

Akobo West and Waat Rapid Assessment

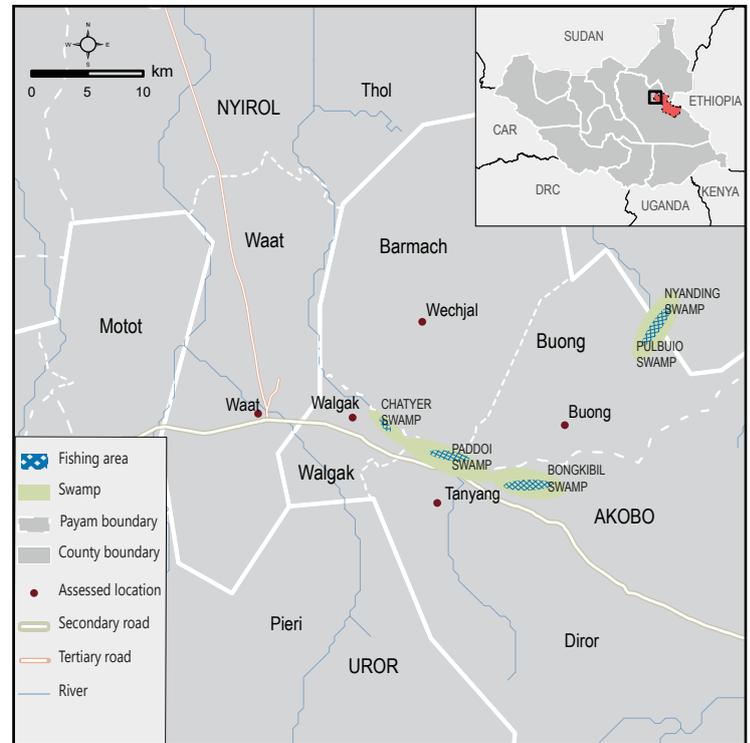
March, 2023 | South Sudan

CONTEXT & RATIONALE

Populations across the Greater Akobo region of Jonglei state, comprised of Akobo, Uror, and Nyirol counties (est. total population of 226,548), face extreme levels of food insecurity and acute malnutrition.¹ The October 2022 Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) identified Akobo County as area-level phase 4 (emergency) with 5% of the population, or 11,348 people, projected to face phase 5 (catastrophic, or famine-like) food insecurity between January and March 2023. Populations in Nyirol are also facing extreme levels of food insecurity, according to the IPC, with 35% of its population classified as P4 over the same period.² Both counties were classified as acute malnutrition (AMN) P4, or 'critical.'

Increased violence across the Greater Pibor Administrative Area (GPAA) and the Greater Akobo region between late-December 2022 and January 2023 reportedly triggered the displacement of more than 30,000 individuals across Waat Payam, Nyirol County and Akobo West,³ likely exacerbating already severe humanitarian needs.⁴ The primary objective of this assessment was to assess the effect of shocks and underlying vulnerability on humanitarian needs, population movement, and service provision in accessible areas of Akobo West and Waat.

Map 1: Assessment coverage



KEY FINDINGS

- Insecurity and hunger driven displacement:** Survey data shows that increased conflict and insecurity coupled with severe food insecurity drove households from their areas of origin beginning in roughly November 2022 and increasingly through December and January 2023. Most displaced focus group discussion (FGD) participants reported moving initially from rural villages to population centers and payam headquarters, while others moved to fishing areas or cattle camps.
- Limited access to and availability of food in displacement areas:** Both displaced and non-displaced households in Walgak reported consuming just 1.2 meals per day on average, and 99% of households in Walgak reported that their household did not have enough to eat at the time of data collection. FGD participants in all assessment locations unanimously reported food as their most pressing need.
- Widespread use of negative or unsustainable food coping strategies:** Respondents commonly reported engaging in harmful or unsustainable behaviours to manage atypically large food consumption gaps. The most commonly reported of these were increased consumption of wild foods, migration to fishing camps, and employing rationing strategies including going a full day without eating. FGD participants commonly reported that they or children in their household were sick as a result of eating lollop fruit for most meals.
- Ongoing and projected distress migration:** Food-related distress migration appeared to be ongoing at the time of data collection in late-January and early-February. REACH assessment staff spoke to members of multiple groups of IDPs in Weichjal and Buong en-route to fishing camps in Nyanding and Pulbuoi, respectively. Several individuals from these groups reported that older persons unable to make the journey had remained behind. FGD participants commonly regarded routes to displacement areas as highly insecure, suggesting that people were choosing between improving access to food and maintaining their physical safety. FGD participants in payam headquarters commonly reported that should access to food not improve in the near future, many households would migrate.
- Increased multi-sectoral needs in Walgak Town:** Household surveys suggest that the influx of displaced households into Walgak Town has stretched already scarce resources there. Displaced persons appear disproportionately impacted across several sectors, including WASH and shelter.

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

This assessment utilised a mixed methods approach consisting of focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs), participatory mapping sessions, a household survey, and direct observation of assessment areas.

A multi-sectoral household survey comprising 219 structured interviews were conducted with 106 displaced households and 113 host community households residing in Walgak Town. **Survey findings are representative of displaced and host community households residing in Walgak Town with 95% confidence and 10% margin of error.** Households were randomly selected for quantitative data collection in predetermined neighbourhoods of Walgak Town.

In addition, the team conducted 25 thematic FGDs with displaced persons and host community members. FGDs were focused on food security and livelihoods (4 with displaced persons and 4 with host community members), population movement (8 with displaced persons and

3 with community stakeholders), and accountability to affected populations and conflict sensitivity (3 with displaced persons and 3 with host community members). Four key informant interviews were held with humanitarian service providers working in health, nutrition, and food security. Eight additional interviews were carried out with displaced and non-displaced heads of household in Walgak following airdrops conducted between the 3rd and 6th of February to better understand the impact of humanitarian food assistance (HFA) on immediate perceptions of access to food and movement intentions. **Qualitative findings should be considered indicative and not representative of the conditions of households across these areas.**

Data collection took place between the 20th of January and 6th of February in Walgak Town and its outskirts, Buong Town, Weichjal, Kuernyuon, and Tanyang in Akobo West, and Waat Town in southern Nyirol. Assessment locations were purposively selected based on accessibility and key informant reporting on the presence of displaced households, severity of inter-sectoral needs and food insecurity. Findings were triangulated with secondary sources when available.

