



Gogrial West and East Rapid Assessment

Warrap State, South Sudan, September 2021

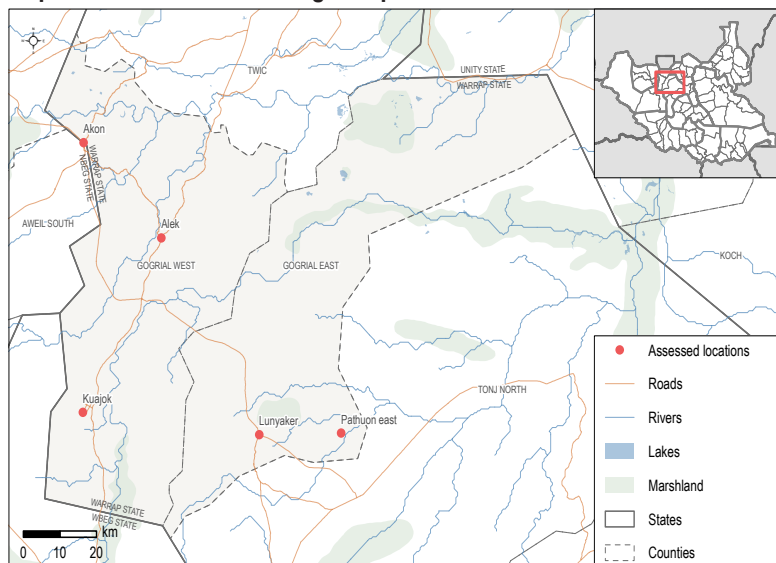
Key Findings

- Insecurity has continued to drive large-scale displacement from Tonj North into Gogrial East and West counties throughout 2021. This has prevented internally displaced persons (IDPs) from accessing their land throughout the cultivation cycle, and has resulted in populations converging on Payam¹ and Boma² headquarters. Findings suggest that the majority of IDPs have been unable to harvest, and that most are relying on casual labour for better-off host community members. IDPs have limited access to cattle and the situation is unlikely to improve in the near future.
- Flooding has led to substantive losses to crop production and depleted food stocks. Displacement to populated areas has further placed substantial pressure on host community food stocks, which are reportedly expected to be exhausted 2-3 months after harvest in October. FGD participants commonly reported concerns about low productivity due to higher-than-usual rainfall and the possibility of further damage to crops if rainfall were to continue.
- Mass displacement has placed substantial pressure on water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), health and nutrition facilities in the areas of displacement, particularly in Mayom Biang Boma, Phataun East where IDPs from Awul Payam in Tonj North have reportedly been displaced.
- Findings suggest that markets are functioning across the two counties, and that IDPs are able to purchase food items. Kuajok market is the largest market in the region and roads remained accessible at the time of data collection.
- With the harvest season (in October) looming, casual labour job opportunities will likely be limited for IDPs, potentially aggravating the food security situation. Continued provision of humanitarian food assistance (HFA) can play a crucial role in reducing atypically severe food consumption gaps after the 'harvest' season.

Methodology

The assessment comprised two main qualitative methodological components: focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs). Data collection took place between the 23th August and 29th August. During this period, a total of five FGDs were conducted with host community members and IDPs in Kuajok town, Alek South, Akon, Phatuan West and Phatuan East. The FGD component consisted of two thematic areas: i) shocks as they relate to food security and livelihoods, and ii) susceptibility to acute food insecurity. Separate FGDs were held for men and women, and participants were disaggregated by location of origin. In addition, a total of five KIIs were conducted with community chiefs, payam administrators, wholesalers and traders. The KII component consisted of two thematic tools: i) understanding market functionality, and ii) food security and livelihoods. Additionally, the team conducted informal, semi-structured interviews with local NGOs, authority officials and community representatives. Qualitative FGD and KII assessment tools were triangulated with interactive proportional piling exercises, which involved piling 100 beans in front of the respondent, who was then asked to divide them into piles, attributing indicative values to questions on population movement and challenges facing the communities, based on the respondents' perception. Findings should be considered indicative, rather than representative, of the situation of affected communities in the assessed areas.

