

# Situation Overview: Western Bahr el Ghazal, South Sudan

November 2017

**REACH** An initiative of  
IMPACT Initiatives  
ACTED and UNOSAT

## Introduction

As of November 2017, many people in Western Bahr el Ghazal (WBeG) who were displaced in successive rounds of violence between June 2016 and April 2017 had not yet returned to their previous locations. In fact, roughly 100,000 people remain displaced inside WBeG, with many more having fled to Sudan and Northern Bahr el Ghazal following the outbreaks of conflict.<sup>1</sup> While no new incidents of widespread displacement have been reported since April 2017, insecurity and occasional episodes of violence have persisted in November, limiting access for humanitarian organisations and putting the livelihoods of local communities at risk.

To inform humanitarian actors on the humanitarian conditions faced by populations living outside of formal displacement sites, REACH has been assessing hard-to-reach areas in WBeG since April 2017. Settlement-level data is collected across Raga, Wau and Jur River counties in WBeG on a monthly basis. From 2-24 November 2017, REACH interviewed 387 Key Informants (KIs) with knowledge of humanitarian needs in 154 settlements in the three counties of WBeG.

The vast majority (95%) of KIs had reportedly been living in the assessed settlement or had regular contact with someone from the settlement within the last month; the remainder

of the KIs (5%) were new arrivals.

Furthermore, four food security and livelihoods (FSL) focus group discussions (FGDs) and two participatory mapping exercises were conducted between November 11-15 to provide a deeper understanding of FSL practices and displacement patterns. Findings were then triangulated with secondary data collected by other humanitarian partners.

The first section of this report analyses displacement trends in November 2017, while the second section evaluates population dynamics and access to food and other basic humanitarian services for IDPs and local populations in the assessed settlements.

## Population Movement and Displacement

Displacement of people across all counties in WBeG slowed down in the months leading up to November. Sixty-seven percent of assessed settlements reported that at least half of the original population resided in the settlement this month. While this remains consistent with October's findings, it is a substantial increase from 26% in May 2017, following the latest wave of displacement. This continued increase in returnees to assessed settlements is attributable to the lack of major reports of violence for the last several months across WBeG. Additionally, FGD participants reported that the beginning of the harvest season in

September sparked an increase in return to assessed settlements.

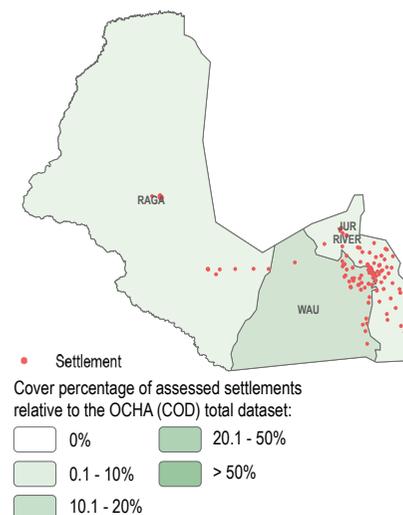
The few newly displaced people interviewed in November cited a lack of health services (40%) as the primary reason for displacement. This can be compared to the primary push factors reported by KIs during the lean season, June to August, which were insecurity and lack of food. The lower number of newly displaced people citing lack of food as a major push factor in November is attributable to the crops collected in the recent harvest between September and November. Meanwhile, the drop in number of people reporting insecurity as the main reason for displacement reflects the absence of large-scale conflict reported in WBeG for the past several months. Thus, the general increase in stability across WBeG and the harvesting of crops have been positive pull factors for returnees to their original settlements in November.

## Situation in Assessed Settlements

### Demographic profile

### Remaining population in assessed settlements

Due to a decline in new arrivals, the demographic composition in assessed settlements remained similar to previous months. Fifty-one percent of assessed settlements reported that the majority of the population was living in their own homes.



