

Western Lakes Population Movement, Food Security and Livelihoods Profile

South Sudan, July 2019

Introduction

Spikes in inter and intra-communal violence (ICV) alongside economic and climatic shocks in western Lakes State have reportedly driven large-scale displacement and restricted access to food for both host communities (HCs) and internally displaced people (IDPs). In the January and May 2019 releases of the Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) for South Sudan,¹ direct outcome indicators for food security in Cueibet and Rumbek North counties indicated severe food consumption gaps and recurrent pockets of IPC Phase 5 in Cueibet County, signifying the potential for catastrophic food insecurity. The onset of the 2019 lean season and continuous reports of ICV and displacement in western Lakes State has brought increasing humanitarian attention to the area. The lack of information on the populations most affected by the insecurity and gaps in access to food was raised within the Food Security and Livelihoods (FSL) Cluster, triggering a joint assessment between REACH and the Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (VAM) Unit in World Food Programme (WFP). The assessment sought to verify if populations of high food insecurity are present in western Lakes State. In addition, the assessment aimed to improve humanitarian understanding of the impact of ICV and economic and climatic shocks on access to food and population movement patterns in the area.

Methodology

In June 2019, the team conducted 19 focus group discussions (FGDs) with over 100 participants, both HCs and IDPs, 12 key informant (KI) interviews with humanitarian actors, local authorities and government officials, and 68 semi-structured household (HH) interviews across 6 locations. Assessed locations included Rumbek town, Cui Cok settlement, and Ameth and Abiol Dit cattle camps in Rumbek Centre County and Cueibet Town and Malual Chum settlement in Cueibet County. (Map 1)

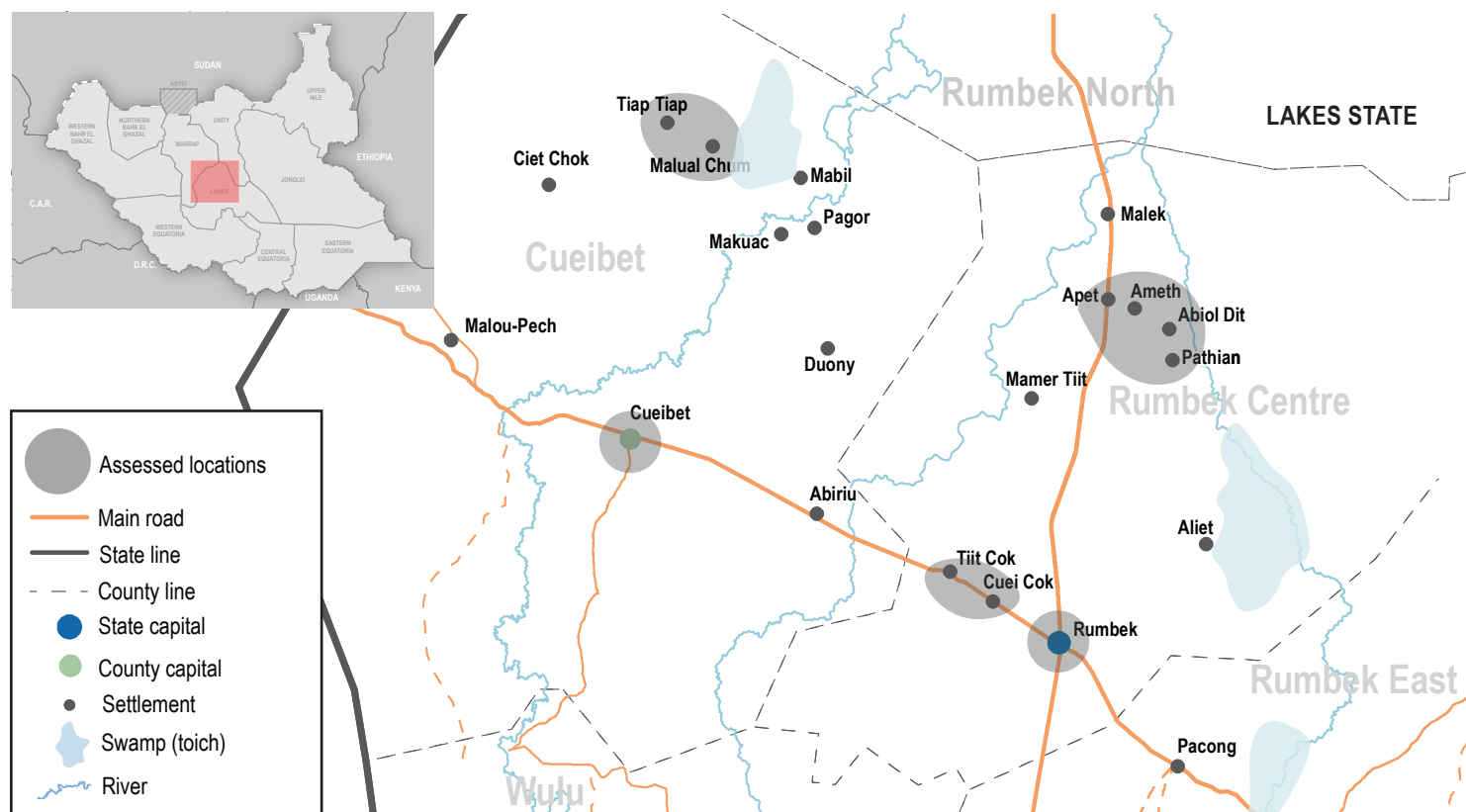
Key Findings

- Escalation in ICV in western Lakes State since 2012, primarily driven by decreasing access to resources, has caused sudden-onset displacement and atypical seasonal population movement.
- Inaccessible seasonal pasture for livestock due to ongoing insecurity has shifted seasonal cattle migration patterns, leading to increases in cattle mortality and limited seasonal access to food (milk).
- Repeated episodes of ICV have triggered a pervasive fear of insecurity, restricting HH mobility and limiting access to traditional livelihood activities.
- Food availability and access across the assessed locations is highly limited, with northern Cueibet County likely to be the most affected.
- Due to perceived insecurity, HHs are reportedly reducing engagement in livelihood activities, such as cultivating near their homesteads, likely limiting their resilience to future shocks.

