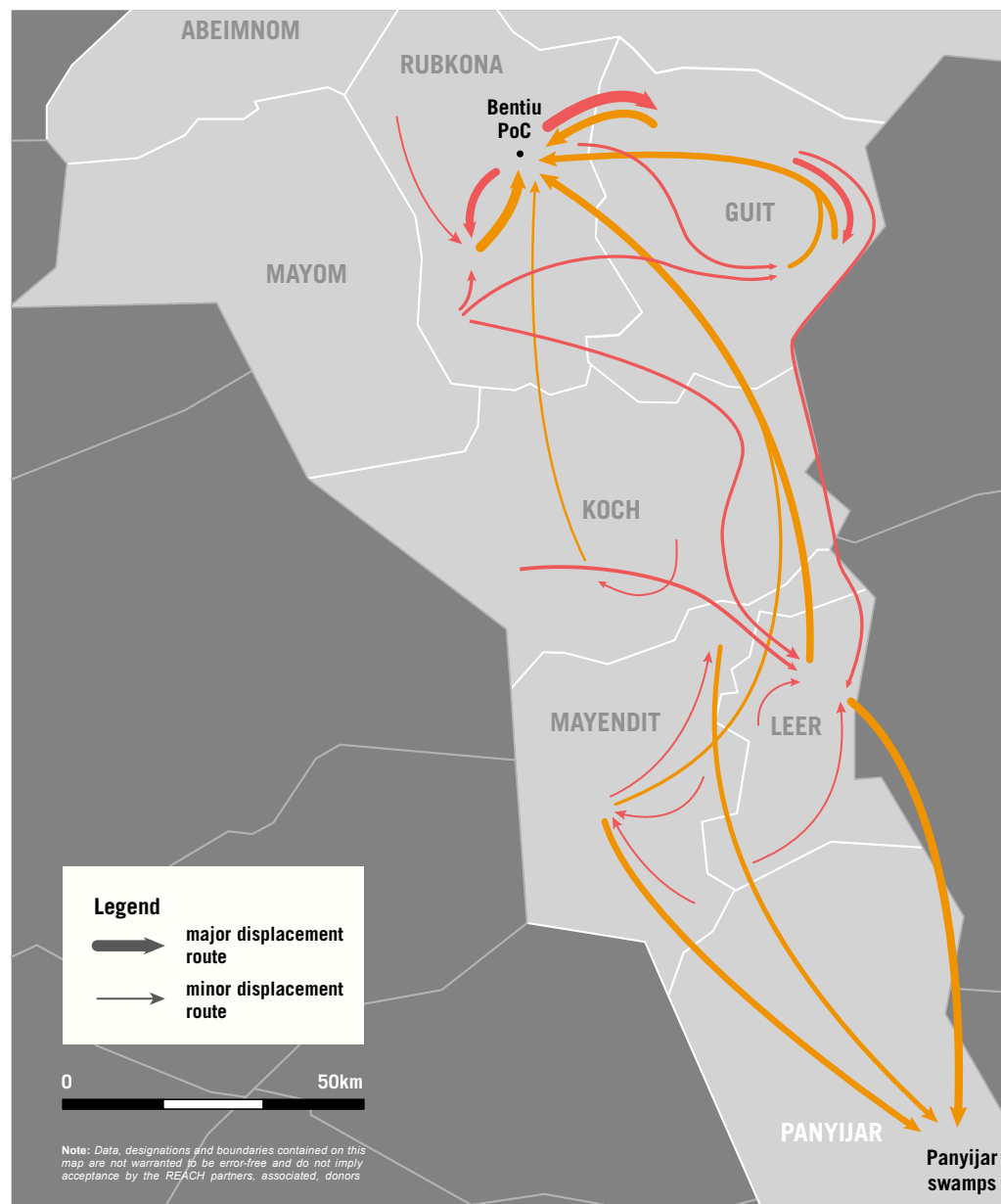
Primary displacement to Bentiu PoC

Clashes across central Unity in December 2014 and January 2015 trigger displacement to the base of UNMISS peacekeeping forces in Bentiu, leading to the creation of a Protection of Civilians (PoC) site. The majority of IDPs arrive from Rubkona and neighbouring Guit County, with smaller numbers from Mayom, Koch and Mayendit. A significant proportion arrive from Leer, travelling over 120km by foot.

