

Situation Overview: Western Bahr el Ghazal, South Sudan

October 2017

REACH An initiative of
IMPACT Initiatives
ACTED and UNOSAT

Introduction

Episodes of violence that occurred in June 2016, February 2017 and April 2017 led to the displacement of more than 100,000 people within Western Bahr el Ghazal (WBeG).¹ Although episodes of violence and displacement have declined since April 2017, Wau and Raga Counties continue to be affected by insecurity, limiting humanitarian operations and putting the livelihoods of local communities at risk.

To inform humanitarian actors working outside formal settlement sites, REACH has been assessing hard-to-reach areas in WBeG since April 2017. This data is collected through interviews on a monthly basis from settlements across the counties of Raga, Wau and Jur River in WBeG. Between 2 and 20 October 2017, REACH interviewed 331 Key Informants (KIs) with knowledge of humanitarian needs in 139 settlements in the 3 counties of WBeG. The KIs were all interviewed in Wau Town's Protection of Civilians (PoC) site and Collective Centers for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs).

The vast majority (99%) of KIs had reportedly been living in the settlement or had regular contact with someone from the settlement within the month prior to the interview; the remainder of the KIs (1%) were new arrivals to Wau town.

Furthermore, five food security and livelihoods

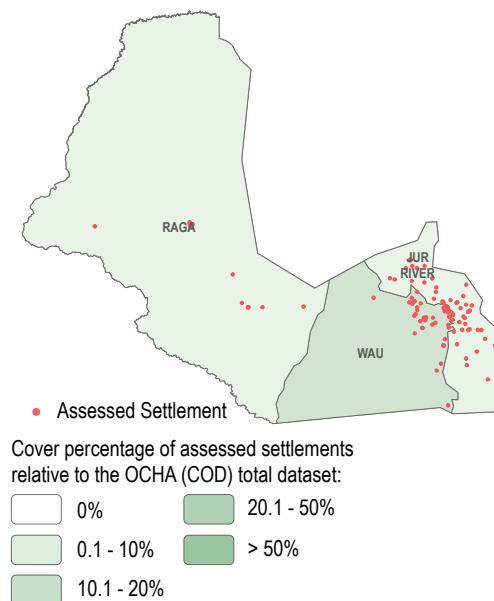
(FSL) focus group discussions (FGDs) and participatory mapping exercises were conducted throughout October to provide a deeper understanding of the FSL situation in hard-to-reach areas of WBeG. Findings were then triangulated with secondary data collected by other humanitarian partners.

The first section of this overview analyses displacement trends in October 2017, while the second section evaluates population dynamics and access to food and other basic humanitarian services for IDPs and local populations in the assessed settlements.

Population Movement and Displacement

Overall displacement was reported to have declined in October. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of assessed settlements indicated that at least half the population remained, which represents a slight increase since September, when only 56% indicated the same. The increase in the proportion of settlements reporting at least half of the population remaining suggests a lack of new displacement and an increase in returnees between September and October. Furthermore, indicative of reduced new displacement, only 11 out of the 331 KIs interviewed by REACH in Wau town in October were new arrivals. In previous months, this proportion had been much higher.² Moreover, none of the new arrivals interviewed cited insecurity as a primary push factor, with a lack of healthcare

Map 1: REACH assessment coverage of Western Bahr el Ghazal



services as the most frequently cited primary reason why new arrivals left their previous location, again reflective of a lack of conflict-related displacement.

The absence of access to food as a frequently reported push and pull factor indicates that the general food security situation has potentially improved due to the harvest season that began in September.

The proportion of settlements reporting the presence of IDPs was similarly unchanged compared to September, at 19%. In Wau

County, a larger proportion of assessed settlement (32%) reported the presence of IDPs, likely due to the displacement of approximately 7,000 IDPs to the Greater Bagarri area of Wau County in 2016 and 2017.³

Situation in Assessed Settlements

Demographic profile

Most displacement and demographic dynamics within the assessed settlements in October were similar to previous months. Seventy-three percent (73%) of assessed settlements reported that the majority of the host community were residing in their own homes, similar to the 67% in September and a slight increase from the 60% in August. In Wau County, 23% of assessed settlements reported that the majority of the population lived in the bush, a proportion similar to that of September (20%). Populations in Greater Bagarri, an area of Wau County, southwest of Wau Town, continue to hide in the bushes due to insecurity and protection concerns.⁴

In October, 71% of assessed settlements that were hosting IDPs reported that most of the IDPs were staying in spontaneous settlements, while 21% of settlements reported that IDPs stayed with the local community. In Wau County, 11% of assessed settlements reported that the majority of the IDPs were residing in the bush, a similar proportion to what was reported for the

1. Estimate made by REACH aggregating and triangulating data from displacement tracking and from IDP numbers in Western Bahr el Ghazal and Northern Bahr el Ghazal States.

