

Situation Overview: Unity State, South Sudan

October 2016

REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action

Introduction

Displacement trends, population needs and humanitarian access all continue to be negatively affected by the insecurity resulting from the ongoing fighting in Unity State since July. Ongoing clashes have continued to trigger displacement to sites such as Bentiu PoC and Nyal, and, along with impaired road access, have disrupted humanitarian activities outside of formal displacement sites. As a result, humanitarians have had limited or no access to many parts of Unity State since July.

To inform the response of humanitarians working outside of formal settlement sites, REACH is conducting an ongoing assessment of hard-to-reach areas in South Sudan, for which data on communities across the Greater Upper Nile region is collected on a monthly basis. Between 10 and 28 October, REACH interviewed 819 Key Informants (KIs) from 77 communities in 7 of the 9 counties in Unity State. 377 KIs were interviewed in Bentiu PoC, 323 in Nyal and 119 in Juba PoCs 1 and 3.

Findings have been triangulated using focus group discussions (FGDs), secondary data, and previous REACH assessments of hard-to-reach areas of Unity State.

New arrivals were specifically targeted during the data collection phase to ensure a better understanding of current displacement

dynamics. The vast majority (more than 80%) of respondents interviewed had arrived in their displacement location in September or October, and therefore had up-to-date information about the village from which they had been displaced.

This Situation Overview provides an update to key findings from the September Situation Overview for Unity State. The first section of this overview analyses displacement trends in Unity State in October, as well as the push and pull factors that shaped patterns of displacement this month. The second section evaluates the population dynamics in the assessed communities, as well as access to food and basic services for both IDP and non-displaced communities.

Population Movement and Displacement

Instability has persisted across much of Unity State in October, with Leer County remaining the worst affected area, followed by Koch and Mayendit. As a result, Leer has continued to be the main source of displacement to Bentiu PoC, representing more than half of the 2,133 new arrivals in the last two weeks of October.¹

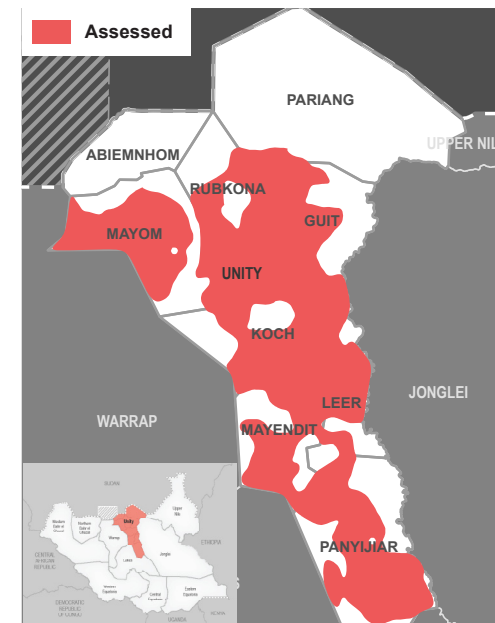
However, although there was a large influx of new arrivals to Bentiu PoC in the latter half of October (primarily from the conflict-affected

counties of Leer and Koch), this was offset by the number of exits to Rubkona and Guit Counties throughout the month. This may be attributed to a perceived improvement in the security context compared to September, particularly in Guit. Those exiting cited cultivation, reuniting with family and, to a much lesser extent, lack of space and shelters in the PoC as the most important push factors. As a result, the population of Bentiu PoC actually decreased over the course of the month, from 103,494 at the end of September² to 101,022 at the end of October.³ By contrast, the number of new arrivals registering in Bentiu Town increased from 1,090 in September to 1,562 in October.⁴

Push factors for leaving pre-crisis location

The vast majority of KIs (88%) reported a lack of security as the most important factor that pushed them to leave their pre-crisis location. This response was consistent across Unity State, as it was reported by more than 75% of respondents from all 7 assessed counties, and more than 90% of respondents from the most conflict-affected counties of Leer and Koch.

Sixty-four per cent of KIs reported inadequate access to food to be the second most important push factor, which can likely be attributed to the impact of insecurity on cultivation and harvests, flooding that has destroyed



Map 1: REACH assessment coverage of Unity State, October 2016

crops in many parts of Unity State, a lack of humanitarian access and general food distributions (GFDs) in food insecure areas such as Leer, and the looting and destruction of crops by armed groups.