Displacement routes

While diagrammatic by nature, the displacement routes shown in maps 3 and 4 were recorded during the participatory mapping exercise, and share several characteristics. While major displacement routes tend to follow primary roads, county and state boundaries, the use of river routes along the east of Unity State was also common. Afraid for their safety, IDPs rarely reported venturing into neighbouring states, such as Warrap or Jonglei, an observation also supported by other studies of displacement in this area.¹²

Map 4: Two-stage displacement before travel to a major site



Primary displacement to ancestral homelands or the bush

Violence in Bentiu Town in December 2014 and January 2015 triggers an initial wave of displacement to neighbouring Guit County and southern Rubkona. Significant numbers are also displaced from southern Rubkona and northeastern Guit. Many flee into the bush, to ancestral homelands or to other areas known by their community to be safe.

Localised clashes in January 2015 cause displacement within Koch, Leer and Mayendit Counties. IDPs from all three counties initially travel towards northern Leer, primarily Ayod.



Secondary displacement from the bush to a major site

Following initial displacement, IDPs travel onwards to major displacement sites in search of assistance. Those in the northern counties commonly headed to Bentiu PoC, and those in the south, towards Panyijar.

12. Huser, Cathy, Displacement: An Auto-Protection Strategy in Unity State, March 2015.

Drivers of displacement

Push factors

A lack of food and insecurity were the most commonly reported reasons by key informants for deciding to leave their pre-crisis location. Both are closely intertwined, since levels of food insecurity across the Greater Upper Nile region were already of concern prior to December 2013,¹³ and have since been exacerbated by conflict and displacement.¹⁴

With the sudden escalation of violence in late 2013, many people in Unity were taken by surprise and fled quickly, taking few items with them in search of security, while many reported the destruction of homes and assets.¹⁵ For those who fled nearby, depleting resources and the destruction of food stocks and productive assets at home caused further food insecurity and constitute a further push factor. Other push factors include a lack of access to healthcare, water and education, all were reported as secondary reasons.

Figure 2: Reported push factors for leaving pre-crisis location

Bold text denotes the most commonly cited factors

Push factors

- 1. Lack of food
- 2. Insecurity
- 3. Lack of healthcare
- 4. Lack of water
- 5. Lack of education

Pull factors

Mirroring reported push factors, the primary reported pull factor was security. Humanitarian assistance, particularly food distributions, represents an important pull factor towards formal displacement sites, particularly for those who have experienced multiple displacements.

When asked to rank the reasons for choosing their specific displacement site, these nuances become clearer, as shown in Figure 3. Security remains the most commonly reported primary reason, closely followed by access to food. While lack of access to healthcare was commonly listed among push factors for displacement, it is clear from the ranking exercise, that this was almost never the first reason for displacement.

While much less commonly reported, the presence of family elsewhere was also found to be an important influential factor, causing many displaced households to travel vast distances, often using indirect routes in order to travel through ancestral homelands, or other relatively safer areas, which were known to be welcoming to members of a particular community.

Changing priorities and asset depletion

It is important to note that the vast majority of key informants reported a combination of factors as the reasons for their displacement. Many factors, such as food insecurity or lack of

Figure 3: Reported pull factors for choosing current displacement site

The darker the colour, the more commonly reported

	First reason	Second reason	Third reason
Security			
Food access			
Health access			
Join family			
Aid			
Education access			
Other			
Water access			

healthcare were ongoing concerns prior to the crisis, and the relative importance of each has been shown to change throughout a period of displacement.¹⁶ For example, once the direct proximity of violence has forced a household to flee to safety in the bush, a lack of food becomes an increasing concern, often leading to further displacement in search of food.