Background

Lakes state, located in the centre of South Sudan, is primarily populated by agro-pastoralists who rely heavily on a mix of rearing livestock and subsistence agriculture, and hence are highly dependent on seasonal cattle migration. Rumbek Centre, Cueibet, and part of Rumbek North counties represent the western region of Lakes State (Map 1) and are often assessed separately from counties located in eastern Lakes State, such as Yirol West, Yirol East, and Aweril counties.²

Map 1: Assessed locations in western Lakes State, June 2019



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In recent years, there have been reports of **increasing severity and scope of inter and intra-communal violence in Lakes State, often attributed to cattle raiding**.³ According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), there have been 21 security-related events in Lakes State from 1 January to 1 June 2019,⁴ indicating ICV continues to be a major issue faced by communities. In early 2018, 28,000 people were reportedly displaced from Rumbek North County to Yirol East County as a result of ICV. The arrival of large numbers of IDPs in Yirol East County, which increased pressure on an already vulnerable area, was identified as a key driver for the likely pockets of IPC Phase 5 that were reported in the August 2018 ICP key messages.⁵ Subsequently, in the January 2019 IPC key messages, both Cueibet and Yirol West counties in Lakes State were identified as having potential pockets of IPC Phase 5 HHs. Most recently, the extreme level of food insecurity was reiterated in the May 2019 IPC update when Cueibet County was reported to have approximately 10,000 people experiencing catastrophic (Phase 5) food insecurity, linked to the heightened level of ICV.⁶

Traditional Livelihoods

Greater Rumbek area (Rumbek East, Centre and North counties) and Cueibet County, are part of the *Ironstone plateau agro-pastoral* and *Western flood plain sorghum and cattle* livelihood zones.⁷ Each zone is characterized by a high reliance on livestock, particularly cattle, as the main source of food, primarily through milk and trading livestock for cereals. Further, FGD and KIs emphasized the seasonal migration of cattle as a key part of the livelihood, creating two distinct seasons of food availability and accessibility. During the dry season, typically from November through March, HHs rely on food stocks from the previous harvest period and market sales. Simultaneously, due to the limited available pasture for cattle, there is a seasonal movement towards grazing land (toiches), typically low-lying locations with access to both pasture and water for cattle. However, most dry season toiches are far from the homestead, which leads to a decrease in access to livestock and often limits milk supply for the HH (See Cattle Migration section).

Subsequently, during the wet season, typically from April to October, HHs have depleted their food stocks and, consequently, their dependence on wild food increases.⁸ During this period,

Figure 1: Seasonal Calendar, June 2019

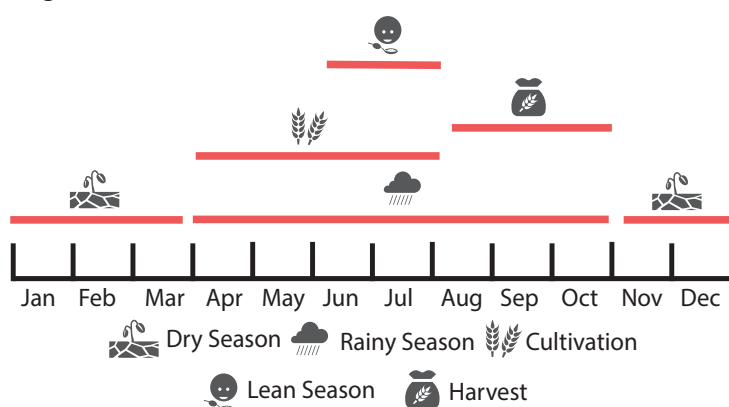
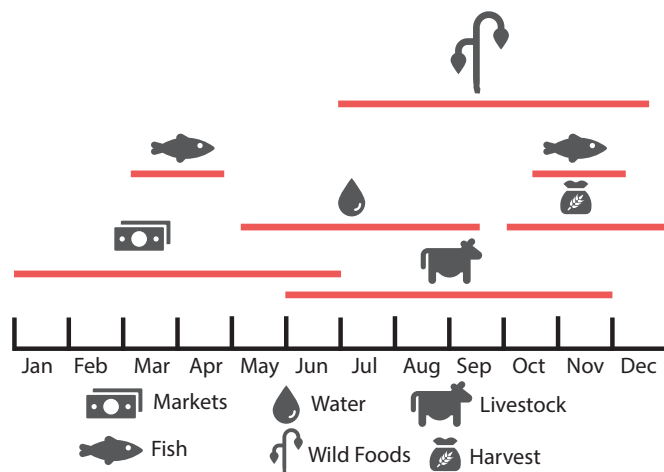


Figure 2: Traditional Access to Livelihoods and Food sources



cattle keepers may move cattle closer to the homestead, increasing the supply of milk – sometimes resulting in a seasonal increase of milk consumption. However, nearly all FGD participants and KIs distinguish the wet season as having the largest food consumption gaps – primarily driven by the uneven distribution of livestock among HHs, minimal food stocks and limited market access.