2. For instance, 19% and 45% of KIs in September and August, respectively, reported being new arrivals.

3. REACH, Bagarri Displacement and Food Security and Livelihoods Brief, September 2017.

4. Observed by REACH during assessments in Greater Bagarri in August, September and November 2017.

METHODOLOGY

To provide an overview of the situation in hard-to-reach areas of Western Bahr el Ghazal (WBeG), REACH uses primary data provided by key informants who have recently arrived, or receive regular information, from their pre-displacement location or “Area of Knowledge” (AoK).

Information for this situation overview was collected from key informants in Wau town’s Protection of Civilians (PoC) site and in the Collective Centres throughout October 2017.

The first phase of the assessment methodology comprised a participatory mapping exercise to map displacement routes of IDPs in WBeG. In-depth interviews were then conducted with selected participants, using a standardised survey tool comprising questions on displacement trends, population needs and access to basic services.

After data collection was completed, all data was examined at the settlement level, and settlements were assigned the modal response. When no consensus could be found for a settlement, that settlement was not included in reporting. Descriptive statistics and geospatial analysis were then used to analyse the data.

Please note that this represents a change in methodology as of December 2016. Data and collection methods have remained the same since September 2016, but modes of aggregation and inclusion have changed. Thus, this report is not directly comparable with Situation Overviews from before December 2016.

local population.

In 77% of assessed settlements hosting displaced populations, most of the IDPs were reportedly women, a slight increase from 63% in September. According to FGD participants, one possible explanation for this gender imbalance is that a higher proportion of male IDPs were killed during previous episodes of violence.

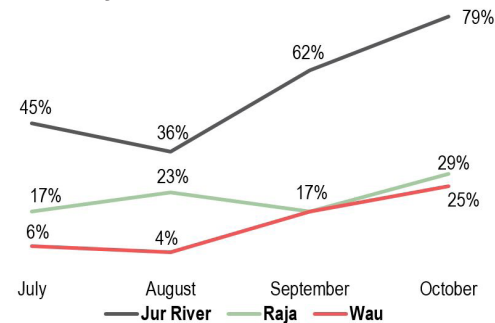
Food Security and Livelihoods

Adequate access to food was reported in 47% of assessed settlements in WBeG in October. This represents an increase compared to the 34% in September and 21% in August, and the highest proportion of reported adequate access to food ever recorded by REACH in WBeG since data collection began in April 2017.

In many areas this improvement is likely linked to the harvest season that started in September and positively impacted levels of access to food. Traditionally, subsistence and cash-based agriculture are WBeG’s most common livelihood activities.⁵ In October, 50% of the assessed settlements reported that farming for sustenance was a livelihood source for their communities. However, casual labour remained the most often reported livelihood source, reported by 73% of assessed settlements (similar to 77% in September). High proportions of casual labour area are observed because people work on the field of those who have access to land and tools during the cultivation season and the beginning of the harvest season.⁶

However, in spite of a general improvement in food security, some areas in WBeG continued to report low levels of adequate access to food. In the settlements that reported no adequate access to food, the most often reported primary reason continued to be the destruction of crops during previous episodes of violence, reported by 43% of assessed settlements in October (51% of settlements reported this September). Even when crops were not destroyed and tools were available, it was often perceived as too insecure to cultivate.⁷

Figure 1: Percentages of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food in Jur River, Raga and Wau Counties from July-October, 2017



Jur River County

In October, Jur River County continued to report the highest levels of access to food and engagement in normal seasonal livelihoods, such as cultivation, in WBeG.

