



# Greater Kapoeta Assessment Brief

Greater Kapoeta, South Sudan, December 2017

## Background

In September 2017, the Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) Technical Working Group classified the Greater Kapoeta region as in Emergency (Phase 4) with 5% of the population facing humanitarian catastrophe in Kapoeta East County.<sup>1</sup> However, very little is known about the root causes and shocks of the severe food insecurity in the Greater Kapoeta area. REACH therefore conducted a rapid assessment in Kapoeta South to understand shocks and causes of severe food insecurity. Between 6-18 December, 3 focus group discussions (FGDs) with participants from Kapoeta East, North and South, totalling 17 participants, and 2 Key Informant (KI) interviews with humanitarian staff and local authorities were conducted. In addition, 64 KI were interviewed in Kapoeta town about conditions in 43 settlements.<sup>2</sup> Findings should be considered as indicative only, and further verification via site visits should occur where possible.

## Food Security and Livelihoods

### Traditional livelihoods and food sources

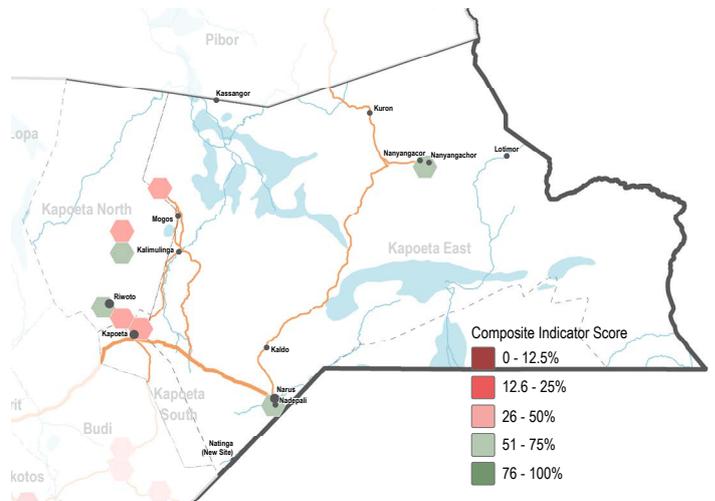
Most people in the Greater Kapoeta area are reported to be pastoralists, who supplement their diet of milk and meat with subsistence agriculture. Nearly all of the assessed settlements reported getting the majority of their food from either home production (41%) or market purchases (49%). Traditional livelihoods in the Greater Kapoeta area have been affected by a lack of rain during the previous three years. FGD participants reported that between 2015 and 2017 the lack of water and sufficient pasture led to large losses of cattle herds due to sickness and disease.<sup>3</sup> This was aggravated by violent cattle raids which led to further losses of livestock for some settlements. As the vast majority of communities in the Greater Kapoeta area traditionally rely on pastoral livelihoods, the loss of herds has led to a lack of most households' main - and often only - food source, which includes the milk and blood of livestock. It has also further lowered the capacity of communities to sell livestock in markets in Narus and Kapoeta towns (see map 1 for locations) in exchange for crops and other foodstuffs.

The lack of rain has also affected cultivation. According to FGD participants, harvest yields between 2015 and 2017 have been extremely low for most communities; only 27% of assessed settlements reported sufficient levels of food.<sup>4</sup> Lower than average harvest levels have reportedly led to excess selling off of livestock in order to purchase food; 33% of assessed settlements reported that most people had done this to cover food gaps. FGD participants indicated that depending on the size of the household, the revenue of one bull provided enough food to last between 2 weeks and 1 month.

### Coping strategies

Families that have lost all or most of their livestock reported resorting to borrowing a cow from a family member or a close friend to provide milk, and blood for the family. Others reported borrowing a bull to sell in the market to buy food such as crops, oil and salt. In times where there was not enough food and pastures near villages were too limited to keep a majority of the cattle, women and children reportedly joined the predominantly male youth in the cattle camps, where they relied on milk and blood. Female FGD participants explained that moving to

Map 1: Greater Kapoeta levels of access to food, composite indicator, October - December 2017\*



the cattle camps is highly risky, as they are regular targets of violent cattle raids. The elderly usually stay in the village, surviving on wild foods.

Cattle raids are reported to be a coping strategy for many communities in the Greater Kapoeta area, and are normally practiced by young men, often under the pressure of the rest of the community. The average dowry for a women is approximately 100 heads of cattle, a price that has not changed in response to the reported reduction in herds. Male FGD participants explained that the social pressure to acquire large amounts of cattle as well as extremely low access to food in the region has led to an increase in the number of cattle raids.

In areas close to gold mining sites (mainly Kapoeta South County and locations close to the national border), men and women reportedly practiced artisanal gold mining when food was scarce. The communities usually ran the mines and miners sold the gold to South Sudanese and foreign traders in the villages and in Kapoeta town. FGDs revealed that this activity is highly risky, as mines regularly collapse on top of the workers due to minimal safety measures. Increased mining is therefore considered to be a coping strategy of last resort, when there is no other livelihood source available.

## Protection

More than half (56%) of assessed settlements reported that the primary protection concern for men was cattle raiding; a further 23% reported violence or injury. According to FGD participants, young men are expected to keep cattle and to participate in violent raids in order to be accepted as a man by the community. Young men who refuse to follow this tradition and opt for pursuing their studies in the villages are usually expelled by their families and their communities.