Given the high importance of HH mobility to traditional livelihoods, an understanding of cattle migration, access to toiches and general population movement flows is critical to assessing food security in western Lakes State.

Population Movement

FGD participants and KIs reported that population movement in western Lakes is primarily driven by (1) insecurity, (2) pastoralism and (3) resource stress. However, these drivers are closely interlinked, often occurring in unison or in response to one another.⁹ KIs reported that, while the initial cause of population movement has primarily been insecurity, the continuation of movement is often driven by access to resources and the search for grazing areas for livestock.

Historic context

FGD participants and KIs in both Cueibet County and the Greater Rumbek area reported that ICV started to escalate in 2012-2013, spiking in 2015 and again in 2017, primarily driven by the competition for resources following the economic collapse in 2012¹⁰ alongside climatic shocks that affected food production. FGD participants reported that events over the last 50 years, such as episodes of flooding, conflict and the Bahr el Ghazal Famine of 1998 caused large-scale movement and resettlement between Rumbek North and Centre counties and within Cueibet County, which forced communities to adapt to new dynamics and set the stage for the rise in ICV as competition for resources increased.

Additionally, KIs reported that formerly, ICV in western Lakes primarily took place between communities along and across state borders, such as between Lakes State and the Greater Tonj area

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Figure 3: Rumbek North County Timeline, 2012-2019

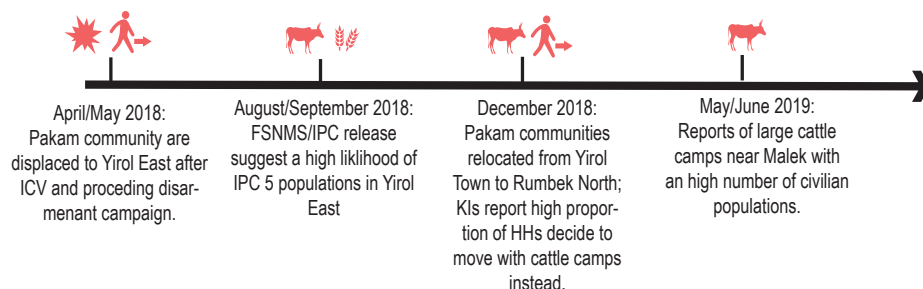


Figure 4: Rumbek Centre County Timeline, 2013-2019

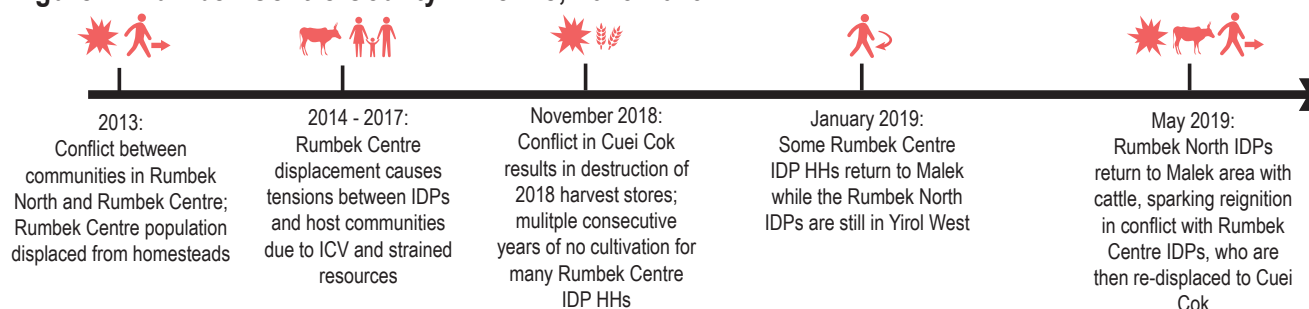
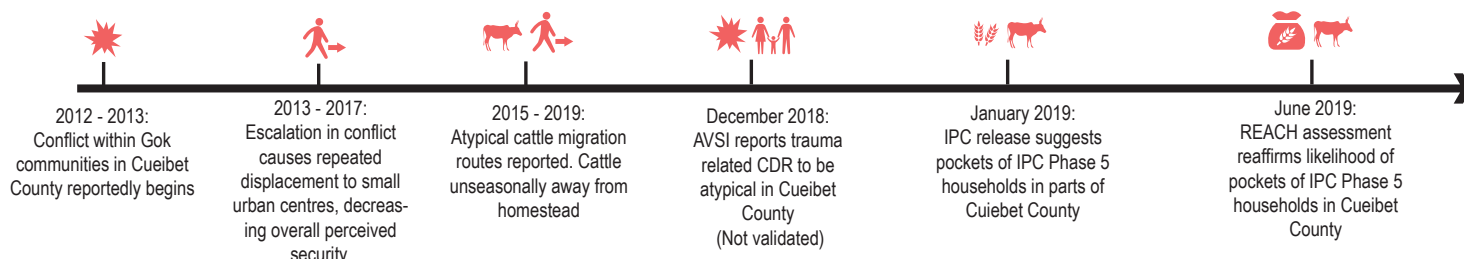