Each time individuals travel to a new location in search of assistance and services, they take a risk, taking only limited resources with them and sometimes spending the few resources they have in order to make the journey. As a result, their ability to cope with further shocks or future displacement is decreased and their resilience is reduced.

The limited availability of assistance outside major displacement sites means that many of those displaced into the bush benefit from little or no assistance, further increasing

their vulnerability to future shocks. On the other hand, increasing knowledge about the availability of assistance in major sites, such as Bentiu PoC, makes these destinations more attractive. Simply put, displacement to well-known, formal sites is considered a less risky protection strategy, since it is more likely to result in access to assistance and therefore reduces the likelihood of further displacement.

While it is clear that many IDPs have undergone multiple displacements—in most cases relatively close to their pre-crisis homes—people appear to decide relatively quickly that they are unwilling to risk displacement to anywhere other than a site with guaranteed assistance.

13. FEWSNET, South Sudan Food Security Outlook July to December 2013, July 2013
14. IPC, South Sudan Integrated Phase Food Security Phase Classification Report, May 2015.
15. REACH, South Sudan Displacement Trends Analysis, April 2015.
16. Huser, Cathy, Displacement: An Auto-Protection Strategy in Unity State, March 2015

Situation in Areas of Origin

This section examines the current situation in the 38 assessed communities in Unity State. These communities cover the area shaded red in map 1, and provide an overview of those who live there, their current living conditions and access to basic services.

This section explains first the reported situation of the remaining host population, and then the situation of IDPs reported to be staying in these communities.

Demographic profile

Remaining population in assessed communities

Many communities across the assessed area are reported to have been completely razed, with 45% of key informants reporting that no members of the pre-crisis population remained in their community. Particularly high proportions of abandoned villages were reported in Guit and Rubkona, corresponding to the similarly low proportion of key informants reporting that family members remain behind in these counties.

In communities where members of the original population were reported to remain, less than a quarter of key informants estimated that households are living in their own homes. Instead, villagers are reportedly living nearby in the bush, with no shelter, where they are safer in the case of future conflict. While individuals remaining in their area of origin do not consider themselves to be internally displaced, it is important to note that many are

unable to enjoy rights to their homes and land without fear of attack, and experience similar conditions and access to services as IDPs from elsewhere.

The demographic profile of those remaining is reportedly predominantly adult and female. Over 60% of assessed communities were reported to have a predominantly female population, particularly those in Leer, Koch and Rubkona. In addition, populations of predominantly children aged under 18 were reported in one fifth of assessed communities.

This demographic profile mirrors that in major displacement sites, raising questions in relation to the situation of adult males.

IDP population in assessed communities

The vast majority of assessed communities were reported to be hosting IDPs, with estimated caseloads ranging from 50 - 1,500. The presence of IDPs was most commonly reported in communities in Leer and Mayendit counties, and least commonly in Rubkona. IDPs were most commonly reported to be staying in the bush, with no shelter, while smaller proportions stayed with relatives, mostly in traditional shelters called rakooba or tukuls. Similar to IDPs elsewhere, many displaced individuals on islands in Greater Nyal, Panyijar were found to be living with no shelter at all.