POPULATION MOVEMENT

Movement trends and drivers (October 2022 – January 2023)

A spike in incidents of organised violence and raiding⁵ across the Greater Akobo region between December 2022 and January 2023 triggered the **displacement of roughly 30,700 individuals from various villages across Greater Akobo to payam headquarters in Walgak, Buong, Barmach, and Diror payams in Akobo West, and Waat payam in Nyirol**, according to an initial rapid needs assessment (IRNA) conducted in January 2023.⁶ Assessment findings indicate displacement to additional locations across Greater Akobo, including to parts of Nyirol and Uror counties not covered by this assessment or the January IRNA, such as Motot, Pulchuol and Pieri payams of Uror county, and Thol payam of Nyirol county.⁷

Participatory mapping sessions, population movement FGDs, and survey results reveal four general movement patterns having occurred to and from assessed areas between October 2022 and January 2023: (1) displacement from rural villages and bomas into semi-urban population centers, (2) movement of full or partial households to cattle or fishing camps, (3) movement to areas where

relatives or social support structures were present, including areas within and outside of Greater Akobo, and (4) small-scale returns to areas of origin beginning in the second half of January, due in part to improved perceptions of security and limited access to basic needs in displacement locations. **Households displaced to Walgak Town reported three primary drivers of displacement during the October to January period: direct exposure to violence, heightened perceptions of insecurity or anticipation of future violence, and food insecurity** (see figure 1).

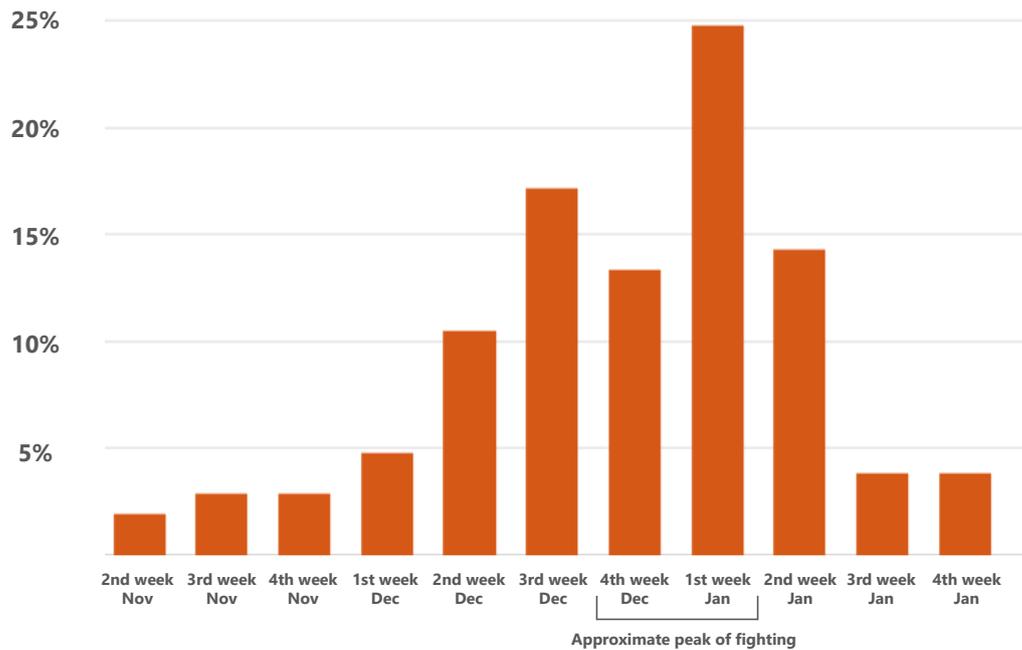
Displaced FGD participants reported that displacement destinations were chosen on the basis of their perceived safety (such as the presence of armed youth, or proximity to military barracks), perceived access to food (i.e. the presence of fishing areas near Walgak Town, or access to markets), the presence of humanitarian actors, and the presence of relatives or support networks.

While exposure to and perceptions of violence appear to have been the proximate movement trigger for most households, driving the largest single wave of displacement from late-December to early-January, **findings indicate that food-related distress migration began months prior, and continued even as perceptions of security are reported to have improved in late-January.** For instance, 15% of displaced households in Walgak Town reported arriving due to inadequate food access prior to the onset of fighting in late-December, while one person interviewed at Buongkaibil fishing camp reported migrating with her household in October because of poor access to food in her area of origin (Kaikuiny, Diror Payam).

Participants in over half of population movement mapping FGDs reported that cattle-owning households had moved

Figure 1: Proportion of displaced households in Walgak Town reporting primary reason for displacement



Figure 2: Proportion of displaced households reporting week of arrival to Walgak Town

with their livestock to various locations in Uror and Nyirol counties, including Pading and Karam payams, which are reportedly closer to dry season grazing areas and perceived as less exposed to raiding.

"If the current [food] situation weren't so bad, we would stay here [in our area of origin] and defend ourselves. But because there is no food, we may move to where it is safer and where we can fish." – Female FGD participant in Weichjal

Ongoing and projected movement trends (February onwards)

Assessment findings suggest that poor access to food will continue to drive displacement for the remainder of the dry season, with perceptions of security weighing heavily on migration routes, destinations, and which members migrate or remain. Participants in 9 out of 10 population movement FGDs reported that their **household or members of their community were planning to migrate in the near-term, nearly always linking prospective movement to the exhaustion of available food sources**. Most frequently, these participants described initial movement to small nearby swamps (such as Paddoi or Buongkaibil in Akobo West, or Nyakueka or Kech near Waat) and then **ultimately to larger more distant fishing areas (including those along the Sobat River, south of Ulang, locations near Malakal, and in Akobo East)** once nearby fishing areas dry up. FGD participants commonly reported that exhaustion of fish at nearby swamps was expected to occur sometime in February or March, while those in larger more distant areas would last until April or May.