Figure 5: Cueilbet County Timeline, 2012-2019



or Unity State ('inter'-communal). However, as resource scarcity increased, insecurity escalated internally within western Lakes State ('intra'-communal). Many FGD participants reported that, before 2012, it was very rare for entire HHs to be displaced from ICV given the differences in nature of the conflict. **Increases in the targeting of women and the destruction and looting of homes and HH assets have reportedly driven spikes in atypical sudden-onset movement of entire HHs, causing heightened perceived insecurity, decreased mobility and changes to traditional cattle migration routes.**

Displacement

Greater Rumbek area

The increased ICV in 2012 in Malek Payam, Rumbek Centre County between communities from Rumbek North and those of Rumbek Centre counties reportedly drove HHs from northern Rumbek Centre County (Green arrows, Map 2) southeast, with many HHs temporarily settling southeast of Rumbek town. Within a year, rising tensions with the HC caused further displacement south into Wulu County. Many of the IDPs reportedly remained there for up to three years, cultivating and coexisting with the HC. However, following a poor harvest, limited resources and reported increases in cattle raiding between IDPs and the HC in 2017, the

IDPs from northern Rumbek Centre County moved northwest of Rumbek town to a settlement where some had social or familial networks. In January 2019, many IDPs attempted to return to Malek Payam in northern Rumbek Centre County, but subsequent reignition of ICV drove HHs back down to their former displaced location. FGD participants reported they had no intention to attempt returning again within the next six months and planned to stay unless Malek Payam were to be vacated by the HHs from Rumbek North County.

In early 2018, the population formerly from Rumbek North County (Blue arrows, Map 2), many of who were residing around Malek Payam, Rumbek Centre County, were displaced with their cattle southeast to Nyang Boma in Yirol East County. After nearly a year of episodic tension with HCs in southern Yirol East County, roughly 1,300 women and children were reportedly relocated to Maper Payam, Rumbek North County, while other IDP HHs reportedly fled northwest and followed the Bahr Nam River to maintain access to pasture for their cattle. IDPs reportedly arrived at the seven cattle camps in northern Rumbek Centre County in May-June 2019, where many remained. Some HHs reportedly continued North to Maper Payam. FGD participants reported that entire HHs were travelling with the cattle keepers given they perceived the cattle camp as the safest place for their families, and they had no home to return to. Most KIs in the cattle camps reported no

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intention to leave the area in the next six months. Some women reported intending to travel to Rumbek North County for the 2020 cultivation season if security permits.

According to FGD participants in Rumbek town, much of the surrounding rural and peri-urban communities **have fled to Rumbek town over the last 5-10 years, citing insecurity as the principle reason for displacement** (Grey arrows, Map 2). Female KIs in Rumbek town reported that before the escalation in ICV in western Lakes, women and children had access to three different locations to seek protection during insecurity and sustain livelihoods: the homestead, Rumbek town and the cattle camps. However, **with the rise in the perceived threat of insecurity and following self-imposed restriction of movement, women now reportedly only feel safe residing in Rumbek town, impacting their seasonal access to food, cultivation and livelihoods** (See Changing Household Dynamics section).¹¹

Cueibet County

In Cueibet County, FGD participants reported that the escalation in the internal conflict in 2012 triggered an increase in displacement, often from rural to peri-urban or urban areas, such as to Cueibet or Malou-Pech towns, or nearby settlements where HHs perceive they will be protected by authorities (Red Arrows, Map 2). Many KIs in rural Cueibet County reported **that repeated outbreaks of ICV since 2012 are causing high-frequency, atypical short-distance movements or 'micro-displacements' within the county**. FGD participants reported they are typically displaced

from the homestead for one to three months at a time before returning home, depending on the duration of insecurity. The episodic micro-displacements are reportedly occurring several times per year.