Map 1: Assessment coverage map

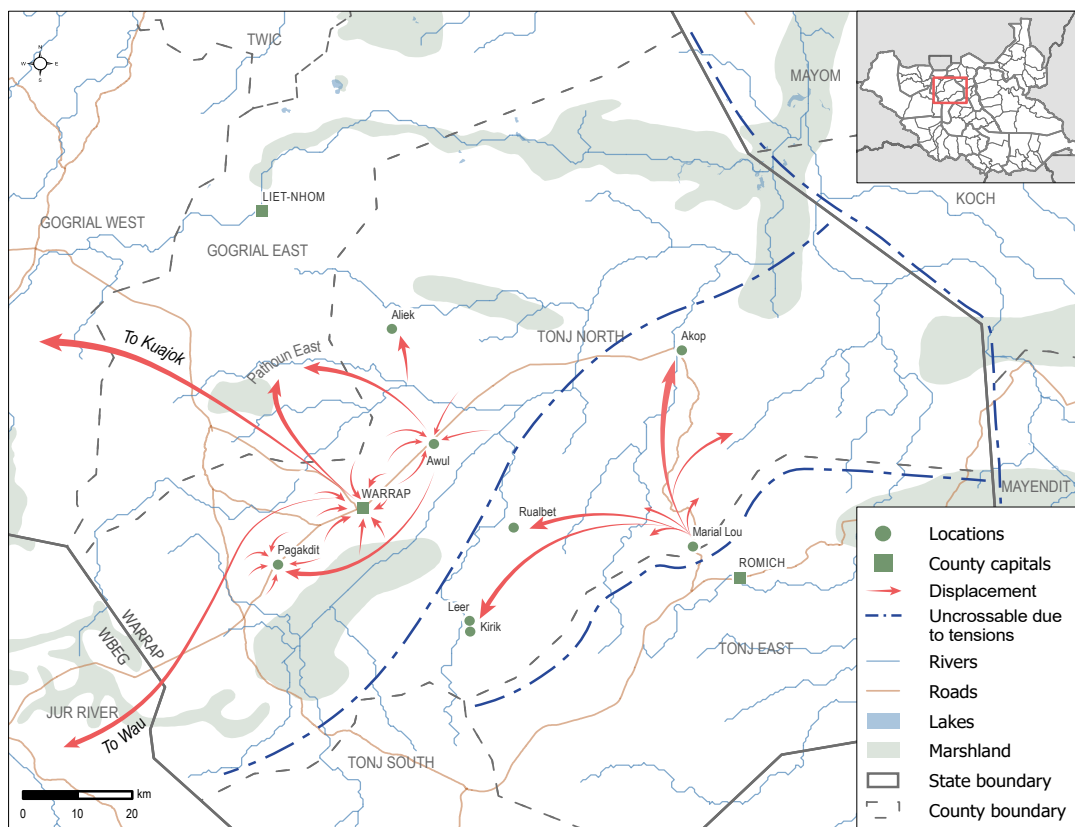


Introduction: Vulnerability and acute events

Compounding shocks such as flooding and repeated violence have led to severe food insecurity in Gogrial East and West. The counties were classified as phasing Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) Phase 4 ('Emergency') levels of food insecurity until July 2021.³

Continued on-going organised violence throughout 2020 and 2021 led to mass displacement of tens of thousands of people from Tonj North into Gogrial West and East.⁴ The violence has led to widespread loss of livestock, disruption of livelihoods and extensive human casualties.⁴

Map 2: Displacement from Tonj North and Tonj East into Gogrial East and West



Since the IPC workshop in November 2020, the 2021 dry season (November-May) saw an increased inflow of populations into Gogrial East and West from Tonj North. In addition to insecurity, following the onset of the rainy season (June - October), August 2021 has also seen considerable flooding, displacing populations in Akon payam of Gogrial West and leading to widespread loss of crops across the county.⁵

In light of these recent shocks, which are likely further compounded by added pressure of an increasing IDP population on host communities' resources, REACH conducted a rapid assessment of selected locations in Gogrial East (Map 1), with the objectives of understanding i) shocks as they relate to food security and livelihoods, ii) susceptibility to famine conditions, and iii) market functionality.