Similar to their hosts, the IDP population was also reported to be primarily adult. However, the gender balance among IDPs appears more even, suggesting that in some cases,

Figure 4: Top reported shelter types of remaining community and IDPs, pre-crisis and in 2015
Bold text denotes the most commonly cited factors

Pre-crisis shelter types		Current shelter types	
Remaining community:		Remaining community:	IDPs:
1. Rakooba / Tukul		1. None	1. None
2. Tent		2. Rakooba / Tukul	2. Tent
3. None		3. Tent	3. Rakooba / Tukul

whole families have been displaced together within these areas. IDPs living on islands in Greater Nyal, Payijar, are a notable exception, with the majority of the displaced population found to be aged under 18.¹⁷

Shelter

The largest proportion of both the remaining host community and IDPs is reported to be living with no shelter at all. These households have limited access to protection from the elements, particularly from heavy rainfall during the wet season. Households living in the open face increased risk from vectors and wild animals; have limited capacity to protect their often limited food stocks from spoiling; and are increasingly vulnerable to theft. The presence of tents as the second or third shelter type, suggests that some IDPs and host community households have received humanitarian shelter assistance, although these represent only 22% of reported shelter types.

With shelter materials reportedly unavailable in the vast majority of assessed communities, the provision of emergency shelter assistance

to both host communities and IDPs should be considered a key priority. Such interventions would not only provide those living in the open air with protection from the elements, and reduce health risks; but facilitate the safe storage of other assistance such as food items.

Access to Food

With a lack of access to food the most commonly reported push factor for leaving pre-crisis locations, the ability to access adequate food is clearly a key influencing factor on displacement decisions. With all of Unity State classed as in the “stressed” or “crisis” acute food insecurity phase prior to December 2013,¹⁸ the outbreak of conflict has served to further exacerbate the situation. By May 2015, the situation had significantly worsened, with almost all of Unity State classified as in the “crisis” or “emergency” phase. Ongoing conflict and displacement has resulted in missed harvests; disrupted planting seasons; a lack of functioning markets; and price inflation; reducing the capacity of those who remain to purchase food to make up for shortfalls in production.¹⁹

17. REACH, Greater Nyal East Situation Overview, December 2015

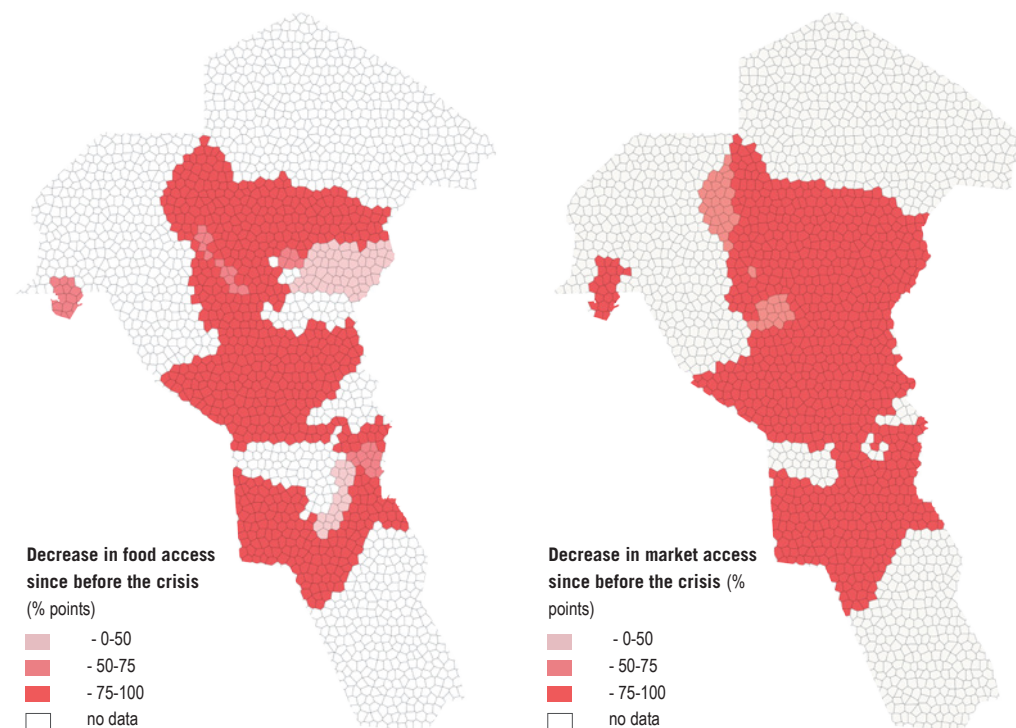
18. FEWSNET, South Sudan Food Security Outlook July to December 2013, July 2013