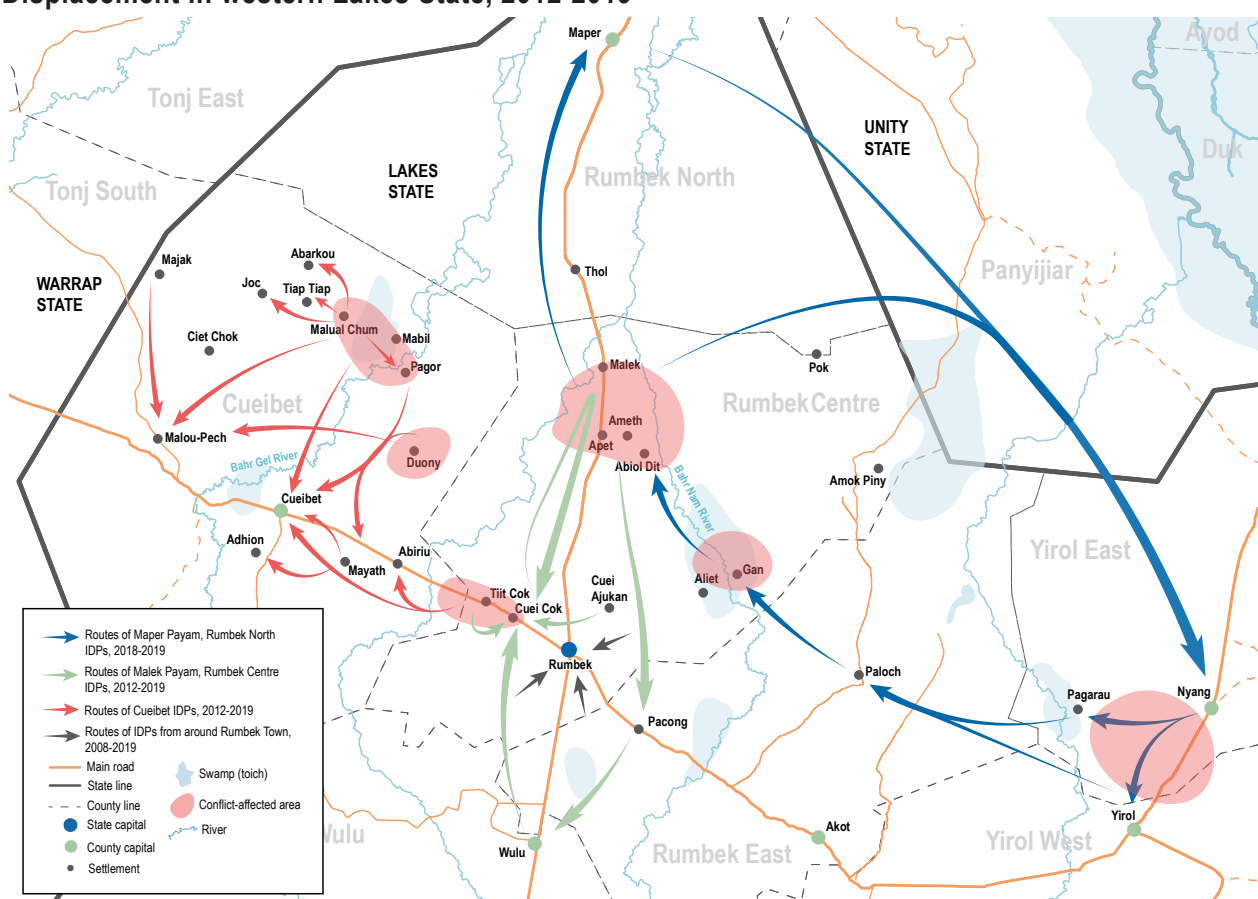
Cattle migration

FGD participants in the Greater Rumbek area reported that over the last two decades, cattle keepers have consecutively lost access to preferred pastures due to insecurity along the borders with Tonj East County, Warrap State and Mayendit and Panyijiar counties, Unity State (Map 3). Consequently, cattle keepers have adapted new cattle migration routes within western Lakes, putting extra strain on fewer pastures, which has contributed to the heightened intra-communal tensions.

Due to the increased tension, **cattle keepers are using wet season grazing areas further away from the homestead to protect HHs and HH assets from the insecurity across western Lakes State**.¹² FGD participants in Tiap Tiap Boma in northern Cueibet County reported they used to keep their cattle near the homestead all year, given there is year-round access to local pasture; however, the increase in ICV drove some cattle keepers to "hide" their cattle away from the homestead, so HHs do not risk large losses of cattle during insecurity or displacement (See Food Access section on how this has impacted FSL in the county).

IDP HHs from Rumbek North County at the cattle camps in northern Rumbek Centre County referred to the movement they made with their cattle in the past year as displacement, rather than cattle

Map 2: Displacement in western Lakes State, 2012-2019



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migration. While insecurity with host communities has repeatedly triggered atypical movement for the cattle keepers and HHs, their routes and onward movement reportedly depended on available grazing areas for cattle, primarily along the Bahr Nam River (Map 3).

KIs in the cattle camps reported that they had adapted to the ongoing threat of insecurity by travelling in a large group, which was split across seven cattle camps. While the cattle keepers reportedly work together to move in concert to protect themselves from external threats, FGD participants reported that tensions were increasing between the seven cattle camps as well. The limited resources and worsening living conditions were reportedly driving micro-level internal tension, reportedly resulting in increased insecurity. KIs noted that such localised insecurity is further contributing to the heightened perceived threat for individuals in the cattle camps, restricting free movement.

Resource stress and livelihood migration

Resource-driven migration patterns are typified by rural-to-urban movement to access labour, markets, or family members.¹³ KIs and FGD participants in all locations reported that increasing fear of looting along the roads over the last five to seven years has heavily restricted this movement (Map 4) (See Food Access Section for more detailed information on livelihood migration).

HHs also reported they annually migrate away from their homesteads due to seasonal water stress, most commonly reported in Cueibet town and northern Cueibet County, where

HHs reported moving from February to April northwest to access nearby rivers or low-land areas (Blue arrows, Map 4). Additionally, annual flooding in Rumbek North County reportedly causes climate-related displacement south, to the highlands of Rumbek Centre County. FGD participants noted that these routes are still reportedly accessible despite insecurity.

