



Chandioy Food Security and Livelihoods Brief

Raja County, Western Bahr el Ghazal State, South Sudan, February 2018

Introduction

Raja County has been among the most insecure areas since June 2016. Projections by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) workshop that took place between 19 January and 2 February 2018 classified the County as the most food insecure area in Western Bahr el Ghazal State.¹

On 16 February 2018, REACH assessed Chandioy settlement, a catchment site, 41 km southeast of Raja town, in Raja County.² The assessment's objective was to gain a better understanding of humanitarian needs and displacement patterns in hard-to-reach areas of Raja County that have remained largely inaccessible to humanitarian actors from 2016 to present. A further goal was to compare the findings with the food security projections of the IPC.

During the two-hour long assessment, REACH conducted four Key Informant (KI) interviews with community leaders, as well as direct observations of the area on foot and by helicopter.

The interviewed KIs spoke on behalf of the wider community living in, and around, Chandioy.

Displacement and Population Dynamics

Chandioy hosts a part of the population that had recently arrived from Dolo, a settlement 28 km southwest of Raja town that was hosting populations that had been displaced from Raja town during periods of conflict in June 2016 and April 2017. However, episodes of violence between October - November 2017 and on 18 January 2018, displaced the entirety of Dolo's population. While most people fled to Chandioy, others reportedly migrated to Darfur, Sudan.

In the assessed area of Chandioy, only a few rakoobas were seen

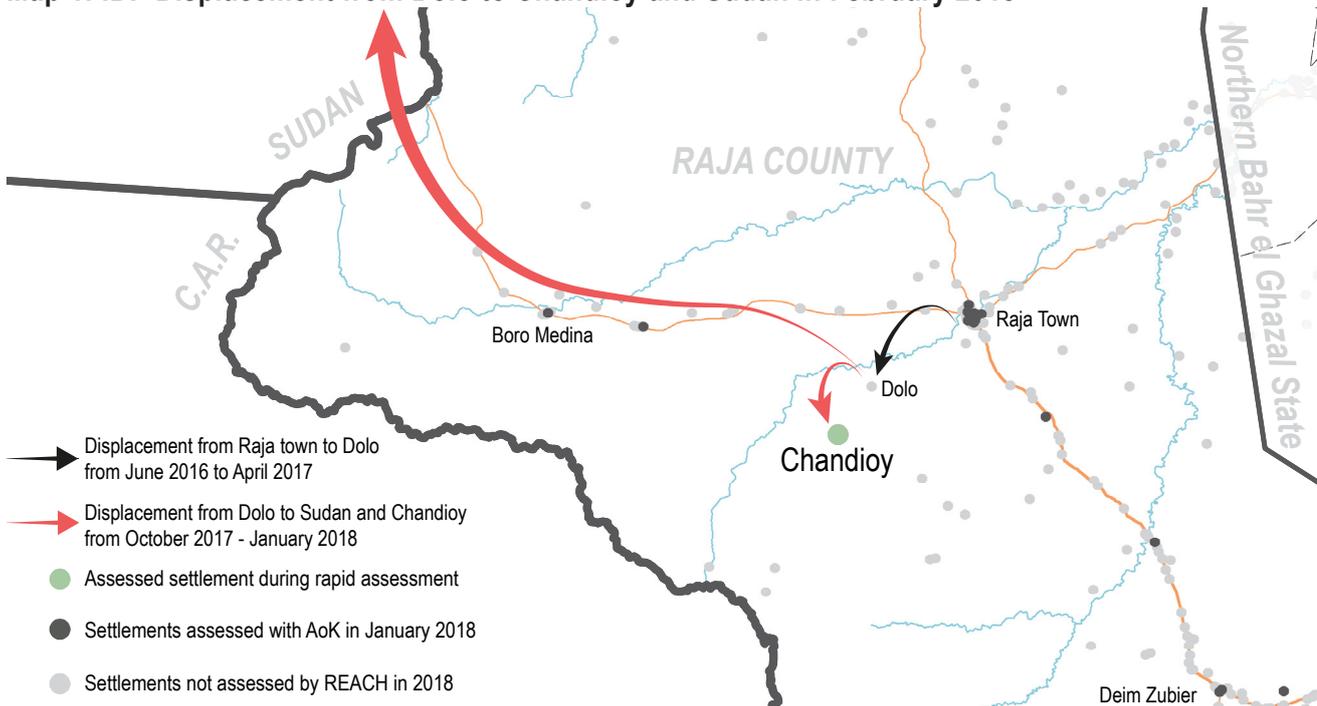
and a total population of approximately 50 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) from Dolo was present.³ However, according to community leaders of Chandioy, the total population of the area is composed of 395 households with a total of 2,184 individuals, most of whom were children. Chandioy is extremely remote and difficult to access due to the lack of roads; no other settlements were observed when flying over the area by helicopter. It was reported that most people live 2-3 hours walking distance away from Chandioy and that during the day they move even further into the bush to find food. There were three reported reasons why they were dispersed, the first reason was that living in small, spread out groups makes it more difficult for HHs to be discovered, reducing insecurity. The second reason was related to access to food, as wild foods and game can be exhausted quickly if too many people concentrate within a small area without their own food stocks. The third reason was that access to water is limited; the few wells dug in each locations are not sufficient to provide water for more than a few families.

When asked about intentions to move, KIs responded that they would want to move back to Raja town, where they were originally from, but that they would move to Sudan instead if the security situation in Raja remained unstable.