All of the assessed settlements reported access to land for cultivation, which is likely

attributable to the low insecurity within the area. The stable security situation appears to have allowed populations to successfully cultivate and harvest in the months leading up to October 2017. As a result, 82% of assessed settlements reported cultivation as the main source of food (compared to 70% in September), indicating that harvests have been successful. The high levels of cultivation as the primary food source appear to have translated into 79% of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food, compared to 62% in September. This represents the highest proportion of settlements reporting adequate access to food ever recorded by REACH in WBeG.

Raga County

In Raga County, the proportion of settlements reporting adequate access to food slightly increased from 17% in September to 29% in October. The slight increase was partly attributable to humanitarian food assistance, reported as the primary food source by 16% of assessed settlements in October (as compared to 0% in September). Increased reported adequate access to food is also attributable to harvests in September that stocked local markets. For example, purchasing food remained the primary source of food in 58% of assessed settlements in October, similar to 63% in September.

However, reported adequate access to food remained fairly low, partially due to the lack of access to land for cultivation. Access to land for cultivation was reported by 45% of assessed settlements, compared to 62% in

5. IOM, WBeG Village Assessment Survey, 2013.

6. According to FGD participants interviewed in WBeG from April to October, 2017.

7. According to FGD participants interviewed in Deim Zubier and Greater Bagarri, August 2017.

September. This is due to reoccurring, small-scale episodes of violence which create a volatile security situation in Raga. A decrease in access to land for cultivation is likely to have hindered some populations from harvesting and diminished levels of adequate access to food.

Wau County

In Wau County, adequate access to food was reported for 25% of assessed settlements, a similar proportion to the 17% reported in September. The lack of a substantial increase in reported adequate access to food from September to October 2017 is likely attributable to low levels of cultivation during the rainy season due to insecurity, lack of seeds, agricultural tools and land. In Wau, purchasing food as a main food source was reported for 32% of assessed settlements in September and 50% in October. Foraging for wild foods decreased from 58% of assessed settlements reporting it as a main food source in September to only 37% in October. The increase in purchasing food, whilst gathering of wild foods has decreased, is likely a result of a harvest food surplus, which was then sold at nearby markets. Furthermore, during the dry season, wild foods are typically less available and therefore less relied upon as a main food source.

Low levels of reported adequate access to food in Raga and Wau Counties are likely to continue in the coming months, and to decrease again as the lean season approaches in early 2018. As a result, for the foreseeable future, access to food will likely remain the primary concern for

people living in WBeG.

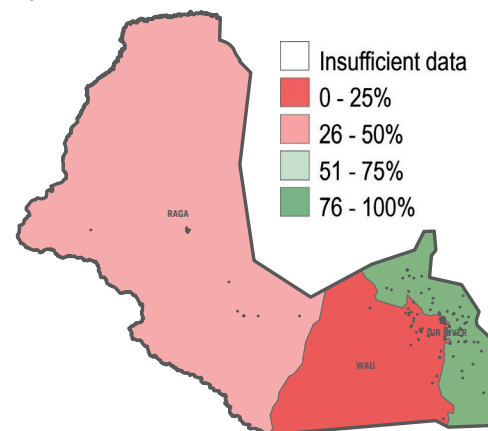
Food consumption and livelihood coping strategies

In the absence of adequate access to food, populations in assessed settlements resorted to a range of food consumption coping mechanisms. Reducing the number of meals, limiting the meal sizes, and buying less expensive foods, reported in 44%, 32% and 27% of assessed settlements, respectively, were the most commonly reported methods. Such food consumption coping strategies are unsustainable and have the potential to adversely impact populations' health. Communities also reported using a range of livelihood coping strategies to meet immediate household needs. Gathering wild food was the most often reported livelihood coping strategy in 44% of assessed settlements and borrowing money was the second (32%). These proportions did not see substantial changes between September and October. Similar to the adopted food consumption coping strategies, the reported livelihoods coping strategies are unsustainable in the long term (wild foods are expected to exhaust in the dry season).

In spite of the current harvest, reported adequate access to food remained alarmingly low in Raga and Wau Counties. The reported food consumption and livelihood coping strategies were not found to be sustainable alternative food sources, which potentially suggests that as the dry season progresses, food stocks are likely to deplete faster than usual, resulting in an earlier onset of the lean

season.