\*A simple, food access measurement was created by averaging the percentages of KIs reporting on the following indicators for specific settlements in October, November and December: 1) Presence of food 2) Access to more than one meal a day 3) Access to food assistance 4) Skipping meals as coping strategy 5) Reducing the number of meals as coping strategy 6) Harvesting of crops not yet ready as coping strategy. All indicators were considered to have the same impact on the composite measure. Values for different settlements have been averaged and represented with hexagons 10km tall. Only hexagons containing two or more settlements and three or more KIs are shown on the map. Only large settlements are shown and labelled on the map.

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Most assessments reported a variety of sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) concerns as the primary protection concern for women; 21% reported domestic violence, while a further 11% reported family separation and 11% reported harassment. FGD participants reported that in many rural communities women are not allowed to make their own decisions, including who and when they marry. For instance when a man dies, his wives are reported to typically be transferred to the brother of the deceased. Women reported widespread physical violence, sometimes leading to severe injury or death.

SGBV is another major protection concern for women in the Greater Kapoeta area. A recent study by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) found that almost half (49%) of the women across South Sudan have experienced some form of SGBV in the last 12 months.<sup>5</sup> Women explained that they were particularly vulnerable to incidents of SGBV during firewood collection and fetching of water, for which they are required to walk long distances, often to very remote areas.

For young girls, early marriages and pregnancies were reported to be the main protection concerns. FGD participants reported that some girls are married as early as age 10. Participants further explained that there were often serious SGBV concerns for young girls, including domestic violence and death.

More than half (53%) of assessed settlements reported the presence of unaccompanied minors across Greater Kapoeta.<sup>6</sup> While some of these children became orphans due to conflict, others were sent away or neglected by their families due to a lack of food, which is insufficient to feed large families.<sup>7</sup> REACH observed dozens of unaccompanied minors sometimes are young as seven years old in Kapoeta South County, most of whom survive by working in casual labour positions (often carrying water to shop owners and restaurants) and were observed taking leftover food from restaurants. All of the observed minors were boys; KIs explained that girls are perceived as a source of wealth and income and are therefore less likely to be sent away.

## Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

Access to clean drinking water was restricted in the Greater Kapoeta area. Although 57% of assessed settlements reported having access to a functioning borehole, most FGD participants reported that there were too few to provide enough water for the settlement, and most people got water from unclean sources. FGD respondents explained that during the wet season, most water was reportedly obtained from seasonal rivers, while during the dry season people obtained water by digging wells inside the dry riverbeds. In addition, open defecation was reported as a common practice in Greater Kapoeta. FGD participants explained that latrines are not used, as defecation near one's residence is considered to be a cultural taboo. People therefore walk from villages deep into the bush for privacy to openly defecate. REACH found that in general, most of the population knew very little about good hygiene practices or the causes of sickness and disease.

## Health

The majority of assessed settlements (62%) reported no access to health services. The 38% that reportedly have access were mainly located in Kapoeta South County, which is likely due to the close proximity to the town and town hospital. To access health services from remote areas, people walk long distances, often for several days. However, basic medicine is not always available and KIs noted that staff seemed demotivated to attend to patients due to delays in salary payments. Female FGD participants further explained that pregnant women often enter labour on the way to the hospital with no access to medical support in the event of complications.

## Education

Only 37% of assessed settlements reported having access to education; KIs clarified that education was unavailable outside of larger towns or villages. Where education is available, many of the local communities are resistant to sending their children to school; girls are usually not allowed to attend school due to household pressure to marry girls off for a dowry, while boys are often kept from school as well in order to work in the cattle camps.

## Conclusion

Three consecutive years of a lack of rain have led to a severe disruption in livelihoods in Greater Kapoeta. Lack of water and pasture led to large losses of livestock, including cattle herds, which have been aggravated by violent cattle raids. With reduced cattle herds and limited to no harvest yields, people were left with little means to adequately meet food consumption needs. Cattle raiding is expected to increase in both frequency and intensity as conditions continue to deteriorate.

Increasing food insecurity is likely to have reverberating effects across other sectors; as food security declines, households are likely to pull their children out of school. This may disproportionately affect girls, who are likely to be married off at younger ages for dowries that will be used to cover food gaps.

Access to other services, particularly healthcare, is likely to remain restricted due to a lack of humanitarian access in the area. A lack of sufficient WASH services has the potential to compound this. Without an improvement in humanitarian service provision, humanitarian conditions in the Greater Kapoeta area are likely to deteriorate.

### Endnotes

1. Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET), South Sudan Food Security Outlook, October 2017.
2. For more information on the Area of Knowledge (AoK) methodology please refer to: REACH, Situation Overview: Greater Equatoria, November 2017.
3. This is supported by Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) data which shows that, although no drought was declared, rainfall and vegetation were both reduced by 20% in 2015, 2016 and 2017 across Greater Kapoeta.
4. This is supported by CFSAM data which estimated 65% cereal deficit in 2016 and 77% cereal deficit in 2017.
5. IOM, SGBV Survey, November 2017.
6. AoK data, November 2017.
7. According to KIs.