



Leer County: Food Security and Livelihoods Profile

Unity State, South Sudan, November-December 2017

of KI interviews conducted: 177

of assessed settlements: 87

Methodology

In January 2018, an estimated 48% of the population remaining within South Sudan, (over 5 million individuals), was severely food insecure under the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC).¹ To support the humanitarian response and identify areas of acute food insecurity, REACH utilizes the Area of Knowledge (AoK) remote monitoring methodology. Using AoK, REACH reports on needs and access to services in Greater Upper Nile, including hard-to-reach areas in Unity State. With frequently disrupted humanitarian access in 2017, REACH data continues to fill critical information gaps. The data presented in this profile supported a classification of acute food insecurity in the area in January and projections of the situation in February-April and May-July. Findings refer to settlements, rather than households, and data was collected through interviews with 177 Key Informants (KIs), including those recently displaced from a given settlement, regularly travelling to and from it, or in regular contact with its residents. This county profile provides a general update to the [May-July 2017 Leer County Food Security and Livelihoods \(FSL\) profile](#).² While AoK findings are not statistically significant, they provide an indicative snapshot of the humanitarian situation in assessed settlements.

Food Security and Livelihoods Overview

Pre-Crisis Livelihoods³

Pre-crisis livelihoods in Leer were predominantly agro-pastoralist, with functioning markets essential to maintaining food security.⁴ To supplement small-scale sorghum, maize, and cowpea production and animal products, households typically sold livestock at markets in Leer town and Bentiu to obtain additional cereals and income, especially in the lean season. Fishing and the gathering of abundant wild foods in local wetlands were common in normal times, increasing seasonally during food insecure periods.

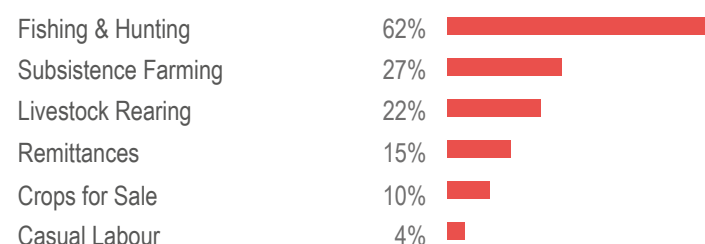
Hazards (Shocks)

- Ongoing armed conflict from 2014, most severe fighting in mid to late 2015; high number of conflict-related deaths in October-November 2017⁵
- Recurrent displacement due to armed conflict and flooding in 2014-2017; common destinations included nearby wetlands, Panyijiar County, north-western Jonglei State, Bentiu Protection of Civilians (PoC) site⁶
- Large-scale cattle losses due to insecurity and disrupted migration
- Successive poor harvests in 2014-2018 due to insecurity, climatic shocks⁷
- Active cholera transmission from mid-2016 through June 2017⁸

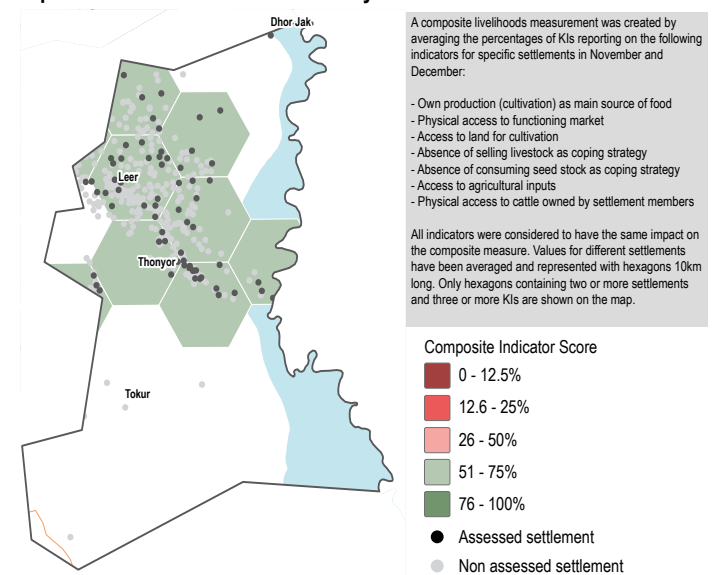
Vulnerability (Resilience)

Similar to the findings of the May-July FSL profile of Leer County, armed conflict continued to be the leading cause of disruption to livelihoods through most of the harvest season (September-December, depending on crop type and rainfall). Severe reductions in agricultural output and livestock holdings, shifting livelihood sources, and heightened reliance on food assistance remain. The incidence and intensity of armed conflict in central Unity State escalated through the second half of 2017, likely disrupting the harvest. Over November-December, an average of 58%