Population movement

KII and FGD findings indicate that the key drivers of displacement were insecurity in the greater Tonj region and flooding in Gogrial West. Tonj North has been experiencing bouts of violence since 2019. The most recent insecurity since January 2021 has been related to internal tensions between communities in Tonj North and tensions with communities from Tonj East in June 2021.

Since the insecurity incidents in lower Tonj North in 2021, Gogrial East and West have witnessed a large influx of displaced populations. In addition, flooding in Gogrial West has displaced

communities from Akop payam, where communities from Agaaldit Boma have moved from the flooded settlements towards the roadside. Affected populations in Tonj North have been making northerly movements from Awul into Gogrial East, with vulnerable populations moving in January 2021, followed by the general population moving between March and July 2021.

There were also reports of IDPs returning back to Tonj North in April to access humanitarian food assistance (HFA) as they were registered there, but they returned back in May without having been able to access any HFA.

Image 1: Flooded homesteads in Akop payam, Gogrial West



Image 2: Akadia seeds consumption remains a common source of wild food



Food availability and access

Gogrial East and West fall under the western floodplain sorghum and cattle livelihood zone.⁶ While a high proportion of the population typically owns livestock, FGD participants commonly reported that cattle populations have been reducing ever since the crisis began in 2013.⁷ While overall production is lower than pre-crisis levels, cereal production had seen a relative improvement in 2020 for Gogrial West, however, in Gogrial East, communities still face a deficit in cereal production.⁸ To mitigate lower levels of cereal production, fishing is a key source of food. Fishing is typically used to mitigate low levels of cereal production, but insecurity has reportedly limited access to fishing grounds, putting additional pressure on the availability of food. To compensate for limited food sources, collection of wild food makes up a major part of dietary intake, especially amongst IDP populations, as reported by FGD participants.

Cultivation

Gogrial East and West were assessed in the post-harvest season; while shocks such as flooding and in-bound displacement have put pressure on the availability of food sources, most host communities reported hoping to rely on having successful harvests in October. However, widespread flooding has led to destruction of crops reducing food stocks; FGD participants commonly estimate current food stocks to last up to three months post harvest for host communities. Some FGD participants and KIs estimated current damages to crops being 30%, further projecting that, if flooding were to continue, crop damages would increase. In 2020, flooding had a similar effect on harvest and reduced the harvested food stocks drastically.

FGD participants and KIs commonly reported that host communities

employ IDPs, giving them cash for work to support the harvest of ground nuts and sesame. According to FGD participants, IDPs generally have no access to their own land, leaving them to be mostly reliant on kitchen gardens⁹ to cultivate, which are generally insufficient to meet household food consumption requirements, likely resulting in food consumption gaps.

As a result of the influx of IDPs, harvest stocks are being depleted faster than normal since both host communities and IDPs are either relying directly on harvest or market purchased through cash for work opportunities. In January, when the harvested stocks are expected to be depleted, food sources will likely be limited for host communities and IDPs, likely driving an increased need for HFA to mitigate food consumption gaps.

Livestock

With Gogrial being part of the sorghum and cattle livelihood zone, the majority of the population typically owns livestock, and reliance on livestock is high. However, during the lean season, access to livestock is generally low and with the onset of the rains, cattle has reportedly been moved further away from the homesteads, for instance from Akon to Aweil South, reducing access to cattle in the short term. In addition to limited seasonal access to cattle, FGD participants reported that IDPs have very limited cattle ownership, having lost approximately half of their cattle compared to pre-crisis levels.

Fishing

Fishing is a livelihood activity that is typically relied upon by poor households to mitigate food consumption gaps. According to FGD participants, access to fishing grounds has been limited due to fears of attacks and flooding-related mobility restrictions. The assessment team observed some people fishing in the floodwaters near the settlements, but access to other fishing grounds is reportedly not possible. If floodwaters recede during the dry season, access to fishing grounds might improve, but only quite late in the dry season around January, when food gaps might already have become substantial.

Wild foods

Consumption of wild foods is common throughout the year, however, relative reliance on wild foods typically increases during the lean season, when harvested food stocks are exhausted and access to alternative food sources is limited. Common types of wild foods consumed in the area reportedly are Akadia (grain like seeds, see image 2), Lalup, and Aneet leaves. FGD participants reported that reliance on wild foods was perceivably causing sickness and diarrhoea among younger children and older persons.