Map 2: Percentage of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food, October 2017



Protection

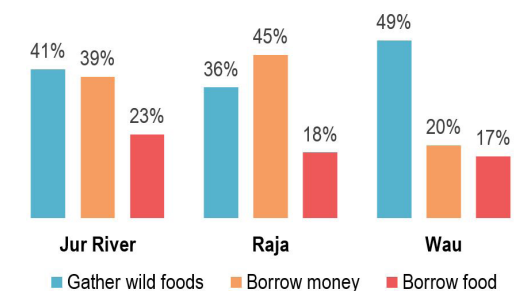
Although no major episodes of violence were reported since April, the security situation continued to be perceived as volatile. In October, only 9% of the settlements assessed in WBeG reported that people feel safe at all times, while 67% reported that they feel safe some of the time and 24% that they never feel safe. In Wau County, 43% of assessed settlements in October reported that the community members do not feel safe at any time of the day. This is indicative of greater levels of perceived insecurity that continue to persist in Wau County, especially in the Greater Bagarri area. The Greater Bagarri area has faced repeated episodes of violence between armed actors over 2016 and 2017.

In line with a stabilising yet volatile security situation, perceived security risks across assessed settlements in WBeG in October

remained similar to September. In 65% of assessed settlements, the main protection concern for men continued to be being killed or injured by members of a different community, as men are more often targeted by armed groups and face a larger risk of forced recruitment.⁸ Looting was the main reported safety concern for women in 32% of the settlements assessed in October.

For boys and girls, the primary protection concern was being killed or injured by perpetrators from outside their community, reported by 40% and 30% of assessed settlements, respectively. In addition, security updates from Wau Town and its outskirts, suggest that criminality has increased over recent weeks, presumably as a result of hyperinflation, limited job opportunities and lack of adequate access to food.

Figure 2: Most often reported livelihood coping strategies in October 2018



Shelter

Levels of shelter damage in October remained similar to previous months, suggesting that no new major episodes of violence, causing the destruction of shelters, occurred from September to October 2017. Across WBeG,

8. According to FGD participants interviewed in October, 2017.

24% of assessed settlements reported that shelters in their community were damaged, similar to the 32% in September. In Wau County, the proportion of settlements reporting shelter damage was slightly higher than in other counties (33% and 47% in October and September, respectively), which is likely due to the greater magnitude of conflict that occurred in the area. The lack of improvement in shelter conditions is likely attributable to insecurity, due to which many people hesitate rebuilding their shelters in the settlements, and because IDPs did not yet return to their settlements to rebuild their shelters.

Traditionally, tukuls are the most common shelter type in WBeG and high proportions of tukuls as the main shelter type suggest a lack of displacement and lack of destruction. In October, most of the assessed settlements (72%) in WBeG reported that tukuls were the primary shelter type in their communities, similar to the previous month (81%). Only 24% of assessed settlements reported that most IDPs were living in tukuls, and in 29%, most of the IDPs reportedly lived in improvised shelters. This was particularly severe in conflict-affected Wau County, where only 13% of assessed settlements reported that most IDPs were sheltered in tukuls and 33% reported most were staying in improvised shelters.

Non-food Items (NFIs)

In assessed settlements where IDPs stay, low levels of availability of non-food items (NFIs) were reported. IDPs were reported to not have access to mosquito nets, cooking pots and

jerry cans in 67%, 72% and 50% of assessed settlements, respectively.