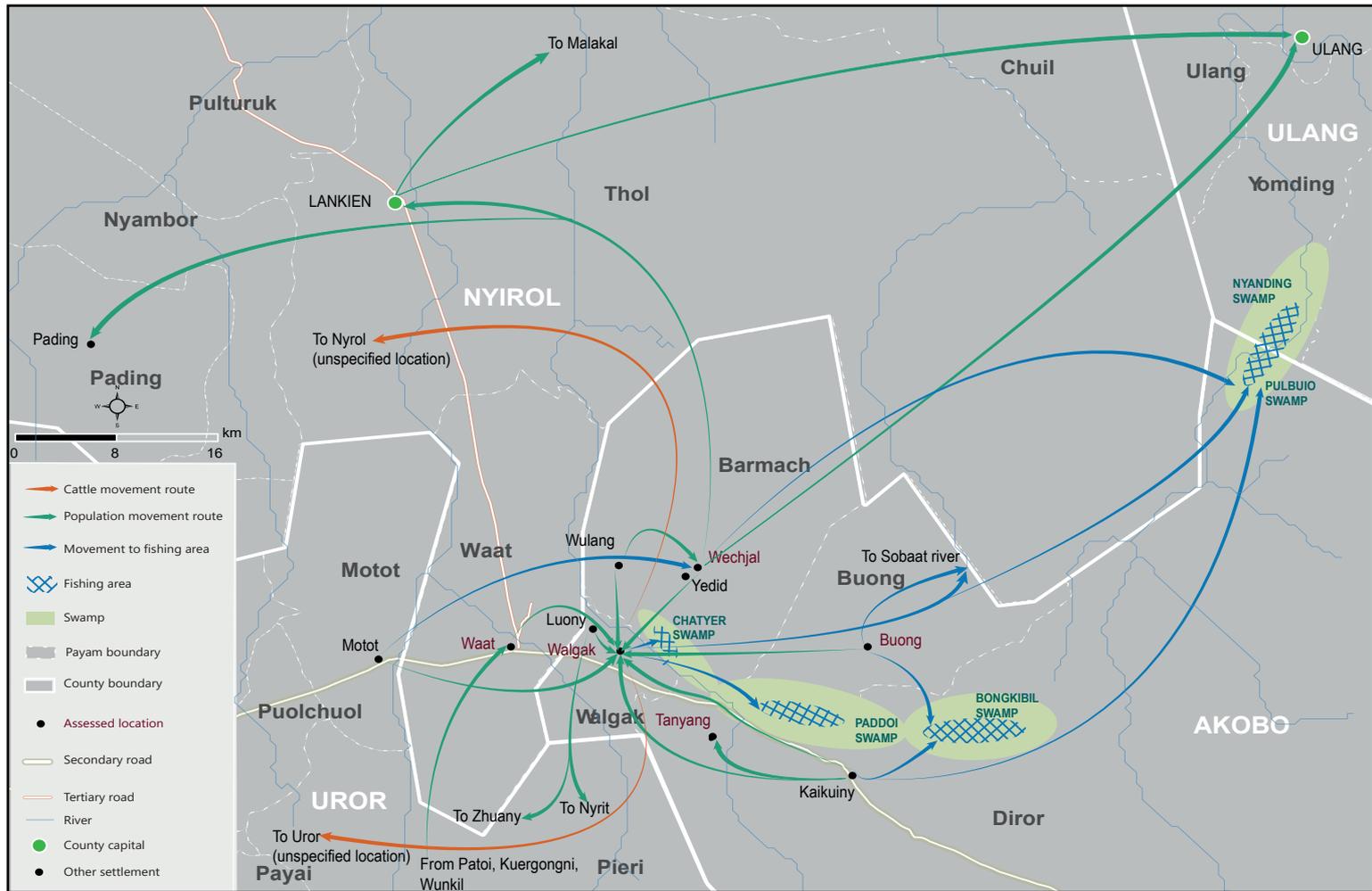
Hunger-related movement appeared to be ongoing at the time of data collection in late-January and early February, including secondary displacements of households already displaced by insecurity. The assessment

team spoke with groups of IDPs from Motot, Uror county transiting in Weichjal en-route to fishing camps in Nyanding, as well as to multiple groups from Akobo West, Nyirol, and Uror moving through Buong Town towards fishing camps along the Pulbuoi swamp (see map 2). FGD participants in Waat reported that households had begun migrating from Thol payam (Nyirol county) to locations in Upper Nile State, including Malakal, Baliet, and Ulang, in search of food. The arrival of populations to these areas was corroborated in bilateral talks with humanitarian actors operating there.