Food Security and Livelihoods

Traditionally, the population of Raja County has relied on subsistence agriculture as the primary livelihood source, including the cultivation of sorghum, groundnuts, cassava and sesame. In pre-crisis years, communities in Raja usually remained self-sufficient in crop production.⁴ Normally, people prepare their land for cultivation in February and would still be consuming their harvested food stocks.⁵ According to data collected with

Map 1: IDP Displacement from Dolo to Chandioy and Sudan in February 2018



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REACH's Area of Knowledge (AoK) survey in January 2018, the population of 52% of the settlements assessed in Raja County was currently engaging in agriculture for sustenance. Furthermore, in 82% of assessed settlements, people were reportedly engaging in casual labour, most likely cultivating and harvesting other community members' fields.⁶

However, according to KIs, in Chandioy and the surrounding area, the majority of people abandoned their food stocks and Non-Food Items (NFIs) when they fled in January 2018 and no one was currently engaging in agriculture or casual work. Due to insecurity, as of 16 February 2018, no one who was displaced had returned to Dolo, and most KIs assumed that their food stocks, seeds and tools had been looted or destroyed.

Although the wider Raja area appears dependent on agriculture, the populations displaced from Dolo are unable to engage in these cultivation practices because of lack of seeds and tools. Furthermore, the KIs noted that normal cultivation has been reduced in the last few years due to insecurity.

While KIs reported they are used to rely on foraged wild foods during the lean season, displacement and insecurity have disrupted cultivation to the extent that this coping strategy is more heavily relied upon, even during the traditional harvest season.⁷

In Chandioy, the most commonly consumed sources of food were reportedly wild fruits, yams, honey, small animals and fish. As of February, wild yams had already been exhausted and the amount of available fruits was rapidly decreasing. It was reported that Chandioy's population was not consuming any sorghum, cassava, and groundnuts, indicating that the situation was comparatively worse than in other settlements assessed by REACH's AoK survey in Raja County in January 2018.

While KIs did not report any deaths related to a combination of hunger, malnutrition and disease between 18 January (main date of displacement) and 16 February (date of the assessment), several children present during the assessment showed signs of malnutrition. The children had swollen bellies, though no visible signs of oedema in their limbs and feet. The unbalanced diet, consisting mainly of wild fruits, was likely to negatively impact on the children's nutritional intake. KIs reported community members eating only once a day, if not less. KIs furthermore mentioned that there were trained teachers in Chandioy who could provide basic schooling but that children were too hungry to study.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Health

Populations in and around Chandioy suffered from severe water scarcity. KIs noted that there was no presence of hand pumps or clean water sources. The only water sources observed during the visit were three shallow, hand-dug, wells that produced visibly dirty, brown water. KIs reported that several community members suffered from diarrhoea and other waterborne diseases

which can negatively impact the absorption of nutrients from food. Health and nutrition services as well as medicines were not available to anyone in the area. Open defecation was reported for the entirety of the population. According to REACH AoK data collected in January 2018, 92% of assessed settlements in Raja County reported access to boreholes and in 43% of assessed settlements, at least half of the population was using latrines. This suggests that in terms of Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) and Health, the situation in Chandioy is worse than in many other settlements of Raja County.

Conclusion

Because of insecurity, most of the population of Dolo had been displaced to Chandioy without food stocks, seeds and tools, and their traditional livelihood sources have been disrupted. Without the possibility to cultivate and/or recover their food stocks and tools, the population of Chandioy resorted to eating wild foods such as fruits, yam, honey, small animals and fish. While these food sources can be sustainable, especially with the increase in fishing in seasonal rivers, the extent to which they will be able to help bridge the lean season hunger gap is not clear. There is a risk that further displacement due to insecurity or the exhaustion of wild foods will occur sooner than expected and that fishing will not be sufficient to alleviate hunger gaps. As of February, no hunger related or disease related mortality was reported in the last month. However, with the widespread loss of food stocks, lack of seeds and tools and the lack of access to safe drinking water, it is likely that the lean season will last longer than in a typical year and that acute malnutrition will rise. Furthermore, in the absence of adequate health and nutrition services and the increase of exposure to waterborne diseases in the rainy season from April to September, it is possible that there will be cases of excess mortality in Chandioy and surroundings.

Although no cases of excess mortality were reported, the lack of food and poor dietary diversity suggest severe food insecurity in Chandioy and potentially, in similar, hard-to-reach areas of Raja County that host IDPs. The remoteness of the area creates a further challenge for the potential provision of humanitarian assistance.

Endnotes

1. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) projections for Raja County: Current (January 2018) Phase 3, Projection One (February-April 2018), Phase 4, Projection Two (May-July 2018) Phase 4, IPC Key Messages for South Sudan, January 2018.
2. Chandioy operates as a catchment site, an area where people scattered around the area meet and gather in case of important events such as, for instance, humanitarian assistance.
3. A rakooba is a basic, traditional shelter type made entirely of dried grass.
4. IOM, Village Assessment Survey, Western Bahr el Ghazal (WBeG) 2013.
5. FEWSNET South Sudan Livelihood Zones and Descriptions, August 2013.
6. REACH Area of Knowledge (AoK) data January 2018.
7. In the Western Groundnuts, Sesame and Sorghum Livelihoods zone, in which Raja County is located, cultivation of groundnuts and sorghum traditionally does not start before February and goes until July, with harvests taking place from September to November.