**Map 1: REACH assessment coverage of Western Bahr el Ghazal, September 2017**

This is only a slight decrease from previous months. A high proportion of the population living in their own homes is a proxy indicator for stability and perceived safety. Given no major violence has broken out in WBeG over the past several months, it is evident that assessed settlements are beginning to stabilise in the region.

However, settlements in the Greater Bagarri area continued to report that the majority of their population lived in the bush in November. In fact, the proportion of settlements reporting that the largest portion of the host community was living in the bush increased in Wau County to 32% this month, as compared to 10% in October and 20% in September. The Greater Bagarri

<sup>1</sup> Estimation made by REACH, triangulating different data sources from April to November 2017

## METHODOLOGY

To provide an overview of the situation in hard-to-reach areas of Western Bahr el Ghazal (WBeG), REACH uses primary data provided by key informants who have recently arrived, or receive regular information, from their pre-displacement location or "Area of Knowledge" (AoK).

Information for this situation overview was collected from key informants in the Wau Protection of Civilians Area Adjacent (PoCAA) site and in the Collective Centres (CCs) in Wau town, throughout October 2017.

The first phase of the assessment methodology comprised a participatory mapping exercise to map displacement routes of IDPs in WBeG. In-depth interviews were then conducted with selected participants, using a standardised survey tool comprising questions on displacement trends, population needs and access to basic services.

After data collection was completed, all data was examined at the settlement level, and settlements were assigned the modal response. When no consensus could be found for a settlement, that settlement was not included in reporting. Descriptive statistics and geospatial analysis were then used to analyse the data.

It must be noted that this represents a change in methodology as of December 2016, as REACH previously analysed data at the community level. This means that this report is not directly comparable with Situation Overviews from before December 2016.

area, which is located southwest of Wau Town, experienced severe episodes of violence and an influx of roughly 7,000 IDPs in April 2017.<sup>2</sup> While violence has since declined, populations remain trapped in the bush due to the presence of armed groups in the area. As perceived insecurity persists, many people in the Greater Bagarri area now opt to hide in the bush instead of living along the roads and in villages, which further exposes them to harassment from armed groups.<sup>3</sup> This continued displacement could also prevent populations from being able to plant their crops in the coming season, which would negatively affect the FSL situation in an area where food stores are near exhaustion.<sup>4</sup>

### IDP population in assessed settlements

Similar to the demographics of the local communities, the situation of IDPs living in WBeG remained consistent in November. Eleven percent of assessed settlements were hosting IDPs as of November, a similar proportion to the previous months.

A slight gender disparity was detected across assessed IDP and local populations in WBeG in November, with both reporting more women than men in the settlements. Gender disparity,

especially within the IDP community, is likely due to conflict related targeting of men and represents a serious issue as it decreases the number of working-aged males.<sup>5</sup> In November, 64% of settlements hosting IDPs reported that there were more women than men among the IDPs and 46% reported that there were more women than men among the local population.

### Food Security and Livelihoods

WBeG is an agro-pastoral society that primarily depends on cultivation for food.<sup>6</sup> The state produces groundnuts, sesame and sorghum and the planting season typically runs from April or May to August (see Figure 1).<sup>7</sup> Due largely to seasonality and an unchanging security environment, there was no major shift in reported adequate access to food in assessed communities in November.<sup>8</sup> In areas less affected by conflict, such as Jur River County, assessed settlements were able to harvest crops and maintain access to markets, similar to previous months. Whereas, in conflict-affected areas, Raja and Wau Counties, adequate access to food in assessed settlements remained restricted because of poor cultivation and low access to markets (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: Seasons in WBeG