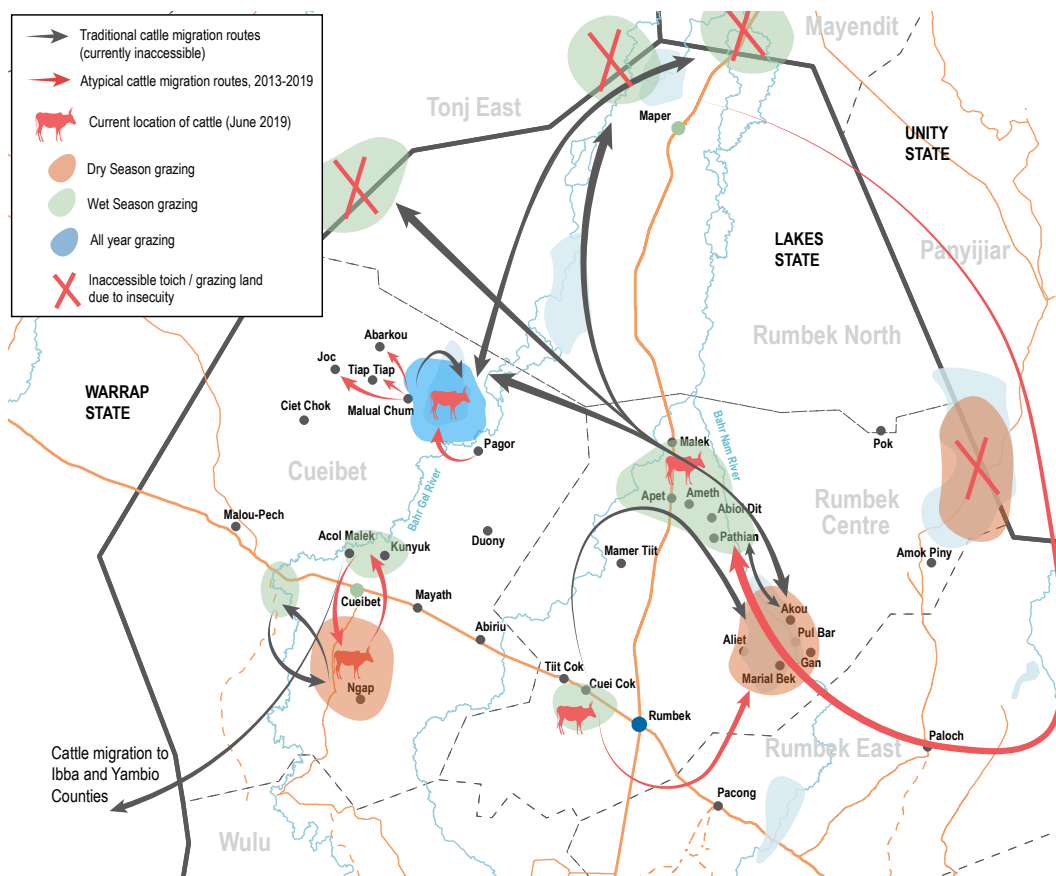
Food security and ICV

The ICV affecting HHs in the assessed locations has had both direct and indirect effects on HH food security and access to traditional livelihoods. FGD participants reported that **the escalation in insecurity over the previous years has led to a general loss of the most productive assets, including agricultural tools, seeds and non-food items (NFIs)**. Many of the participants noted that while there has been a perceived decrease in the number of large scale episodes of ICV, the high perception of insecurity has reportedly prevented HHs from engaging in livelihoods.

Food availability

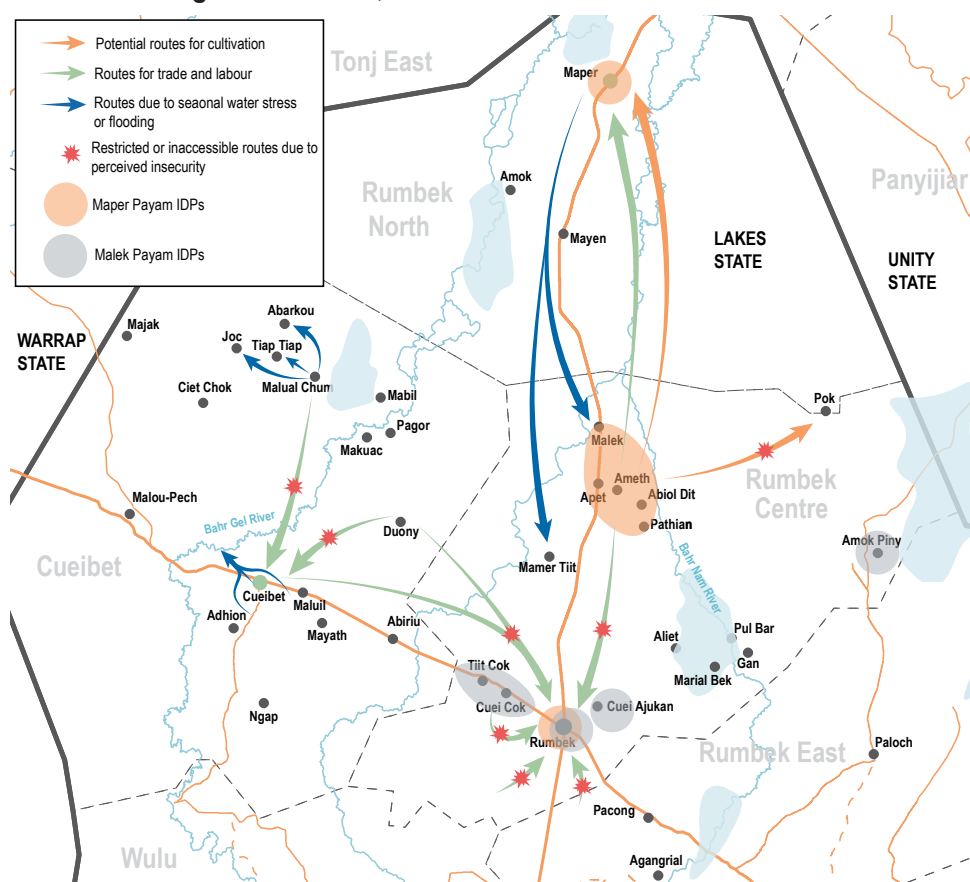
As a result of the high level of perceived insecurity, several KIs and FGD participants noted that they had implemented different coping strategies to mitigate insecurity, often limiting food availability and access. KIs reported that HHs in assessed locations perceived that physical risk increased the further the HH was from the village centre or when valuable assets, such as cattle, are in the homestead. As a result, HHs reported cultivating fewer hectares