Twenty-eight per cent of KIs reported lack of shelter to be the third most important factor (with lack of health services and lack of humanitarian aid not far behind at 21% and 16% respectively). As explored in the shelter section below, the insecurity and conflict in Unity appear to have had a pronounced

1 CCCM Cluster Bi-Weekly Situation Report 17-30 October 2016.

2 IOM, Bentiu PoC Update: Population Count 28 - 30 September 2016.

3 IOM, Bentiu PoC Update: Population Count 29 - 31 October 2016.

4 IOM, DTM registration figures.

METHODOLOGY

To provide an overview of the situation in largely inaccessible areas of Unity State, REACH uses primary data provided by key informants who receive regular information from their pre-displacement location or “Area of Origin”.

Information for this report was collected from key informants in the Bentiu Protection of Civilians (PoC) site and Nyal in Unity State, as well as in Juba PoCs 1 and 3, throughout October 2016.

The first phase of the assessment methodology involved a participatory mapping exercise to map the relevant communities in Unity State, as well as the identification of key informants. 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 community level, and communities were assigned the modal response. Descriptive statistics and geospatial analysis were then used to analyse the data.

It should be noted that when no consensus could be found for a community, that community was not included in reporting. This, combined with the fact that sometimes only a subset of respondents are asked certain questions depending on their answer to a previous question, is why the total number of communities reported on may differ throughout this report.

negative impact on access to traditional, permanent shelters (tukuls).

Pull factors for choosing current location

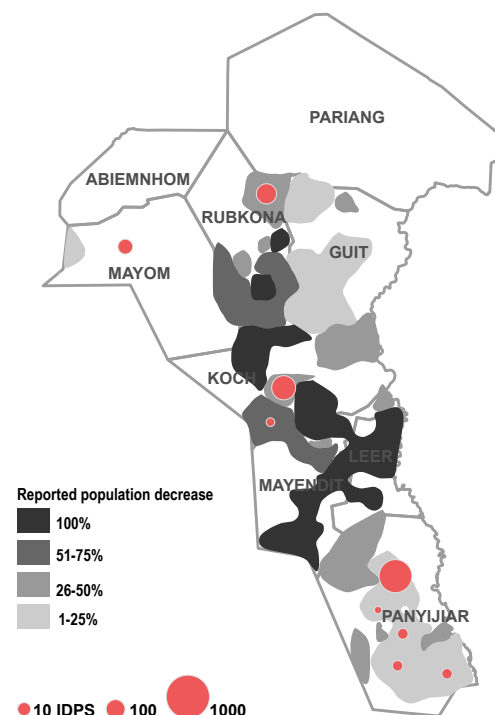
The major pull factors to Nyal and the PoCs in Bentiu and Juba largely mirror the reported push factors. Eighty-one per cent of KIs reported perceived security as the primary reason for moving to their current location. Fifty-two per cent reported access to food as the second most important reason. Twenty per cent reported access to shelter as the third most important reason, followed by access to humanitarian services (19%) and access to healthcare (17%).

Situation in Assessed Communities

Demographic profile

Host community population in assessed villages

The ongoing violence has reportedly resulted in the total depopulation of large numbers of villages in the conflict-affected counties of Unity State. In October, 27% of assessed communities reported that there was no population remaining in their village, meaning that the entire village had fled their homes. Nearly half of the communities reporting no remaining population are in Leer. By contrast, none of the assessed communities in the stable counties of Mayom and Panyijiar reported total depopulation.



Map 2: Reported host community population decrease, and reported IDP populations, October 2016

Similarly, only communities in Leer and Mayendit reported that the majority of the remaining host community in their village was currently residing outside their homes, with 5 assessed communities in Leer and 3 in Mayendit reportedly living in the bush. Furthermore, 3 communities in Leer reported that most remaining members of the host community were living in someone else's home, possibly because their own had been destroyed or rendered uninhabitable by fighting. This is consistent with FGDs conducted with

new arrivals from Leer in Bentiu PoC, in which many participants reported that at least some of the homes in their village had been destroyed in the course of fighting, and that they had been repeatedly forced to hide in the nearby bush or swamp due to clashes in or near their village.

Although Leer has likely experienced the highest degree of population movement, host community displacement was reported by 97% of assessed communities. Of these, conflict was cited as the most important cause of the displacement in all but one of the communities.