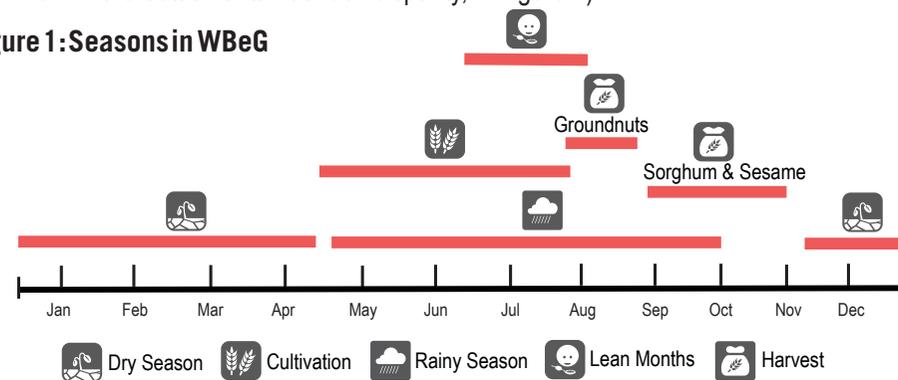
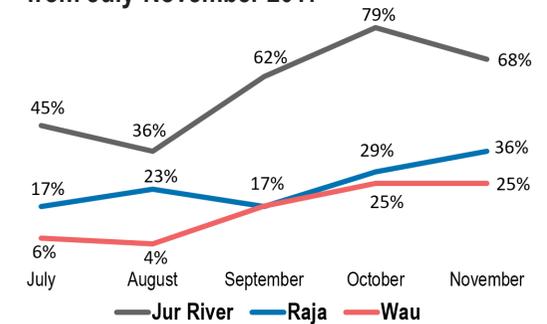


Figure 2: Percentages of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food in Jur River, Raja and Wau Counties from July-November 2017



With most harvests already having taken place, only 44% of assessed settlements in WBeG reported adequate access to food in November, a similar proportion to 47% in October.

Markets are one way to offset food insecurity for certain populations with access. However, KIs reported an increase in market prices in November. For example, 81% of assessed settlements with access to markets reported an increase in the price of sugar and 53% reported an increase in the price of oil. These findings are consistent with a recent market assessment conducted by WFP, which further suggests there has been an increase in instability in WBeG markets due to reduced crop outputs this season and the ongoing economic crisis across the country.<sup>9</sup> Although, trade routes from Sudan supplying WBeG's main market in Wau Town opened with the cessation of rains in September, which is expected to slightly increase food availability for those with access to the market.

### Jur River County

In Jur River County, a continued stable security

2 REACH Bagarri Food Security and Livelihoods Brief, September 2017

3 UNSC, Interim Report of the Panel of Experts on South Sudan, November 2017

4 REACH, Bagarri Food Security and Livelihoods Update, November 2017

5 Oxfam, South Sudan Gender Analysis, March 2017

6 IOM, Village Assessment Survey Report WBeG, 2013.

7,8 According to FSL FGDs participants and observations from FSL cluster members.

9 WFP, "Market Assessment: Wau Market, South Sudan", November 2017

environment allowed for the harvesting of crops. The county's harvested food, which peaked in October, has not yet been exhausted (as seen in Figure 2). However, the proportion of assessed settlements in Jur River County that reported having adequate access to food slightly decreased from 79% in October to 68% in November, which could be attributable to the higher market prices.

The vast majority (95%) of assessed settlements in Jur River County reported having access to land for cultivation, which is also reflective of the positive security environment across the county. The sustained high access to food suggests that security incidents did not disrupt cultivation between October and November. Cultivation as the primary source of food slightly decreased from 82% in October to 67% in November. This is expected at the end of the harvest season when the availability of harvested food begins to decline and market dependence increases to meet food gaps.<sup>10</sup>

### Raja County

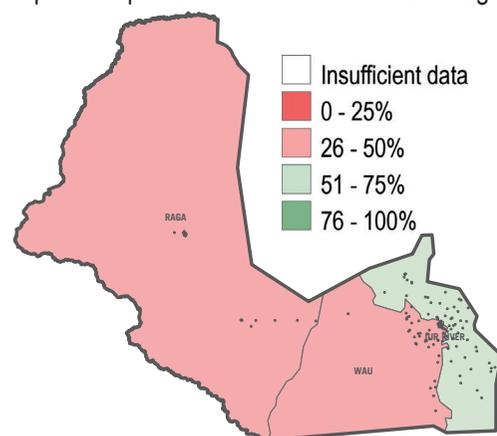
In Raja County, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food remained consistently low in November, largely due to ongoing insecurity. In November, 36% of assessed settlements reported adequate access to food, similar to the 29% in October. When food access was reported as insufficient, the primary reason was that crops had been destroyed during episodes of violence, as reported by 42% of assessed settlements. In Raja County, traditionally considered one of the breadbaskets of South Sudan due to its large agriculture surplus, only 27% of assessed settlements reported cultivation as their primary