Map 3: Cattle migration routes, June 2019



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Map 4: Livelihood and distress migration routes, June 2019



than normal, opting to cultivate near the homestead instead of the larger areas of land that are further away, and limiting the number of valuable assets within proximity, including lactating female cattle which are normally kept near the homestead during the rainy season. While the number of large-scale cattle raids was reportedly less than in previous years, KIs noted that the heightened perception of insecurity, regardless of the credibility of the threat, meant that HHs would likely produce fewer food stocks than normal and seasonal increases in access to milk, often associated with the rainy season, were limited. The changing engagement in livelihood activities linked to the perception of insecurity reportedly happened across all the assessed locations and was not associated with any one group or HH demographic.

FGD participants and KIs also reported that large losses of livestock were both directly and indirectly linked to ICV, through extended cattle migration, exposure to diseases and cattle raiding. In the cattle camps in northern Rumbek Centre County, livestock loss was indirectly linked to cattle raiding due to the geographic length and time of the cattle movement as a result of ICV – often exposing cattle to new diseases while traveling large distance with minimal fodder or water. However, in Tiap Tiap Boma and Cuiet Cok settlement, FGD participants placed a higher emphasis on the frequency and impact of cattle raiding, considered a form of ICV. KIs reported cattle raids caused the largest loss of cattle. Overall, livestock losses and consecutive

years of restricted cultivation due to the perceived insecurity have likely limited both current and future food availability.

Food access

In addition to limited food availability, FGD participants and KIs in assessed locations reported that protection mitigation measures, reportedly related to the high level of ICV, often resulted in limited access to food - physically and financially. HHs in Tiap Tiap Boma and Cuiet Cok settlement reported moving cattle to safer locations, often resulting in limited access to milk. Despite the importance of milk as a key dietary component, FGD participants in Tiap Tiap Boma and Cuiet Cok settlement emphasised that having lactating female cattle at the homestead made the HH a target for looting. Therefore, children are either atypically spending longer periods of time in cattle camps, or milk has to be brought to the HH from long distances. Further, the new grazing locations were reportedly in locations with fewer resources that were likely less sustainable for long term grazing than traditional grazing areas. While KIs and FGD participants residing in the northern Rumbek Centre County cattle camps reported consuming milk regularly, they noted that, since entire HHs are residing in the cattle camps, the over-reliance on milk would likely be unsustainable. In addition, HH access to livestock, particularly cattle, was reported as marginal, due to a large loss of cattle or the physical distance of the HH from the herd.

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As stated, due to the heightened insecurity, HHs are reportedly engaging less frequently in trade or casual labour in urban areas, which has reduced their ability to purchase food. In previous years, HHs would trade milk, labour or HH assets to substitute for exhausted food stocks and, additionally, a few lactating cattle would reportedly be kept close to the homestead or market all-year, allowing for easy access to milk-trade for HHs. However, FGD participants reported limiting movement to markets or having to travel in large groups to mitigate the risks. Due to the heightened perception of insecurity, HH members traveling to markets also reported bringing fewer high-value assets, such as a large bull, to limit exposure to insecurity - limiting their ability to trade commodities for food. As a result, HHs were experiencing both physical and financial constraints to food access. According to KIs residing in the northern Rumbek Centre County cattle camp, a HH may trade 15 litres of milk for approximately 10 kg of maize flour in Rumbek town; however, the process may take between four and five days, including collecting the milk, waiting for a large enough group to travel, selling and returning to the cattle camp - a much longer time-investment than in years prior to the insecurity.

Finally, the wet season is associated with the increase in availability and access to wild foods, including fruit, leaves and fish, which are traditionally used to mitigate large food consumption gaps in pastoralist communities. However, participants emphasised a lack of engagement in seasonal activities this year due to the increases in perceived insecurity. As a result, the seasonal increase in access to food and the consumption of wild foods, is reportedly far below average.

Changing HH dynamics: Zero-sum coping and the effects of ICV on resilience and HH decision making

FGD participants and KIs cited that the increase in both scope and severity of ICV had cumulative effects on HH resilience and coping capacity. As discussed previously, the heighten levels of insecurity coupled with reduction in freedom of movement was reported to limit a HHs' ability to engage in productive livelihoods, thus eroding a HHs' coping capacity overtime. As a result, KIs and FGD participants reported that HHs were increasingly more susceptible to acute events, such as erratic rainfall, market volatility or the loss of livestock.

When discussing HH vulnerability, KIs explained that vulnerability was directly linked with a HHs' ability to complete core activities on a daily basis. KIs listed a set of key activities that were essential for a HHs' survival and needed to be completed each day: collecting water, collecting wild foods to consume or natural resources to sell, preparing meals, and carrying out activities related to cultivation. However, KIs reported that the most vulnerable HHs were typically unable to complete all the necessary tasks each day, usually due to a lack of time or energy considering that they often had fewer productive members between whom tasks could be distributed and owned fewer productive assets, such as ox-ploughs, that decrease time spent on more strenuous activities. While water

collection was unanimously considered the top priority for HHs in all assessed locations with water being reportedly collected on a daily basis, KIs reported that for the most vulnerable HHs, there was usually a trade-off between collecting and preparing food for that day's meal, a short-term investment for immediate gain, or carrying out cultivation, a long-term investment for future subsistence. KIs noted that when cultivation was chosen, the vulnerable HH was likely to go all day without eating, as there was not enough time for the HH to also collect and prepare wild foods. Consequently, decision making around coping mechanisms for the most vulnerable HHs results in a "zero-sum" scenario, whereby today's gain results in tomorrow's loss.