IDP population in assessed villages

Thirteen per cent of assessed communities reported that they were hosting IDPs in October, with an average reported IDP population of 234 (though individual reports ranged from 10 to 2,500 per village). Most of these communities are in stable Panyijiar, and the most frequently cited pull factor was reuniting with family.

Protection

Triggered by renewed violence, the protection context in Unity State has changed in highly concerning ways since July, with reports of major violence committed against civilians, particularly in counties such as Leer, Koch and Mayendit. According to FGDs conducted with new arrivals in Bentiu PoC and Nyal, this trend has reportedly continued in October.⁵

Forty per cent of assessed communities reported having access to protection services in October. Protection is usually either provided by community leaders (as reported by 34% of

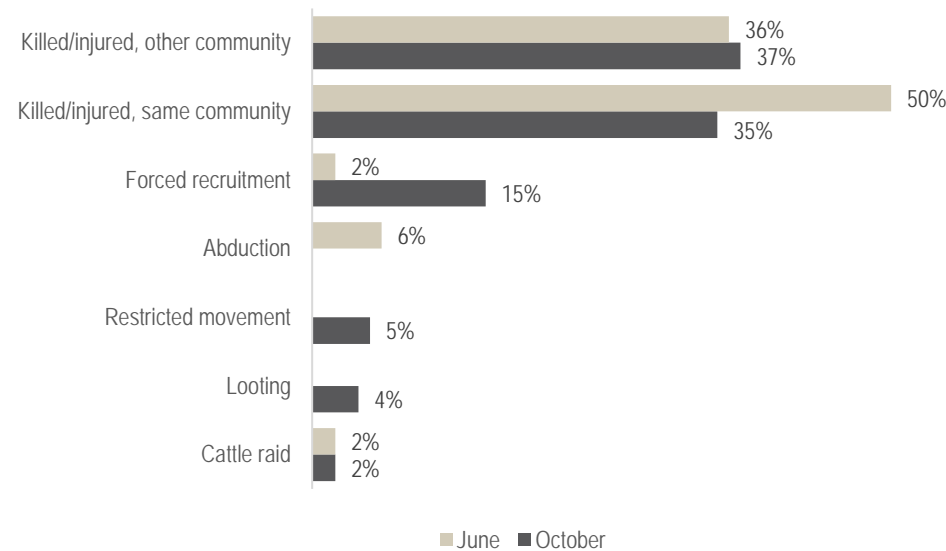
assessed communities) or by community-led early warning groups (50%). Fifty-seven per cent reported that women would be unsafe at any time of day if they had to leave their shelter, and 79% reported the same for men.

Sexual violence is the biggest protection concern for women (as reported by 83% of assessed communities) and **being killed or injured is the biggest protection concern for men** (72%). **Forced recruitment has also emerged as an important protection concern for men**, particularly in Guit (5 communities) and Mayom (4), which are both susceptible to forced recruitment for political reasons.

Shelter

In October, shelter trends appear to have

Figure 1: Reported most important protection concerns for men, June (pre-crisis) vs. October 2016



improved slightly for host communities compared to September. The most common type of shelter reportedly used by host communities was the rakooba (77% of assessed communities), followed by the tukul (23%). A high proportion of rakoobas, which are temporary structures that are easily set up and taken down, is usually a sign of displacement, or that permanent shelters (tukuls) have been damaged, destroyed, or are considered unsafe to inhabit due to fighting. However, a higher proportion of communities reported tukuls as the most commonly used shelter in their village than in September (9% of assessed communities). This may be a positive indication that shelter trends are beginning to improve among host communities, but further

investigation is required to confirm this. By contrast, all communities with an IDP presence reported that the majority of the IDPs were living in rakoobas.

Food security

Alarmingly, **39% of assessed communities reported that deaths from hunger had occurred in the past three months**. This is likely indicative of the negative impact of the ongoing crisis on the resilience of those populations that have been most affected by violence since July, as the overwhelming majority of communities reporting such deaths are located in Leer (11), Koch (8) and Mayendit (6).