As shown in Map 5, adequate access to food has reportedly decreased by 75-100 percentage points in the majority of communities assessed, with only small proportion of assessed communities reporting access to functioning markets. Among those communities less affected by decreased food access are those in Leer County, where food security scores have traditionally remained higher than the rest of the state in recent years.²⁰ Leer also represents a commonly reported location of secondary or tertiary displacement, suggesting that knowledge of the relatively higher availability of food may have influenced displacement patterns.

NGO or government distributions were reported as the primary current food source across the assessed areas, followed by 'other' sources, such as fish, water lilies and kodra, a wild form of millet that is traditionally eaten in times of famine.²¹ Despite reliance on humanitarian food assistance, KIs in only 23 of the 38 communities reportedly received any assistance in the past month, the majority of this reportedly insufficient to provide for all of the affected community. Cultivation, the most commonly reported food source prior to the crisis, was only reported as the primary current food source in two communities.

With the majority of assessed communities reported reliance on external food assistance, the delivery of which is regularly hampered by ongoing insecurity and logistical constraints,²² communities reported reliance on a wider variety of coping strategies than prior to the

Map 5: Reported decrease in access to food (left) and markets (right)



crisis to deal with a lack of food. The most commonly reported strategies at the time of data collection include skipping meals, reducing portion size, eating seeds and wild foods—each reported in over half of those communities where strategies are reportedly used. Despite the increased use of a wider variety of coping strategies, 37 of the 38 assessed communities reported the use of at least one coping strategy both before the crisis and at the time of assessment, highlighting

ongoing food security concerns throughout the state.

The provision of immediate, life-saving assistance is required to address humanitarian needs of both host communities and IDPs across the assessed communities. Food should be considered an immediate priority, including targeted supplementary nutrition programmes to address the situation of those suffering from acute malnutrition.

Water and Sanitation

Reported access to safe water has decreased dramatically since before the crisis, with the number of communities reported to access water from protected sources, such as boreholes and protected wells, having reduced from 38 to 5.

The situation of communities with high proportions of displaced individuals is of particular concern, since an increase in population places increasing pressure on already limited resources. Leer County for example, which is estimated to host some 67,850 IDPs, has seen a reduction in access to safe drinking water of between 50-100 percentage points.

Prior to the crisis, the vast majority of assessed communities reported accessing safe water from boreholes, most accessible in under an hour by foot. Since the conflict, reduced accessibility of protected water sources has forced host communities and IDPs alike to access water from unsafe sources, primarily rivers or ponds, where the risk of water-borne disease is higher. At the time of data collection, only 5 communities reported borehole access, compared to 36 prior to the crisis.

The use of latrines is also reported to have decreased since prior to the crisis, when the majority of assessed communities reported using latrines, commonly within their village compound. By the time of data collection, the number of communities reporting the use of latrines had reportedly decreased

19. IPC, South Sudan Integrated Phase Food Security Phase Classification Report, May 2015

20. Ibid.

21. National Research Council, "Kodo Millet". Lost Crops of Africa; Volume 1: Grains. (1996).

22. Protection Cluster, Protection Trends South Sudan No 6, November 2015

from 20 to 5, with a significant rise in the number of communities reported to practice open defecation. As shown in Map 6, the assessed areas appear to have registered a less significant decrease than other services, in part due to limited access to sanitation prior to the crisis.