Journeys to more remote displacement locations were widely described as arduous and unsafe. For instance, individuals interviewed in Weichjal described an additional 4-5 day journey to Nyanding along a route mostly through swamp areas with no areas to rest and few food sources. **Participants in all FGDs regarded movement through bush areas as unsafe, putting people at risk of serious protection concerns including attacks and abductions.**

Findings suggest that future dry-season movement will also be impacted by the provision of humanitarian food assistance (HFA), which was carried out across the four distribution points of Akobo West in February (see map 3). Because survey data shows that much of the ongoing and planned movement was driven in large part by inadequate access to food, **displaced households in Walgak reported intending to return, at least temporarily, to their area of origin to collect HFA**. Three displaced heads of household in Walgak reported that they would return to their areas of origin to collect HFA if and when a distribution is carried out, **but were planning to return back to Walgak Town afterwards because of security related concerns.**

Findings suggest that the provision of HFA, however, may only temporarily slow food-related movement. Eight interviews with female heads of household in Walgak Town conducted following airdrops (February 3-6)

Map 2: Population movement to and from assessed locations, based on population movement mapping FGDs

indicate that significant numbers of individuals who are unregistered to receive food assistance, such as returnees from refugee camps, are likely to contribute to atypically rapid exhaustion of household HFA stocks, which have already been reduced due to ration cuts in 2022. As such, **movement between distribution periods, particularly between towns and fishing camps or cattle camps, is likely to continue as food insecure households aim to supplement limited food supplies.**

Movement barriers

FGD participants and surveyed households commonly reported facing movement barriers between towns and in remote areas due to perceptions of insecurity, which appear to have considerably reduced access to key livelihoods and food sources. Seventy-seven percent (77%) of displaced households in Walgak Town reported that household members were unable to move freely within their area of residence, including to the bush, to nearby swamps, and to grazing areas. Participants in most FGDs on population movement and FSL reported fearing ambushes, attacks, and abductions in remote bush areas, **frequently noting violence against women and children as key protection concerns.** Female FGD participants in Walgak reported that movement to remote livelihood areas to collect wild foods, fish, firewood, or thatch is usually done with an escort of armed youth. Further, participants in FSL FGDs reported being unable to access

large remote fields for cultivation, restricting them to small gardens and reducing overall crop yield. While FGD participants in 9 of 11 groups on population movement reported inter-communal tensions as the leading cause of insecurity-related movement restrictions, KIs working for humanitarian NGOs reported that intra-communal tensions also drive insecurity, occasionally causing incidents at or en-route to distributions, or at livelihood areas such as fishing camps.

FGD participants in Waat described insecurity-related movement barriers as particularly problematic since most households from Waat collect food assistance in Motot (a smaller proportion reportedly travels to Walgak), a roughly two hour walk, stretches of which are heavily forested, contributing to fears of ambushes and abductions. Displaced FGD participants in Walgak (from Weichjal and Luony) reported that populations living outside of payam headquarters face greater barriers to receiving assistance. Because the provision of assistance is typically centralized, these populations reportedly have to travel to distribution points in town on foot, which was regarded as unsafe.

Given the importance of movement to livelihoods and coping, **persons with challenges to mobility, including older persons, persons with physical disabilities, and young children are likely to be disproportionately impacted by food challenges** between February and

May. For instance, groups of IDPs interviewed en-route to fishing camps reported that **some older persons had remained in their settlement of origin because they were unable to travel long distances.**

FOOD ACCESS AND AVAILABILITY

Findings indicate limited physical and financial access to and availability of food in all assessed areas, unusual during the post-harvest period even for poor households, likely driving large consumption gaps and acute malnutrition for both displaced and non-displaced population groups.⁸ **Surveyed households in Walgak Town reported consuming just 1.2 meals per day on average and 99% of surveyed households reported that their household did not currently have enough to eat.** Participants in all FGDs reported food as their most pressing need.

Assessment findings suggest an atypically high consumption of wild foods, chiefly lollop, with limited access to alternative or supplementary food sources, among both displaced and non-displaced households. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of households in Walgak Town reported that the collection of uncultivated wild foods was their primary food source (and 31% their secondary food source), while participants in all food security FGDs reported that **lollop had comprised the vast majority if not the entirety of their diet since roughly November.** Participants in all FSL FGDs agreed that lollop was expected to exhaust in February or March.

Participants in about half of FSL FGDs reported fishing in small nearby swamps to supplement limited diets of wild uncultivated foods. Fishing was the most commonly reported secondary food source (46%), and the third most commonly reported primary food source (11%) among all surveyed households in Walgak town. FGD participants in Walgak, Waat, Tanyang, and Buong reported that small nearby swamps were likely to dry up in February, **which would necessitate migration to larger more distant fishing areas** (see above) where fish would be available until April or May.

Figure 3: % of households in Walgak Town reporting primary and secondary food sources



Sixteen percent (16%) of households in Walgak reported market purchases were their primary source of food, and 7% their secondary source of food. FGD participants **often**

described large financial barriers to accessing food at markets, driven by atypically high prices and limited income earning opportunities (see below).

Livelihood loss and factors limiting food access and availability

Assessment findings illustrate the impacts of recurring and compounding shocks on traditional livelihoods and food sources - chiefly livestock rearing and crop cultivation - which appear to have been eroded over a protracted period of sustained pressure. As crop production has decreased over the past decade, the cereal gap in Jonglei has grown substantially,⁹ while cattle productivity and ownership has reduced as a result of raiding and repeated bouts of severe flooding.¹⁰

Cultivation: Both displaced and host community participants in all FSL FGDs reported that the **2022 harvest had been extraordinarily poor, most crops having been eaten by birds or destroyed by flooding.** Almost all households (99%) surveyed in Walgak Town reported there were no food stocks in their homes at the time of data collection, roughly 3 months prior to the typical exhaustion of foods that initiates the lean season (see Annex 1).¹¹ Participants in about half of FSL FGDs reported that **larger more remote fields typically used for cultivation were now inaccessible due to insecurity,** restricting agriculturalists to smaller gardens in close proximity to their homes.