In their food security forecast for the October 2016 to May 2017 period, FEWS NET identified southern and central Unity to be one of the two regions “of greatest concern” in South Sudan.⁶ FEWS NET classifies most of Unity State as either ‘stressed’ or in ‘crisis’. Those counties that have been most directly affected by the fighting since July (namely Leer, Koch and Mayendit) are classified as experiencing a food security ‘emergency’ (or IPC Phase 4, with ‘famine’ being Phase 5). As of October, Guit has also been classified in the ‘emergency’ category. The report warns that **without significant humanitarian intervention, central and southern Unity State are at serious risk of entering famine (Phase 5) as the lean season approaches**, stressing that “improvements to humanitarian access and high levels of assistance are needed to prevent

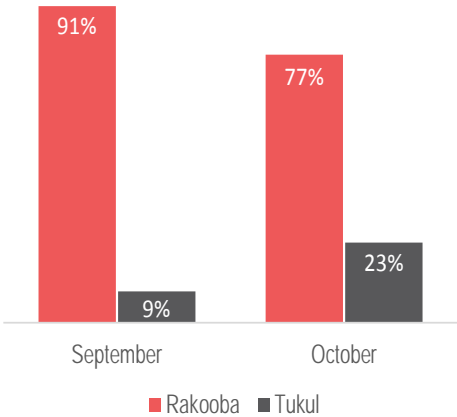


Figure 2: Most common types of shelter reportedly used by host community, September vs. October 2016

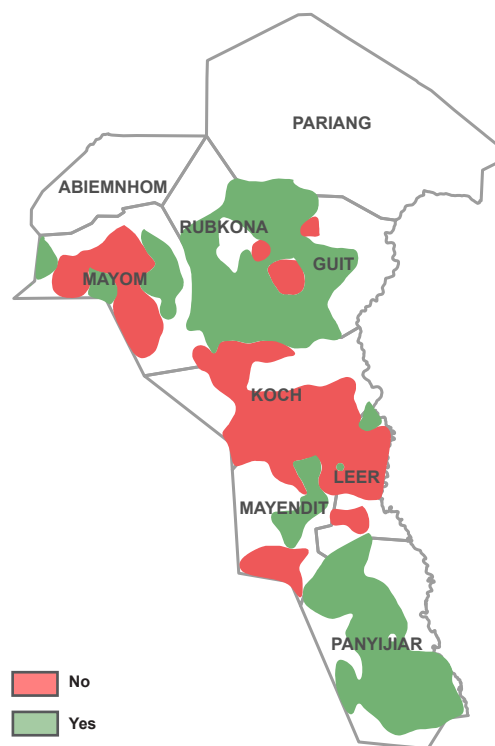
the loss of life.”⁷ Only 45% of assessed communities reported that they had adequate access to food in October, which is comparable to September, when 48% of assessed communities reported the same. None of the assessed communities in conflict-affected Leer, Mayendit and Koch reported adequate access to food. These figures reflect the persistent food insecurity experienced in large parts of Unity State, as well as the pronounced impact of conflict on access to food. The most important sources of food have changed markedly since the July crisis. In October, 44% of assessed communities identified cultivation as their primary source of food, **41% reported foraging for wild foods, and only 13% cited humanitarian aid**. By

6 FEWS NET, “Food Security Outlook: October 2016 to May 2017”.
7 Ibid.

contrast, in June 85% of assessed communities were reportedly relying on humanitarian aid, only 15% cited cultivation, and no communities reported foraging for wild food.

These trends are partly attributable to the advent of the cultivation season, which has permitted more people to rely on their own crops for food instead of depending on humanitarian aid. However, reliance on aid has also declined due to the negative impact of the renewed crisis, as it has become difficult or impossible for humanitarians to conduct general food distributions in many parts of Unity where it is unsafe to cultivate. Foraging has likely become more prevalent because the increased instability has impeded cultivation, forced many to flee to areas where foraging is the only viable source of food, and prevented humanitarians from accessing certain food insecure areas.

Map 3 illustrates the communities reporting that a food distribution took place there within the past 3 months. Distributions were reported by KIs from Rubkona, Guit, Panyijiar and, to a lesser extent, Mayendit and Mayom Counties. This is consistent with the geographical coverage of WFP distributions in Unity from August to October, namely in Dingding, Bentiu Town and Thanyang in Rubkona, Kuach and Niemni in Guit, Ganyiel in Panyijiar, Dulbol and Thaker in Mayendit, and Mankein, Kueryiek, Wangkei and Ngop in Mayom.⁸ Thirty-two per cent of assessed communities reported that they expected to benefit from a future food distribution within the next month. However, 77% of those communities are in the counties



Map 3: Communities reporting that a food distribution has taken place in the last 3 months

that are most accessible for humanitarians (Rubkona and Panyijiar).