The lack of access to safe drinking water coupled with increasing rates of open defecation is of serious concern, increasing the risk of infection and leaving the population predisposed to waterborne diseases and malaria. The situation is particularly critical

in swamp areas, such the islands in Panyijar, where the surrounding water was used for both defecation and drinking, leading to direct contamination of the water supply.²³

Health

Health and medical assistance is a key concern of IDPs, with access to healthcare commonly cited as both a push and pull factor for displacement. In turn, access to healthcare has decreased significantly, with medical services reportedly available in only 6 communities, compared to 38 prior to the

crisis.

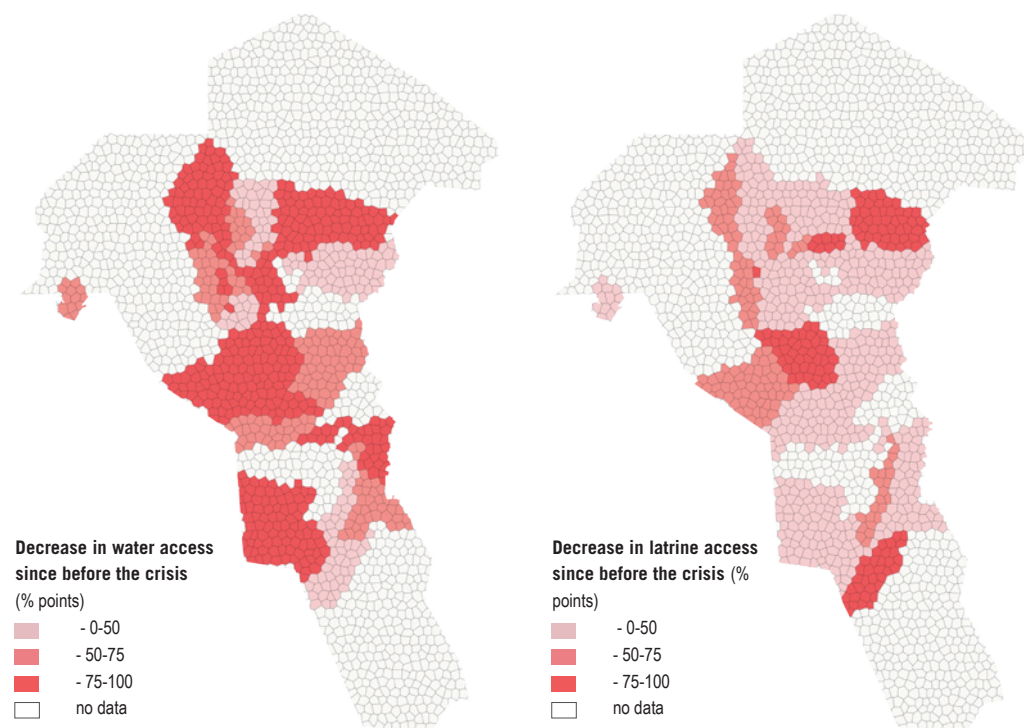
The lack of functioning health services is attributed directly to the conflict, with the destruction of facilities and ongoing insecurity the primary reported reasons. A lack of trained staff and inadequate supplies of medicine were also reported in a smaller proportion of communities.

Of the few remaining healthcare services, the majority were reportedly provided by local or international NGOs. Continuing insecurity has also seriously affected their functionality of these facilities, with MSF having evacuated its clinic in Leer twice in the past six months.²⁴ The closure of medical facilities has interrupted the monitoring of disease, supplementary nutrition programmes and regular vaccinations, leaving the remaining population increasingly vulnerable to future outbreaks of disease.