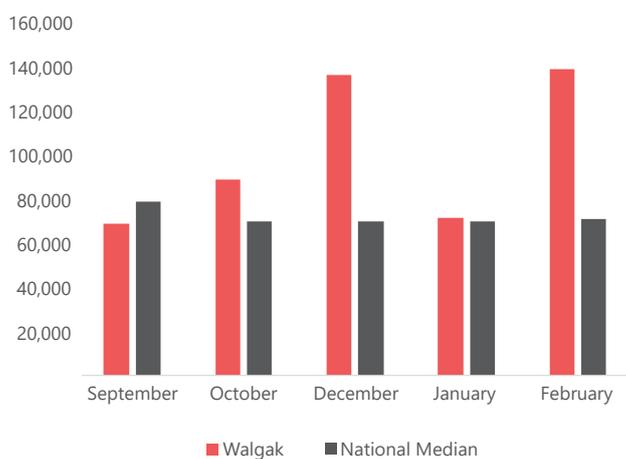
"[Before there was food assistance] We cultivated, because there was no insecurity. Insecurity started to increase about 5 years ago, and got to the point where we could no longer cultivate." - Female FGD participant in Waat

Livestock: Shocks and displacement appear to have negatively impacted livestock ownership and consequently, pastoralist livelihoods activities. FGD participants in 7 of 8 FSL FGDs reported **reduced ownership of cattle as a key driver of food insecurity.** Results from the household survey conducted in Walgak Town suggest that livestock loss over the month prior to data collection may have been especially pronounced, with **77% of displaced households and 60% of host community households reporting livestock loss by theft or disease since December.** Reduced ownership of livestock impacts both food consumption and household coping capacity. Households without cattle face greater barriers to accessing staple food items such as milk, and are also unable to liquidate cattle in order to purchase cereals and other items at the market, a cornerstone of coping capacity within pastoralist communities.¹² Households with cattle were reported in some population movement FGDs to have migrated to dry season grazing areas in Uror and Nyirol counties, further reducing access to livestock products for populations remaining in villages and towns.

Markets: Access to food appears to have been further restricted by poor financial access to markets. While the assessment team observed some cereals available at markets in Walgak and Waat, December data from the Joint

Market Monitoring Initiative (JMIMI) reflects extremely high prices for both food and non-food items in Walgak.¹³ For instance, **the cost of the median survival minimum expenditure basket for food in Walgak in December was 163,237 SSP, more than 180% higher than the national average.**¹³ A drop in prices in January was followed by a sharp increase in February, which may reflect seasonal fluctuations in demand around the holidays. Just 16% of all households surveyed in Walgak reported that markets were a primary food source, and 8% a secondary food source. Participants commonly reported that the only people able to purchase food were those working for NGOs. Traders interviewed in Walgak Town reported that prices were likely to fall in March due to increased supply of staples as a result of improved road access.

Figure 4: Price of survival minimum expenditure basket (food) in Walgak, compared to the national median, from September 2022 - February 2023, in South Sudanese Pounds (SSP)¹⁴



Fishing and uncultivated wild foods: Fishing was widely reported as a critical supplementary food source. While fishing in nearby swamps was often described as a key food source (47% of all households in Walgak reported fishing was their main secondary food source, see figure 3), FGD participants described several factors limiting their ability to access fish, including a lack of fishing equipment, distance to fishing areas, and poor security along routes to fishing areas. As nearby swamps were reportedly expected to dry up in February and March, many FGD participants reported planning to move to more distant camps along the Sobat.

COPING & MITIGATION

High levels food insecurity were further evidenced by widespread reported use of negative or unsustainable coping strategies to manage food consumption gaps.

Increased consumption of wild foods: Findings indicate the consumption of wild foods for most meals, and suggest people were resorting to atypical consumption methods of commonly consumed wild foods, such as eating lollop shell (kai). FGD participants in all locations

reported perceiving an increase in wild foods consumption since October, which is corroborated by quantitative findings (see figures 3 and 5). In about half of FGDs, participants reported atypical consumption methods of lollop, including eating the shell. Participants in 7 of 8 FGDs on FSL reported that **consumption of lollop for most meals was causing sickness including diarrhoea and vomiting, especially among young children.** While the consumption of lollop and other wild uncultivated foods is typical throughout Greater Akobo, even in times of relative food security, **the consumption of lollop for most or all meals, particularly so early in the seasonal calendar, is a sign of severe food insecurity.**¹⁵

Figure 5: Most commonly reported coping strategies employed by displaced and host community households in Walgak Town

Displaced		Host community	
1. Gathering and consuming more wild foods than normal	32%	1. Gathering and consuming more wild foods than normal	45%
2. Adults skipping meals so children can eat	32%	2. Sending household members to fishing camps	35%
3. Reducing the amount of food consumed daily	26%	3. Adults skipping meals so children can eat	27%
4. Sending household members to fishing camps	23%	4 (tied). Not eating for entire days	25%
5. Sending household members to cattle camps	22%	4 (tied). Reducing the amount of food consumed daily	25%

Migration: Twenty-nine percent (29%) of all surveyed households in Walgak reported sending household members to fishing camps and 22% to cattle camps to cope with limited access to food, while **FGD participants commonly reported that they were likely to move in the coming weeks should access to food not improve.** Other locations where participants described perceptions of improved food security include Akobo East, where some households have relatives or other support networks, and refugee camps in Ethiopia.

While small-scale dry-season migration to fishing camps is typical in Greater Akobo, particularly among male youth, large-scale migration of entire households to fishing camps along routes perceived as highly insecure is atypical.¹⁶ **Such movement is characteristic of zero-sum coping, whereby one basic need is foregone in order to fulfill another** - in this instance, traveling along insecure routes jeopardizes physical safety but improves short-term food needs.¹⁷

Consumption based coping: Households in Walgak commonly reported the use of severe food rationing strategies, including reducing the amount of food consumed daily (26% of displaced households and 25% of host community households), adults skipping meals so that children can eat (32% of displaced households and 27% of host community households), **and skipping entire days without eating (21% of displaced households and 25% of host community households).**