Findings suggest that there are specific barriers to accessing wild foods, including the presence of flood waters, preventing access to wild foods, and the limited availability of trees and greens near major towns, reportedly forcing people to travel larger distances to

the forests, even in some areas that are perceived to be insecure. Yet, insecurity also limits access and will likely continue to pose barriers to wild food collection throughout the dry season.

Such barriers could further drive food consumption gaps, particularly among the IDP population, whose limited access to cattle and harvested food stocks will likely result in a consistent reliance on wild foods until at least the July 2022 harvest.

Markets and financial access to food

Markets are a critical source of food for populations in Gogrial East and West. During the assessment most of the assessed locations were found to have functional markets. While markets are functional, FDG participants and KIs reported compounding shocks have reduced purchasing power, limiting populations' access to markets. The casual labour market reportedly remains among the most common income generating activity, especially for IDPs and poorer households; during the FGDs, IDPs commonly reported that five days of work can usually help them procure 1 kilogram of malwa/sorghum at the market.

Findings from interviews with traders and wholesalers indicate that Sudan remains the most preferred source of goods. The route from Kuajok market to Abeyi is generally open throughout the year, while the route from Juba to Kuajok market is severely affected due to seasonal flooding and insecurity. One trader reported that non-food items are generally brought from Juba if goods are not available from Sudan, however, getting goods from Juba reportedly remains a challenge, with over 30 checkpoints on the way.

Traders commonly reported perceiving that the main driver of price changes is fluctuations in the exchange rate. Prices for goods have reportedly been low since June 2021 when compared with prices in 2020. As the exchange rate fluctuations have been stable, traders importing goods from Sudan can purchase goods at cheaper rates and sell at lower rates. Even though the prices of goods have been stable, traders commonly reported that the purchasing power of consumers would depend on them getting a good harvest which, due to the foreseen limited harvest and the flooding-induced crop damages, seems to be unlikely.

Social networks and access to food

In Gogrial West and East, poorer households normally rely on better-off households for employment and resource sharing. While the influx of displaced populations has reportedly put pressure on existing host community resources, FDG participants reported this has not led to tensions between the two communities. Hunger courts, a key social mechanism to share resources between poor and better-off households, are reportedly functional for both displaced and host communities.

However, while tensions appear to have remained low, FDG participants reported concern about the pressure on the availability of healthcare services and boreholes. Participants reported

foreseeing that, by January, when the dry season sets off and harvested food stocks are likely to become depleted, sustained pressure might cause boreholes to run dry and tensions to start rising.

Overall, FDG participants commonly reported that, while host communities and IDPs were still sharing existing resources and services at the time of data collection, available resources will likely be depleted in the following months, potentially driving the situation to become comparable to the 1998 hunger season as a result of a lack of assets, inhibiting usual coping strategies.

Conclusion

A combination of flooding and insecurity has resulted in reduced livelihoods in Gogrial East and West, with considerable food consumption gaps, particularly affecting displaced populations. With limited harvests expected in 2021, the food security situation is unlikely to see any improvements in the long term. While communal coping strategies, such as hunger courts, appeared to have remained functional, the expected decrease in resources to share heading into the dry season might further strain the accessibility to food for vulnerable populations.

Humanitarian services such as food assistance, health and nutrition facilities should be continued for IDPs to prevent a further deterioration across of the food security and livelihoods situation in Gogrial East and West County.

Endnotes

1. Payam is the administrative unit below the county-level.
2. Boma is the lowest-level administrative level, below payams.
3. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. IPC acute food security and nutrition analysis, October 2020 – July 2021. October 2020.
4. World Food Programme. Greater Tonj conflict dynamics. Internal. August 2021.
5. Integrated Rapid Needs Assessment Akon Payam, Gogrial West.
6. Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET). Livelihoods Zone Map and Descriptions for the Republic of South Sudan. August 2018.
7. *ibid.*,
8. Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO). 2021. Special Report - 2020 FAO/WFP Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) to the Republic of South Sudan. Rome. <https://doi.org/10.4060/cb4498en>
9. Kitchen gardens are homestead areas where vegetables are grown, typically with limited space.