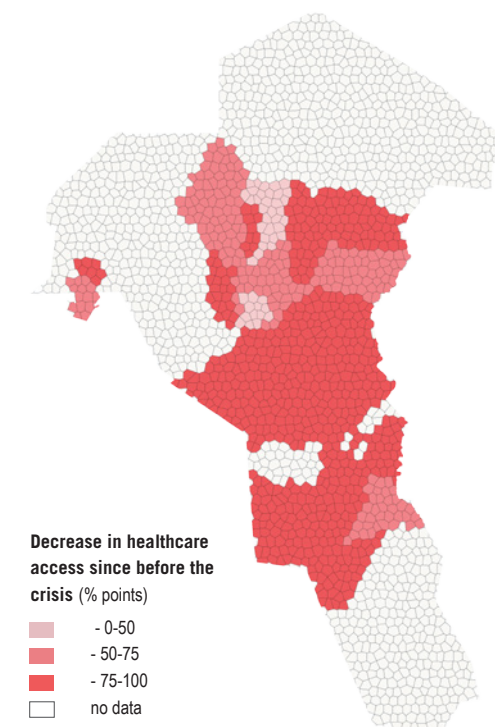
NGOs providing medical assistance in hard-to-reach areas of Unity state report treating acute malnutrition and war-related injuries, as well as cases of malaria, respiratory tract infection, diarrhoea, and suspected measles—together the leading causes of morbidity among IDPs throughout the country.²⁵

The increased use of mobile clinics could help to address emergency health concerns and re-establish immunization programmes. In the longer term, improved security is vital in order to enable aid actors to continue existing operations, launch new programmes in under-served areas, and rehabilitate damaged health infrastructure. Collaborative projects

Map 6: Reported decrease in access to safe water (left) and latrines (right)



Map 7: Reported decrease in access to healthcare



23. REACH, Situation Overview Ganyel East and West, Panyijar, December 2015

24. MSF, South Sudan: Trapped by violence in Unity state, October 2015

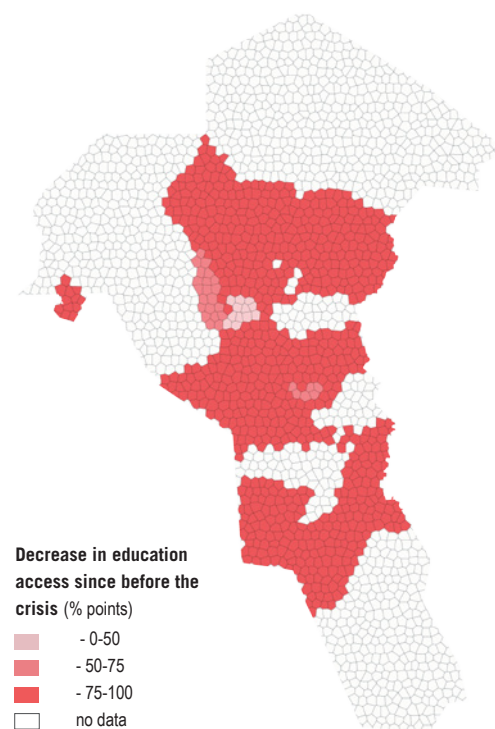
25. MSF, South Sudan: Trapped by violence in Unity state, October 2015; WHO, South Sudan Health Situation Report, July 2015

with WASH actors could also help to avoid the spread of waterborne disease, malaria and infection, reducing pressure on existing, over-stretched health facilities.

Education

Prior to the crisis, primary education was reportedly available in all assessed communities, with opportunities for vocational training and secondary education also available in many. By the time of data collection, education was only reportedly available in three communities, leaving children in the vast

Map 8: Reported decrease in access to education



majority of assessed communities deprived of both formal education opportunities, and the psychosocial support available in a school environment.

Throughout the conflict, schools have been attacked or used for military purposes. In 2015 alone, the protection cluster recorded 69 cases of attack or military takeover of schools, the majority of these in Unity State.²⁶ Schools have also been targeted for the recruitment of child soldiers since the beginning of the conflict, causing parents to withdraw children from school out of fear.²⁷

Education actors should scale up the provision of emergency education assistance in order to reach those in Unity state. Many children have been out of school for almost two years, and risk falling significantly behind their peers. In addition, young adults have few opportunities for secondary education or vocational training. Basic remedial education, and skills-based training in displacement sites could address their needs and contribute to the longer term reconstruction and development of South Sudan.