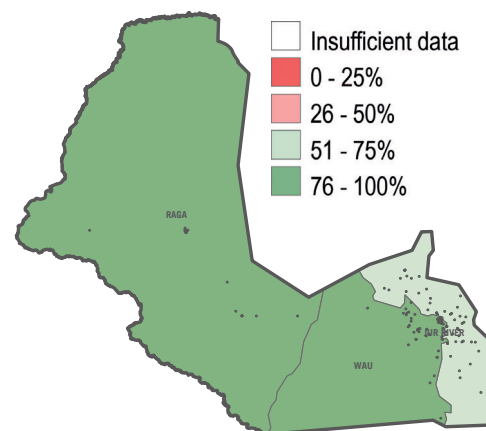
Water and Sanitation

Access to water across WBeG decreased in October. Eighty-one percent (81%) of assessed settlements reportedly had access to boreholes in October, a similar proportion to the 85% in September. However, only 57% of assessed settlements that had access to boreholes reported that the boreholes were functional, a much lower proportion than the 76% in September. The highest proportion of settlements with functional boreholes was reported in Raga (82%), while in Jur River (41%) and Wau (54%) these proportions were substantially lower. In line with these percentages, Raga County reported the highest proportion of settlements in which boreholes were the primary source of water (74%), while in Jur River and Wau only 40% and 43% of assessed settlements reported the same. The decrease in the proportion of functional boreholes is likely attributable to reduced groundwater because of the lack of rains in September and October or because of technical and maintenance issues. According to KIs, the dry season in WBeG started in October and is expected to last until May 2018. During that time it is likely that the proportion of functional boreholes will further decrease and access to improved water sources will be reduced. The most common alternative source of water was protected wells, reported by 39% of assessed settlements across WBeG in October.

As in previous months, open defecation

continued to be widespread with 55% of assessed settlements reporting that no one in their community used latrines, a proportion that remained similar compared to 59% in September. Such high levels of open defecation put populations at greater risk of contracting waterborne diseases.

Map 3: Percentage of assessed settlements reporting access to boreholes, October 2017



Health

Overall access to healthcare increased slightly across WBeG in October. In Wau County, reported access to healthcare increased from 51% of assessed settlements in September to 65% in October and in Jur River from 69% to 85%. In Raga County, 96% of assessed settlements reportedly had access to health services, a proportion that is attributable to the high density of humanitarian actors from the health cluster operating in the county.

When health services were not available in assessed settlements in WBeG, the destruction of healthcare facilities was the

most often reported reason (43%). This indicates that healthcare facilities that were destroyed during prior episodes of violence had not yet been rebuilt due to insecurity and lack of building material.

Malaria remained the most frequently reported health concern by the assessed settlements in WBeG (41%), followed by malnutrition (16%). In October, malnutrition was notably high in Raga and Wau Counties, the same counties with the lowest proportions of adequate access to food, with 20% of assessed settlements reporting malnutrition as the primary health concern. In Raga County, the proportion of settlements in which malnutrition was a primary health concern rose from 10% in September to 20% in October, indicating that sustained low levels of reported adequate access to food negatively impacted the population's health.

Education

Across WBeG, access to education increased in October, indicative of a stabilising security situation, which had previously made education inaccessible to people in many settlements. In October, 60% of the assessed settlements reported access to education, an increase from the 49% in September and 36% in August.

When education services were not available in settlements in WBeG, the primary reported reason was the destruction of facilities as reported by 35% of assessed settlements in October. Wau County was especially affected by this, with 48% of settlements reporting that education facilities were destroyed. The higher proportion of settlements reporting

the destruction of education facilities in Wau County is attributable to the greater levels of conflict and destruction experienced in Wau County, especially in the Greater Bagarri area, southwest of Wau Town. The proportion of assessed settlements in Wau County reporting access to education in October (48%) remained similar to the 41% reported in September, a sign that most destroyed education facilities in Wau County had, as of October, not yet been rehabilitated.⁹

Most assessed settlements with access to education reported that school fees were the primary reported reason that children were not attending school; 56% and 63% settlements reported that boys and girls, respectively, were unable to attend school due to unaffordable school fees. Apart from school fees, in 27% of assessed settlements in Jur River County and 22% of assessed settlements in Raga County boys were reportedly being kept at home because they were needed for agricultural work. In Wau County, only 14% reported the same, which is in line with the reported lower engagement in agriculture in the area, compared to the other counties of WBeG.

Conclusion

As of October, the general humanitarian situation across WBeG state has slightly improved over previous months. The most critical concerns, such as adequate access to food and protection have improved, particularly when compared to April 2017, when REACH began assessing WBeG State. Similarly, shelter conditions, access to healthcare and education were reported to have improved

in October. These improvements are likely attributable to the stabilised security situation.

Access to boreholes across WBeG decreased slightly in October, which is likely due to the lack of maintenance of boreholes in some areas and reduced groundwater.

In spite of these slight improvements, adequate access to food in Raga and Wau Counties remained alarmingly low, with populations resorting to unsustainable food consumption and livelihood coping mechanisms. These counties are likely to experience a further deterioration in access to food in the upcoming lean season of 2018, when the harvests of September and October have been consumed.

9. Based on observations made by REACH in Greater Bagarri in August and September 2017.

About REACH

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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