A successful harvest is critical to food security because market access is generally low in Unity State, so most of the population must rely on their own cultivation for food. Only 12% of assessed communities reported access to a market in October. It is worth noting the continued impact of the instability on market prices across the country, which has led to hyperinflation, the rate of which reached an

all-time high of 836% in October.⁹ **This rapid increase in the price of basic goods has made purchasing food from the market an largely unviable option even for those who can physically access one.** In Bentiu Town market, for example, buying 1 kg of field beans in mid-October 2016 cost nearly 8 times what it did in mid-October 2015.¹⁰

Of the 42 communities reporting inadequate access to food, 88% reported that the most important reason was that it was too unsafe to access food by their preferred method. The second most important reason was reportedly the destruction of crops (48% of assessed communities), in most cases likely due to flooding. This is supported by a FEWS NET assessment from mid-September, which reported that since July, heavy rains have caused flooding with severe consequences for food security in northern South Sudan.¹¹

Livelihoods

Sixty-eight per cent of assessed communities reported that land was available for cultivation, but only 39% reported access to agricultural inputs. In a likely reflection of the impact of insecurity on cultivation and livelihoods, the majority of those reporting access to inputs were communities in stable Mayom (9) and Panyijiar (8), and the majority of those reporting no access were communities in conflict-affected Leer (16) and Mayendit (14). Furthermore, 63% of assessed communities reported that most of the farming implements and tradesmen's tools in the community had been looted.

As in previous months, a large proportion of assessed communities (57%) reported that at least one major cattle raid had taken place in the past six months, of which all reported that personal property other than cattle had been damaged, 85% reported that community infrastructure such as a school or health facility had been damaged, and 95% reported that displacement had occurred as a result of the raid.

On the other hand, 15% of assessed communities reported that non-agricultural casual jobs were available. Although this is clearly a small minority, and is comparable to September, it nevertheless represents a marked improvement from the June - August period, when only 4% to 7% of communities were reporting access to casual job opportunities.

Water and Sanitation

Forty-two per cent of assessed communities reported access to safe drinking water (borehole), of which all communities for which a consensus could be determined (23 communities) reported that the safe water could be accessed by walking for less than an hour. It should be noted that **even in villages with functioning boreholes, FGDs suggest that these are often only used by those living in relatively close proximity to them, with those living further away obtaining their water from unprotected sources such as rivers and swamps.**

Ninety-nine per cent of assessed communities reported open defecation, with only one

8 WFP distribution data.

9 OCHA, South Sudan Humanitarian Bulletin Issue 19, 6 December 2016.

10 WFP South Sudan Weekly Price Tracker, Week 2 October 2016.

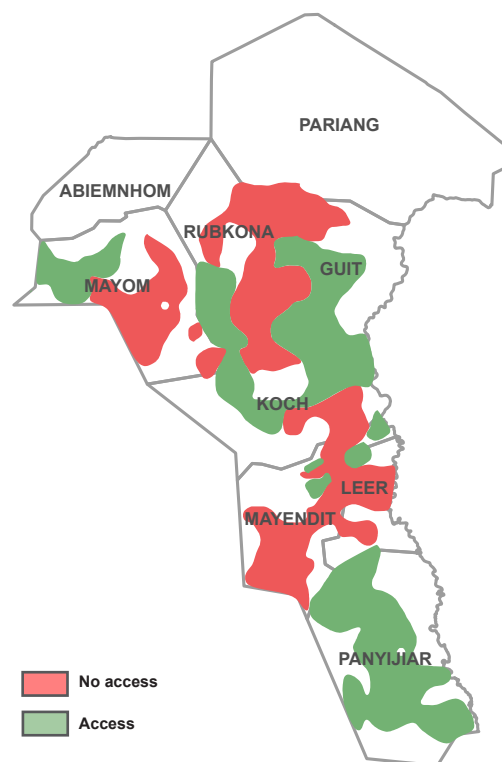
11 FEWS NET, "Global Weather Hazards Summary", 9-15 September 2016.

community in Panyijiar reporting the use of latrines. This can be attributed to a general absence of latrines as well as the fact that open defecation is an entrenched practice that will require substantial behavioural change communication to eliminate. **Sanitation infrastructure and hygiene promotion therefore remain a priority need in Unity State.**

Health

Only 22% of assessed communities reported access to health services. Of those citing no access to health services, 66% reported that previously existing services were abandoned, looted, destroyed or otherwise unable to function due to fighting, and 34% reported that health services simply never existed in the first place. According to both KI responses and secondary data from health partners, there are currently no functioning health services in either Leer or Mayendit as a result of the July crisis.