Figure 1: Most commonly reported livelihoods sources in assessed settlements



Map 1: Level of livelihood vulnerability



of assessed settlements reported the looting of at least one household in the previous month, while an average of 44% reported at least one violent incident causing a civilian death and/or property damage. For assessed settlements reporting inadequate access to food, this increases to 70% and 90%, respectively. An average of 29% of assessed settlements likewise reported armed conflict causing shelter damage or destruction in the previous month. In December, a large shift in perceived main cause of death occurred, with the proportion of assessed settlements reporting malaria as a suspected main cause of death falling by half and the proportion indicating armed conflict increasing from 0% to 33%. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) project also reported a high density of armed conflict events and fatalities in October-November 2017 in Leer County.⁹

Over time, the effect of armed conflict on agriculture has been extensive. From 2011 to 2018, annual Crop and Food Security Assessment Missions (CFSAM) to South Sudan undertaken by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations (FAO) show an estimated 84% reduction in total area planted for cereals from 2010 to 2017, 70 percentage point drop in the proportion of households engaged in farming from 2010 to 2017, and annual cereals deficits averaging 87% over 2015-2018 across the county.¹⁰ Livelihood sources have shifted in response to repeated disruption to agriculture, with fishing and hunting consistently the most commonly reported livelihood sources from June through December 2017. This livelihood source was reported as currently practiced by an average of 62% of assessed settlements in November-December. This was roughly double the average proportion of assessed settlements reporting subsistence farming and triple that of livestock rearing in an agro-pastoralist area where fishing and hunting are typically seasonal complements to food access (see Figure 1).

Livestock rearing has reportedly also been severely affected by armed conflict, greatly reducing access to milk and meat and removing a key asset that can be sold or traded to obtain cereals. The proportion of assessed settlements indicating at least some community members owning any cattle both at home or at pasture has fluctuated widely in Leer County over 2017. Rising from a March-June average proportion of 14% to an August high of 59%, the proportion of assessed settlements dipped to 31% in October before rising again to an average of 55% in November-December. The largest single increase (42 points) occurred from June to July, possibly suggestive of sudden cattle acquisition, such as through raiding. By November-December, increases in cattle possession had not led to similar increases in the average proportion of

assessed settlements reporting livestock rearing as a currently practiced livelihood source (22%), although the average proportion of assessed settlements reporting physical access to cattle within the settlement or at pasture increased to 31% from an average of 15% in September-October. The proportion of assessed settlements reporting an active livestock disease outbreak in the previous month among livestock owned by the members of that settlement also averaged 31%. In November-December, no assessed settlements reported that either milk or meat were regularly consumed within the settlement, suggestive of limited increases in the absolute size of community herds.¹¹

Access to Food

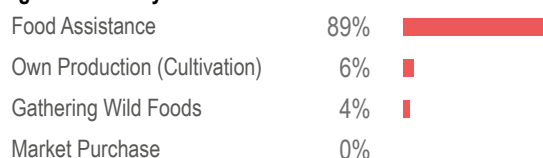
Through November-December, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food averaged 94%, with 88% reporting food assistance as their primary source of food. In the same period, the General Food Distribution (GFD) cycle slowed from every 45 days to every 60 days,¹² likely reducing food availability. However, the proportion of assessed settlements relying on food assistance as their primary food source roughly matched the March-October average, suggesting continued reliance on food assistance. While other food sources, such as own production (cultivation) and the gathering of wild foods, were not commonly reported as primary sources, they may have supplemented GFDs (see Figure 2). While the average proportion of assessed settlements reporting physical access to a functioning market in November-December (59%) remains the same as the 2017 average, no assessed settlements in either November or December reported market purchase as a primary source of food. It is not clear to what extent local markets in Leer County were or are able to provide staple food commodities at accessible prices, especially with disrupted trade routes.¹³

Coping Strategies

Over November-December, the average proportion of assessed settlements reporting gathering wild foods due to a lack of access to food averaged 56%, which may be in response to the reduction in GFD frequency. The proportion of assessed settlements reporting the sale of livestock due to a lack of food and/or money to buy food was 12%, an atypical coping strategy for the harvest period. However, it is not clear how many households may be capable of utilizing this strategy and the extent to which minimally functioning markets and trade routes can facilitate livestock-for-cereals trade.