Additionally, in northern Cueibet County, FGD participants reported that the ongoing episodic micro-displacement, whether due to perceived or credible insecurity, has severely decreased HH resilience. FGD participants and KIs reiterated that each time they are displaced, their tukuls and assets are looted, damaged or burned - leading to a loss of key HH assets or food stocks which are often critical components of a HH resilience or coping capacity. One KI in northern Cueibet County reported that many HHs have pre-packed "go-bags" in their homes with essential items in the event of insecurity have identified which assets they would bury and which they would leave behind when fleeing. KIs reported that these subtle changes in dynamics and decision making prevents HHs from engaging in livelihood activities that would likely result in an increased coping capacity and potential accumulation of HH assets, both of which are critical for mitigating shocks.

Access to services

Across all locations assessed in Cueibet and Rumbek Centre counties, the reported access to WASH services and infrastructure, health facilities, and shelter/NFIs by FGD and KIs was very limited. Participants in most locations reported that access to clean water was a major concern and they either relied primarily on stagnant water, such as swamps, or queued in long lines at boreholes for multiple hours. According to FGD participants, the time spent collecting water or food for the day, prevents the most vulnerable HHs have less time for care-taking practices, engaging in income generating activities, or seeking health/nutritional care. In the cattle camps near Rumbek North County, FGDs and KIs reported that the lack of nearby health services, for both people and livestock, was their primary concern. All HHs interviewed in the cattle camps reported that the nearest health facility, located in Rumbek or Maper towns, were more than a half a day's walk away. Additionally, in locations where services were available or close enough to access, such as on the border between Rumbek Centre and Cueibet counties, FGD participants and KIs noted that the influx of additional IDPs in the recent months had placed added pressure on already stretched resources. In more isolated locations, such as in Tiap Tiap Boma, there was a seasonal decline in the HHs' ability to physically access towns where services are more likely to be located due to poor road infrastructure.

Furthermore, due to the repeated episodes of displacement and asset stripping reported by HHs, many FGD participants reported that the lack of NFIs, such as cooking utensils, mosquito nets and

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mattresses, was a major concern. Direct observation in both Tiap Tiap Boma and the cattle camps bordering Rumbek North County reflected the general lack of HH items and shelter.

Conclusion

Lakes state has experienced a general increase in ICV over the previous years. In western Lakes state, this escalation reportedly started in 2012/13 with a further increase in ICV, both in scope and severity, in 2015/16. The heightened ICV was linked to multiple factors, most notably a reduction in available grazing land for livestock and competition over scarce resources. As a result, there was a number of reported large scale displacements, including the communities from Malek Payam beginning in 2019 and continuing to as recent as January 2019 and communities from Rumbek North into Yirol East and back towards Rumbek North in January 2019. The continuous displacement of HHs has reportedly led to large disruptions to livelihood activities and access to HH assets and food, including marginal engagement in cultivation. Further, in Cueibet County, continuous 'micro-displacement,' small in geographic scope but higher in frequency, has also resulted in limited engagement in livelihoods and disrupted HH access to seasonal food groups, such as milk. As a result, HHs were reportedly increasing incorporation of "zero-sum" trade-offs to cope. Further, the insecurity has reportedly impeded HHs' willingness to engage in livelihoods, with HHs assessed reporting that the heightened perception of ICV is a key reason for limited cultivation and access to livestock products. Overall, the ICV in western Lakes State, often linked to limited access to resources, has caused atypical population movement patterns and has both directly and indirectly contributed to high levels of food insecurity.

Endnotes:

1. IPC Key Messages, January 2019; IPC Key Messages Update, May 2019.
2. See [REACH Food Security and Livelihoods Profile on Yirol West](#).
3. See [REACH Food Security and Livelihoods Profile on Yirol West](#).
4. ACLED collects the dates, actors, types of violence, locations, and fatalities of all reported political violence and protest events across Africa, South Asia, South East Asia, the Middle East, Europe, and Latin America. <https://www.acleddata.com/>.
5. IPC Key Messages August 2018 – <http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/details-map/en/c/1152080/> - Phase 5 - Households have an extreme lack of food and/or other basic needs even after full employment of coping strategies. Starvation, death, destitution and extremely critical acute malnutrition levels are evident.
6. Insert references to IPC key messages.
7. FEWSNET South Sudan Livelihood Zone Report, 2013.
8. FEWSNET South Sudan Livelihood Zone Report, 2013.
9. Reported by FGD participants and KIs in Rumbek town.
10. In 2012, oil production shut down in South Sudan, contributing to nation-wide economic crisis.
11. The lack of perceived safety of women and children from around Rumbek town in cattle camps is notably different from those in the cattle camps in Malek area, where HHs reportedly perceived cattle camps as the safest option for women and children..
12. Reported by KIs and humanitarian actors in Rumbek Town, Lakes State.
13. Reported by KIs and FGDs in both Cueibet and Rumbek Centre counties.