Conclusion

Unity state has seen intermittent conflict for almost two years, causing mass displacement both within the state and elsewhere in the country. Displacement patterns are complex and varied, with multiple displacements taking place as a result of changing push and pull factors. Displaced individuals fled their homes due to conflict, insecurity, and a lack of food, and fled elsewhere in the hope of humanitarian assistance and better access to services. While many IDPs reported travelling directly to Bentiu PoC, the majority experienced multiple displacement, first seeking safety in the bush in ancestral homelands, later moving to major displacement sites where assistance was known to be available.

With crisis levels of food insecurity throughout much of the state, the population of Bentiu PoC can be expected to continue to grow in the coming months, as those displaced in the bush and elsewhere exhaust available resources and coping strategies and flee to Bentiu and other major displacement sites in search of assistance, which they are unable to access in situ. When they do so, the majority are likely to follow the same routes, while smaller proportions will continue to flee through ancestral homelands and other traditionally safe communities.

Despite the major displacement witnessed to date, significant numbers are reported to remain in their pre-crisis communities, and have been joined in many cases by IDPs from

elsewhere. Even for those continuing to live within their own community, the majority of households are reportedly living in dispersed locations in the bush rather than in their original villages. This is both as a result of the destruction of homes and community buildings, and as a strategy to ensure their own personal safety. Having experienced localised displacement, the largest proportion are reported to have no shelter, living in the open with minimal protection from the elements.

With demographic composition of both host communities and displacement sites reported to consist predominantly of women and children, this assessment highlights an important information gap relating to the location of men, about which further research is required.

After nearly two years of disrupted planting, insecurity, and displacement, people's capacity to produce their own food has been severely reduced. Humanitarian assistance is now the primary reported food source in the vast majority of assessed communities, and very few communities reportedly cultivate sufficient crops to sustain their population. With reduced capacity to produce their own food, the purchase of supplies elsewhere is also a challenge, with markets in the vast majority of assessed communities destroyed by ongoing conflict, and prevented from re-opening due to continued insecurity. Faced with limited food, people are increasingly turning to a range of coping strategies to meet their immediate needs. These include severe strategies, such

26. Protection Cluster, Protection Trends South Sudan No 6, November 2015

27. Human Rights Watch, We can die too: Recruitment and use of child soldiers in South Sudan, November 2015; IRIN news, Amid the violence, education suffers in South Sudan, June 2014

as consuming seeds intended for production, which in turn affect future productivity and cannot be sustained over a long period.

If the current situation continues, the provision of lifesaving humanitarian assistance should be considered a priority in order to address immediate food needs and counter growing levels of acute malnutrition in southern Unity State. The provision of shelter assistance would help to address the situation of host communities and IDPs who are reportedly living in the open air, with no protection from the elements. Such assistance would also facilitate the safe storage of food and other resources, and prevent supplies from perishing.

With a dramatic decrease in the availability of all basic services, the provision of safe drinking water should also be considered a priority, in order to prevent the spread of waterborne disease and infection. Healthcare also remains a key priority among IDPs, with many common health conditions exacerbated by the use of water from rivers, swamps and ponds, which are also used for defecation in some areas.

Failure to address lifesaving humanitarian needs in communities across Unity State is likely to result in further displacement away from pre-crisis locations and ancestral homelands, towards major displacement sites such as Bentiu PoC. The presence of humanitarian assistance is a crucial pull factor, and one which is becoming increasingly significant as worsening overall conditions

increase the vulnerability of those living in their own communities.

With few resources and increasingly limited capacity to cope, the risks of displacement can be minimised by travelling to known sites where the availability of assistance is more likely. On the other hand, the presence of increasing numbers of IDPs in major sites will stretch limited land and resources further, increase dependency on assistance and make eventual return more difficult.

About REACH Initiative

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.

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