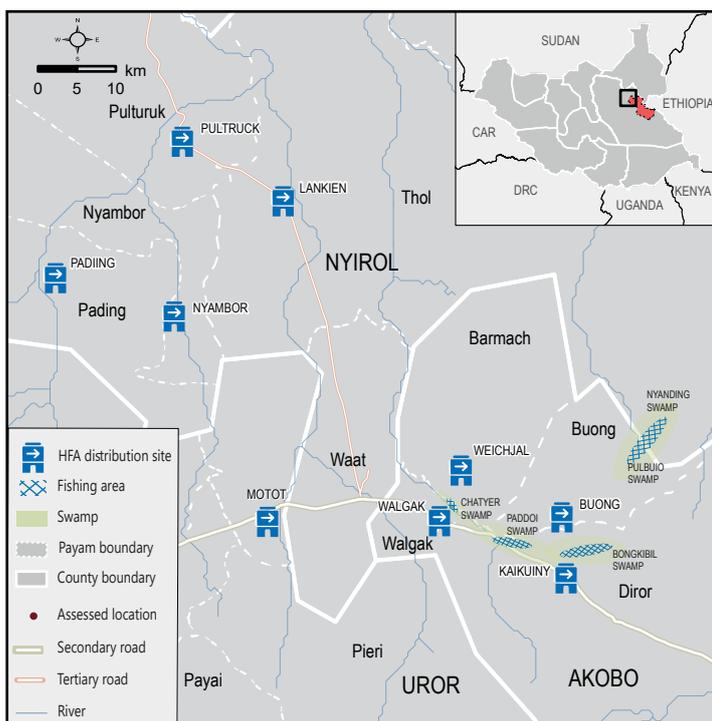
Begging and social networks support:¹⁸ Seventeen percent (17%) of households in Walgak Town reported begging or relying on social networks support to increase access to food. FGD participants in Walgak and Waat reported the presence of friends, family, or other support networks was a key pull factor to displacement locations, and displaced participants in one FGD reported moving to Waat in order to beg from traders at the market there.

HUMANITARIAN FOOD ASSISTANCE

While the main season response was reportedly scheduled to start in January (Akobo) and February (Nyirol), according to an HFA service provider, as of the 1st week of March **poor quality roads continued to impair access to much of Greater Akobo, including Akobo West.**¹⁹ Specifically, a damaged bridge near Pathai (Uror County) continued to block convoys from moving to northern Uror, Nyirol, and Akobo West, according to HFA provision KIs and the logistics cluster. The previous distribution was reportedly carried out in August 2022, marking the end of the lean season response that typically ends following the sorghum harvest (see annex 1).

As a result of ongoing access constraints, airdrops were carried out in Walgak between the 3rd and 6th of February, followed by airdrops in Barmach, Buong, and Diror payams later in the month. KIs working in HFA service provision reported that sufficient supplies had been dropped to serve the full general food distribution (GFD) case load with a one month ration (10.5 kgs of sorghum, 1 kg of pulses, and 0.6 liters of oil per person). Households registered to receive food for assets (FFA) were not included in the February distribution, according to service providers and triangulated through interviews with beneficiaries in early February.

Map 3: Locations of HFA distribution points serving Akobo West and Nyirol, as reported by humanitarian service provider KIs



A registration for FFA was reportedly carried out in September 2022, during which roughly 2,000 households switched from GFD to FFA. The last registration for GFD was carried out in 2019. **As a result, many of those who were not physically present at the time, such as those who have since returned from refugee camps, are not registered to receive GFD, reportedly putting additional pressure on limited food stocks.**

A humanitarian service provider based in Walgak reported **a reduction in HFA rations** from a 45 day cycle in 2021 to a 60 day cycle in early 2022. The same KI reported that rations exhaust for most households in between 15 and 30 days, which was corroborated by beneficiaries in Walgak Town. KIs and HFA beneficiaries reported that **food rations are exhausted quickly because unregistered individuals share rations with registered households.**

There are 4 distribution points in Akobo West, one in each of the four payam headquarters, Walgak Town (Walgak), Kaikuiny (Diror), Weichjal (Barmach), and Buong Town (Buong). **There was no distribution point in Waat at the time of data collection.** Most beneficiaries there travel to Motot to receive assistance, a roughly two hour walk, according to FGD participants and HFA service providers. Participants in two FGDs in Waat reported that they fear traveling by foot to Motot due to concerns around insecurity.

NUTRITION SERVICE PROVISION

There are 13 nutrition centers and 1 stabilization center (SC) in Akobo West, according to one KI working in nutrition service provision. All 13 sites conduct blanket supplementary feeding programs for children under-2, and out-patient treatment services for pregnant and lactating women, while the one SC in Walgak offers in-patient treatment for more complicated cases of severe acute malnutrition (SAM).

The same nutrition service provider KI reported that as of data collection in early-February **all facilities had been out of nutritional supplements and treatments since December 2022**, including RUTF, RUSF, CSB++, F75, F100, and amoxicillin. **As a result of supply shortages, nutrition centers were reportedly unable to provide treatment for case of acute malnutrition, including SAM.** Health centers were still reportedly admitting patients with SAM with medical complications, but were only able to provide treatment for the medical complication and not the underlying acute malnutrition. As a result of supply shortages, fewer people were seeking medical services at nutrition centers, according to the KI.

A security incident in late-January resulted in outreach activities being paused for several weeks, according to the KI. These included maternal, infant, and young child nutrition (MIYCN) sensitization and community outreach activities. Following the incident, many community volunteers were unwilling to travel long distances to reach remote communities, according to a humanitarian service provider. Outreach activities reportedly resumed in mid-February.