Through the harvest period, marginal declines occurred among the proportions of assessed settlements reporting several consumption-based coping strategies in the month prior to assessment, suggesting small improvements in food consumption within limited areas of Leer

Figure 2: Primary source of food in assessed settlements



County. Between September-October to November-December, the average proportions of assessed settlements indicating reductions in the number of meals per day among community members decreased from 37% to 14%, while the average proportion reporting reductions in meal size fell from 65% to 44%. Conversely, the proportion of assessed settlements indicating borrowing food as a coping strategy remained high at an average of 60% in November-December, suggesting widespread sharing of food assistance and any harvested crops. This sharing of food, along with access to wild foods, may have contributed to reductions in other coping strategies.

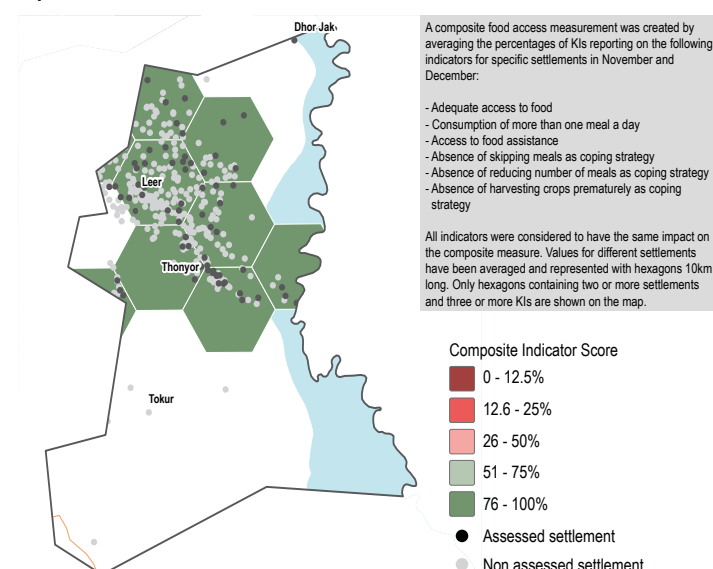
Access to Health and Nutrition Services

Despite the impact of armed conflict on livelihoods, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting access to static health services and nutrition feeding programmes substantially improved over 2017, with moderate interruption to this trend over September-October. The proportion of assessed settlements indicating physical access to a functioning health facility increased from 30% in January to an average of 89% in November-December. Similarly, the proportion of assessed settlements indicating the presence of a nutrition programme providing supplementary and/or therapeutic foods¹⁴ increased from 9% in January to an average of 60% in November-December.

Stability of Food Access

Armed conflict continues to inhibit the recovery of agro-pastoralism, including through repeated disruption of harvests, the accumulation of cattle, and the movement of commercial goods and people. Adequate access to food appears reliant on continued food assistance and limited harvests appear unlikely to contribute to food access beyond March. While access to food will most likely decline through the 2018 lean season, mortality related to hunger, acute malnutrition, and disease is less likely to increase should current reported levels of access to health and nutrition services be maintained. However, continued incidents of armed conflict present risks to service provision.

Map 2: Level of access to food



Endnotes

- 1 South Sudan IPC Technical Working Group, IPC Key Messages: January 2018.
- 2 REACH, Leer County: Food Security and Livelihoods Profile May-July 2017.
- 3 Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), South Sudan Livelihood Zones and Descriptions, August 2013.
- 4 Mercy Corps, "Emergency Market Mapping and Analysis (EMMA): Livestock Off-take and Sorghum Market Systems in Leer County, Unity, South Sudan," January 2015. Tubiana, Jerome, "Report on Ethnographic Study on Pastoralism in Unity State," VSF-Suisse-VISTAS, August 2015.
- 5 FEWS NET visualization of ACLED real-time dataset, 12/2017.
- 6 For example, see the following REACH products: Unity State Situation Overview December 2015; Greater Nyal West Unity State Situation Overview December 2015; Quarterly Displacement to Nyal Southern Unity State Situation Overview December 2016; Unity State Situation Overview July-August 2017; Nyal Port Monitoring December 2017.
- 7 WFP/FAO CFSAM 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018.
- 8 OCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin South Sudan, 12 June 2017; South Sudan Health Cluster Bulletin #8, 31 August 2017.
- 9 ACLED real-time dataset 12/2017.
- 10 WFP/FAO, CFSAM, 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014; 2015; 2016; 2017; 2018.
- 11 In Jul/Aug 2017, less than 5% of Leer County households reported any cattle ownership in the Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring System (FSNMS) - FAO/UNICEF/WFP.
- 12 Email with Charles Musoka, WFP Emergency Response Officer (19/01/2018).
- 13 FEWS NET noted "minimal or no" "market and trade route activity" in all main central Unity State markets - October 2017 South Sudan Food Security Outlook.
- 14 Specialized nutritious foods used to treat acute malnutrition and fortify diets.