An overwhelming majority of assessed communities (97%) identified malaria as the biggest health concern in their community, and 36% reported diarrhea as the second most important health problem. This is consistent with findings from the South Sudan Health Cluster, which reported that malaria accounted for 43% of the major causes of death in South Sudan, followed by acute watery diarrhoea at 11%, for the January-August 2016 period.¹² Unsurprisingly, then, malaria drugs and oral rehydration salts were most frequently identified by KIs as the most needed health items.



Map 4: Communities reporting access to safe drinking water, October 2016

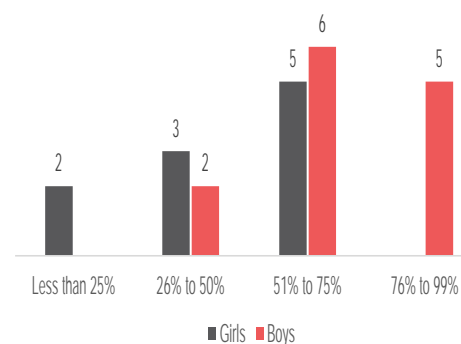
Although not highlighted by REACH data, it should be noted that the ongoing outbreak of cholera in South Sudan became a priority health concern in Unity State in October. The first cases of cholera in Bentiu PoC were confirmed on 21 October, and since then additional cases have been identified among new arrivals from across the state. Those who did not receive the oral cholera vaccine during the 2015 vaccination campaign are particularly susceptible. Identifying and responding to cholera in Leer and Mayendit has been highly constrained by the insecurity there.¹³

Education

Only 18% of assessed communities reported access to education services in October (exclusively pre-primary and primary schools), with a clear majority (62%) reported in Panyijiar, one of the more stable counties in Unity State. However, secondary data from education partners working in Unity suggests that education services may be underreported. This may be partly attributable to the fact that several schools supported by education partners were re-opened in October after a long closure due to insecurity, after many of the KIs interviewed would have left the area.

Of the 13 communities reporting access to education, 5 reported that more than 50% of girls were attending school, while 11 communities reported the same for boys. FGDs conducted by REACH in catchment sites in previous months suggest that the gender disparity in school attendance rates illustrated

Figure 3: Proportion of girls aged 6-17 years reportedly attending school compared to boys, by number of communities (where education is reportedly available), October 2016



in Figure 3 is linked to traditional gender roles.

Access to education, which has always been limited in Unity State, has been further set back by the closing down of many schools in the southern counties (particularly Leer and Koch) as teachers fled and NGO staff were evacuated due to the fighting in July. Many of these schools have yet to reopen.

Conclusion

The fighting that escalated in southern Unity State in July has continued to negatively affect displacement trends, population needs and access to basic services in October, although a few small but positive trends were also observed. Although IDPs continue to enter formal displacement sites such as Bentiu PoC and Nyal in large numbers, in October this influx was offset by an even larger number of exits from Bentiu PoC to Rubkona and Guit, possibly suggesting that some IDPs felt safe enough to move to nearby areas close to the PoC.

Many host communities have either been directly affected by the fighting (with consequences such as violence, looting, destroyed property and displacement), or have been cut off from humanitarian access due to the resultant insecurity. The high prevalence of more temporary structures (rakoobas) as the primary shelter in almost all communities is likely a reflection of the instability, fear and high levels of displacement currently being experienced by large parts of the population in Unity State. However, although rakoobas remain by far the most common type of shelter, the reported increase in tukuls may be a

12 Health Cluster Bulletin #5, 23 September 2016

13 WHO, Situation Report #95 on cholera in South Sudan, 17 November 2016.

positive indication of improving shelter trends.

Access to basic services (most notably food, health and education) has remained low since the beginning of the July crisis, and continues to do so in October. Food security remains the most pronounced challenge, as cultivation has been impeded by insecurity and flooding, humanitarians have been prevented from implementing general food distributions in some of the most food insecure parts of Unity, and access to markets is extremely limited. As a result, many have had to resort to negative coping mechanisms, and deaths from hunger are widely reported.

While improvements in humanitarian access are expected with the beginning of the dry season and consequent rehabilitation of roads, instability is also expected to increase as armed groups will be able to mobilise more easily. It is therefore likely that the volatile security context will continue to have a negative impact on population needs and on humanitarian access to hard to reach areas.

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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