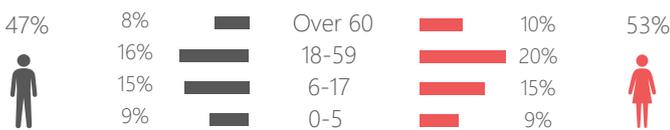
MULTI-SECTORAL NEEDS IN WALGAK TOWN

The influx of displaced households to Walgak Town appears to have put significant strain on already limited resources, including on water, shelter, and NFIs. Local officials reported that the majority of IDPs settled within the local host community, illustrated by the 85% of surveyed displaced households that reported staying with a host household, and 66% of host community households that reported displaced individuals were living with them. As a result, resources at both the community-level (such as water from public water points), and at the household-level (such as shelter or non-food items) appear to be strained. While the additional strain was reported to have negatively impacted living conditions for both displaced and host community households, **displaced households appear to have been disproportionately affected across several sectors, including WASH, and shelter.**

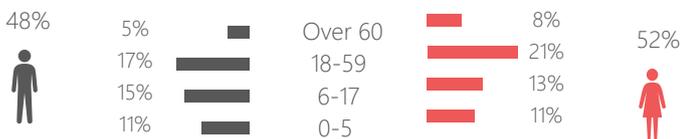
WASH: While the majority of all households reported accessing their water from a borehole (98% of host community households and 64% of displaced households), **28% of displaced households reported accessing water from nearby swamps**, compared to just 1% of host community households. Displaced FGD participants reported that this is because they are charged money to use boreholes by the local community, which they cannot afford. Ninety-four percent (94%) of all surveyed households reported not treating their drinking water with any purification method, and 99% reported not

Figure 6: Demographics of surveyed households in Walgak Town, by population group

Age and sex of household members - Displaced



Age and sex of household members - Host community



Average household size - Displaced: 8.9
Average household size - Non-displaced: 10.1

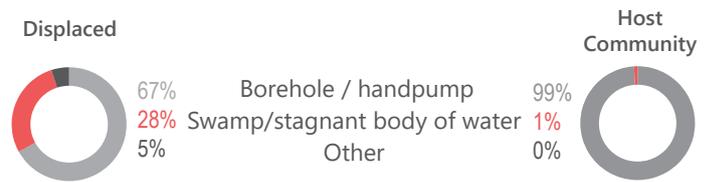
Figure 7: % of households reporting at least one member from the following groups

	Displaced	Host Community
Pregnant or lactating women (PLW)	82%	85%
Separated / unaccompanied child(ren) ²⁰	35%	44%
Chronically ill or disabled person(s) ²¹	53%	55%

having enough containers to fetch and store water. One WASH service provider KI reported that **nearly 50% of all boreholes in Akobo West were not functional** as the time of data collection (30 are functioning, and 29 not functioning).

Against this backdrop of high reliance on unimproved drinking water sources, most displaced (78%) and host community (64%) households reported practicing open defecation, which further indicates a high risk of disease contamination and spread. **Just 27% of host community households and 9% of displaced households reported using a latrine.**

Figure 8: Proportion of households in Walgak Town reporting primary source of drinking water, by population group



Shelter/NFIs: Displaced FGD participants in all locations reported living in tukuls, make-shift shelters, rakoobas (called "gew" in Nuer), or within luaks (shelters that house cattle, which are typically vacant this time of year because of seasonal migration of livestock to dry-season grazing areas). **Nine percent (9%) of displaced households reported sleeping out in the open**, compared to just 1% of host community households. The majority of both displaced and host community households reported feeling unsafe in their current shelters (89% of displaced households, and 74% of host community households), while roughly the same proportion of displaced and host community households reported that their shelters were not enclosed from outside (69% and 67%, respectively).

Sixty-two percent (62%) of displaced households in Walgak report that their shelter in their area of origin had been damaged or destroyed since December.

A significant number of displaced individuals in Waat appeared to be sleeping out in the open at several sites within town, while many others had dispersed into the host community.

Figure 9: Most needed NFIs, as reported by displaced and host community households

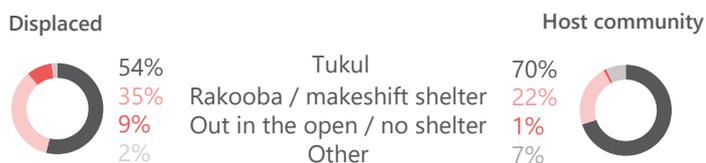
	Host community	Displaced
1. Mosquito net	52%	1. Plastic sheeting / tarpaulin 60%
2. Plastic sheeting / tarpaulin	50%	2. Mosquito net 56%
3. Mattress / sleeping pad	38%	3. Fishing equipment 39%
4. Blanket	35%	4. Blanket 28%
5. Kitchen utensils	28%	5. Mattress / sleeping pad 26%

Health/Nutrition: Fifty-eight percent (58%) of host community households and 57% of displaced households reported at least one household member was sick at the

time of data collection.²² The most commonly reported symptoms were fever (54% of all households), cough (51%), and diarrhoea (46%). Of households reporting a sick household member, displaced households more frequently reported facing barriers to accessing healthcare (37% versus 19% of host community households). Thirty-nine percent (39%) of host community households and 40% of displaced households reported that some or all household members had slept under a mosquito net in the previous night.

Twenty percent (20%) of displaced households reported that a child in their household had been screened for malnutrition since they arrived in Walgak. Further, displaced households reported poorer knowledge of nutrition services than host community households, with 37% of displaced heads of households knowing where to take a child with symptoms of malnutrition, compared to 57% of host community households.

Figure 10: % of households in Walgak Town reporting shelter type, by population group



Education: Access to schools to temporary learning spaces was reportedly limited in Akobo West at the time of data collection. However, **displaced children appeared to face greater barriers than non-displaced children to accessing education.** Eighty-three percent (83%) of displaced households reported that children were unable to access a school or temporary learning space, compared to 57% of host community households. Displaced participants in one FGD in Walgak reported that displaced children often face bullying at child friend spaces, causing parents to keep them at home.

FOOD SECURITY PROJECTIONS (FEBRUARY-MAY)

Results of this assessment supported by secondary literature on seasonality and livelihoods in Greater Akobo suggest that mitigating and aggravating factors affecting the food security situation between February and May could include the following:

Humanitarian assistance: Poor financial access to markets with limited availability of alternative food sources suggests that **the provision of HFA is likely to remain a key mitigator of catastrophic outcomes for worse-off households until roughly August.** The February provision of HFA is likely to improve access to food for most households in the immediate to short term. As such disruptions to HFA provision should be closely monitored to gauge risk of food security deterioration.

