

Compounding shocks and consequences for food security, coping capacity, and social stratification in Leer and Mayendit counties.

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Assessment objectives

To situate existing multisectoral humanitarian needs by understanding the range of compounding shocks and stressors experienced, and their impact on i) underlying vulnerability, ii) social stratification, and iii) on community level institutions to redistribute assets and to protect the most vulnerable.

Table 1: Names given to recent periods of food insecurity according to FGD participants from Leer and Mayendit counties

1988	Ruon Nya Kuajok - 'The year of the Kuajok tree', during which people were reportedly surviving on kuajok leaves
1997	Ruon Gatluak Gai - 'The year of Gatluak Gai', a military commander, and Ruon Khor - 'The year of fighting'
2013-2018	Ruon Kor - 'The year(s) of conflict'
2020-2021	Ruon Nyoch - 'The year of the flood'



Assessment methodology

Data collection took place between the 4th and 14th of June.

The assessment comprised two main qualitative methodological components: focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs).

- The FGD component consisted of five thematic areas: i) shocks as they relate to food security and livelihoods, ii) social group analysis and wealth ranking, iii) susceptibility to famine conditions, iv) WASH service access and functionality, and v) access to services.
- A total of 36 FGDs were conducted with host community members, IDPs, and refugee returnees. Separate FGDs were held for men and women.
- The KII component consisted of two thematic tools: i) health and nutrition service provision, and ii) chiefs' courts functionality.
- A total of 12 KIIs were conducted with community chiefs and health and nutrition service providers.
- Qualitative FGD and KII assessment tools were triangulated with interactive proportional piling exercises.

The assessment findings are indicative of the situation at the time of data collection, and are not statistically representative of the area's population.



Shocks and changes in social stratification

- Compounding shocks and stressors have resulted in substantial social shifts which have depleted resources and **the ability of a now relatively small group of ‘better off’ to support a substantial population of poor households.**
- The pre-crisis period ‘a time of plenty’. Prior to the crisis, the riang riang reportedly provided employment, supported relatives, and **formed the cornerstone of an effective community support mechanism.**
- Around 55% of the population from Leer and Mayendit reportedly left these counties during the **2013-2019 crisis**; especially those with resources.
- **Population of extreme poor, characterised by highly vulnerable households with limited social connections, has burgeoned.**

Table 2: Social groups and structures (proportional piling exercises)

	Pre crisis population estimate (2012)	During the worst hunger 2015/ 2016/ 2018	Post crisis population estimate (2021)
Riang riang – ‘Better off’	50%	0%	10%
Ney tin te tah – ‘The middle’	20%	10%	10%
Chan – ‘The poor’	20%	30%	30%
Changai – ‘The extreme poor’	10%	60%	50%



Institutions and community coping capacity

Chiefs' courts in South Sudan have typically been able to function even under extreme pressure, and **transition into 'hunger courts'**, which primarily or solely see cases related to hunger and the redistribution of resources to those who are most in need.


Findings suggest that the ability of chiefs to effectively redistribute assets has been severely eroded in some areas of Leer and Mayendit counties.

This appears to be mainly due to two factors:

- i) **Changes in social stratification, widespread livelihood collapse and a consequent lack of food or assets to redistribute within the community**
- ii) **A structural shift in community power dynamics, away from traditional community leaders, such as chiefs and elders, towards youth.**

Picture 1: Waterlily seeds have become an increasingly important source of food as access to traditional livelihoods has decreased





Consequences of limited chief court functionality

Findings suggest that a decrease in chief court functionality has resulted in food more commonly being shared exclusively down family lines.

- **As a result, highly vulnerable groups, particularly those with limited social connections, may fall through the cracks.**

In conclusion, although hunger was reportedly not as pressing at the time of data collection as it had been in the past, **findings suggest that decreased resilience among the population and reduced functionality of traditional social security systems to deal with hunger might mean that future stressors can lead to a faster and more severe deterioration in humanitarian conditions.**

Picture 2: Aerial view of flooding in southern Unity State. Consecutive years of flooding have severely limited crop production.



Thank you!



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