Markets: Market functionality will likely increase through the remaining dry season months as road

conditions improve, increasing food availability in payam headquarters. **Financial barriers to accessing food at markets, however, are likely to remain extremely high for the majority of the population,** and physical access to markets will be limited for populations residing in rural areas. This is likely to further deteriorate vulnerable populations' access to food during the lean season, when market dependency for poorer households typically peaks.²³

Security: Negative perceptions of security will likely continue to hinder movement between towns and into remote livelihood areas, **restricting access to wild foods, fish and other livelihood assets such as firewood and thatching grass.**²⁴ As in previous years, planting will likely be impacted, restricting agriculturalists to smaller nearby gardens, reducing overall yield potential.²⁵

Should the number of security incidents increase, it is likely that another wave of displacement would occur to population centers, putting additional strain on resources there, including on water, shelter, markets, and the on the capacity of health and nutrition facilities. Such displacement has the potential to further disrupt land preparation and planting, which typically takes place beginning in January and April, respectively, in turn impacting potential yields from the 2023 harvest. In line with what has been reported by service provider KIs, incidents of insecurity along supply routes or around program areas may disrupt humanitarian access, potentially disrupting the provision of food assistance, healthcare, or nutrition services.

Population movement, wild foods, and fishing: Fish is likely to remain a critical dry-season food source for food insecure households, pushing full or partial households to fishing areas, including those along the Sobat, in Akobo East, and in Upper Nile State. **Conditions for populations there, as in cattle camps, remain a key information gap** - access to healthcare and other basic needs are likely to be limited, potentially driving high rates of morbidity and malnutrition. As noted, persons with challenges to mobility are likely to be particularly at-risk in the coming months, as they face greater barriers to moving to access basic needs. Security incidents at or along routes to fishing areas may significantly reduce access to critical food sources, driving people back into towns where resources are limited.

ABOUT REACH

REACH Initiative 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. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).

ENDNOTES

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- ¹ IOM. "South Sudan Population Estimates." 2022; IOM. "Displacement Tracking Matrix – Round 11." 3 June 2022.
- ² [South Sudan: Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Situation for July - October 2022 and Projections for November 2022 - February 2023 and March - June 2023](#), Integrated Phase Classification, November 2022
- ³ Inter-Agency Initial Rapid Needs Assessment for Akobo West and Waat, January 2023
- ⁴ [High Levels of Food Insecurity Persist Amid Conflict and Humanitarian Access Constraints](#), FEWS NET, January 2023

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- ⁵ [Press Release: Sharp Increase in Violence in South Sudan at the End of 2022, According to Latest UNMISS Quarterly Brief](#), 16 February, 2023
- ⁶ Inter-Agency Initial Rapid Needs Assessment for Akobo West and Waat, January 2023
- ⁷ Ten percent (10%) of displaced households surveyed in Walgak Town reported arriving from Motot payam, while smaller proportions reported arriving from Pieri and Pulchul (Uror county). The assessment team also spoke to a group of IDPs from Motot payam in Weichjal who were moving towards fishing camps near Ulang. IDPs in two different FGDs in Waat Town reported hunger-related displacement from Lankien, Nyirol county to parts of Upper Nile State.

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- ⁸ [Livelihoods Zone Map and Descriptions for South Sudan](#), FEWS NET, 2018
- ⁹ [Cereal Trend \(2007 - 2021\) - Jonglei](#), CLiMIS
- ¹⁰ [Floods Impact on Livestock - 2021](#), UNFAO, February 2022
- ¹¹ [Livelihoods Zone Map and Descriptions for South Sudan](#), FEWS NET, 2018
- ¹² [South Sudan: Cattle, Conflict and Coping](#), Global Hunger Index and Concern Worldwide, October 2015

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- ¹³ [South Sudan Joint Market Monitoring Initiative \(JMIMI\), REACH Initiative](#), December 2022; November data for Walgak is unavailable and is omitted from the graph.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ [Everything Except the Soil: Understanding wild food consumption during the lean season in South Sudan](#), Oxfam, October 2017

¹⁶ ["Now the Forest is Blocked": Shocks and Access to Food](#), REACH Initiative, page 11, March 2018

¹⁷ [Living memory of famine in South Sudan: using local knowledge to inform famine early warning](#), Humanitarian Practice Network, Chris Newton and Katie Rickard, October 2018

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¹⁸ Translators frequently used the term "begging" to refer to the action of receiving food or money from either friends and family, strangers, or traders - for example, "some people moved to Uror County, where they have relatives. They went there to beg for food from them." As a result, coping strategies referred to in this report as "begging" encompasses the receipt of food, money, or other support from social networks, including family.

¹⁹ [South Sudan - Access Constraints Map](#), Logistics Cluster, 16 February 2023

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²⁰ A separated child is an individual 17 years old or younger that has been separated from their parents or usual guardian, while an unaccompanied child is an individual 17 years or younger that has been separated from their entire family.

²¹ A chronic illness or disability refers to any condition that impacts an individual's ability to perform routine tasks, and includes difficulties seeing, hearing, walking, concentrating, communicating in one's own language, or caring for themselves.

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²² This indicator was collected as the proportion of households reporting at least one sick member, as opposed to proportion of individuals reporting symptoms, and as such should not be interpreted as overall morbidity.

²³ [Livelihoods Zone Map and Descriptions for South Sudan](#), FEWS NET, 2018

²⁴ FGD participants often described fearing retaliatory attacks from communities in GPAA.

²⁵ [South Sudan Agricultural and Food Insecurity Dynamics \(2006-2020\)](#), Food Security and Livelihood Cluster, page 9

Annex 1: Seasonal Calendar of Greater Akobo Livelihood Zone - "Eastern Plain Sorghum and Cattle"
Source: FEWS NET. ["Livelihoods Zone Map and Descriptions for South Sudan"](#) 2018