source of food. Since fighting broke out in June 2016, consistent insecurity in the county has resulted in restricted cultivation and access to food.<sup>11</sup> Most settlements in the county reported acquiring a majority of food from market purchases; although many markets in the county are not functioning, resulting in insufficient access to food in settlements.

### Wau County

In Wau County, only 26% of assessed settlements reported adequate access to food, the same percentage as in previous month. As few as 7% of assessed settlements reported that cultivation was the primary source of food in November, an alarmingly low proportion considering that Wau County is traditionally dependent on its historically rich agricultural outputs. As of November, most settlements reported buying food (45%) and foraging wild foods (34%) as their primary source of food.

Wau County had in the past been affected by repeated episodes of violence that led to large-



**Map 2: Percentage of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food, November 2017**

scale displacement of people and widespread insecurity. The latest episode of violence in April 2017 coincided with the beginning of the planting season. During episodes of violence, settlements were often looted and crops were destroyed. The destruction of a harvest early in the year, as seen in Wau County, can severely affect the crop for the rest of the growing season. Through both the planting and harvesting seasons, the destruction of crops was reported as the primary reason for not having adequate access to food in Wau County.

### Food consumption and livelihood coping strategies

When populations in assessed settlements reported not having adequate access to food, they resorted to food consumption and livelihood coping strategies. Across WBeG, the most common food coping strategy was to limit the size of meals, reported by an overall 33% of assessed settlements.

Meanwhile, the consumption of seeds as a coping mechanism more than doubled in WBeG, from October (12%) to November (27%) across assessed settlements. Consuming seeds is one of the most extreme livelihoods coping mechanism as it impedes future cultivation, causing negative long term effects on a settlement's FSL.<sup>12</sup> The increase in seed consumption in WBeG directly reflects the declining FSL situation across the state, which was largely caused by the outbreak of conflict early in the planting season in Wau and Raja Counties, dramatically impacting the rest of the year's harvest.<sup>13</sup> In Wau County specifically, consumption of seeds as a livelihoods coping mechanism has more than doubled each month

from September (7%) to November (28%). With the exception of Jur River, WBeG remains in an IPC Phase 4 Emergency, with parts of Wau County declared as Phase 5 Famine.<sup>14</sup> Given the compounded effects of the violence earlier in the year on the harvest and as harvested food begins to run out, WBeG is likely to see a continued decline in food security in the coming months.

### Protection

The reported perception of safety in November was similar to previous months; 65% of assessed settlements in WBeG reported that people felt safe sometimes and 22% reported that people felt unsafe at all times. In Wau County, the proportion of settlements reporting that people feel unsafe at all times was slightly higher (37%) than the state average. A greater perceived insecurity in Wau County is likely attributable to a higher density of armed actors around Greater Bagarri and in the outskirts of Wau Town.

The primary perceived protection concerns in November were similar to previous months. For women, being killed or injured by perpetrators from outside the community was the most often reported protection concern (35%). For men, 50% of the assessed settlements reported the same. According to FGD participants, men face a greater risk of being killed as they are often presumed to be combatants and thus more likely to be targeted than women. Looting was also a major concern for populations in WBeG. In November, 72% of assessed settlements across the state reported that at least one incident of looting had taken place in the last 30 days. This is likely an indication that individuals'

10 FSL FGDs participants in November in Wau

11 REACH, Raja County Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Brief, November 2017

12 WFP, The Coping Strategies Index, 2008

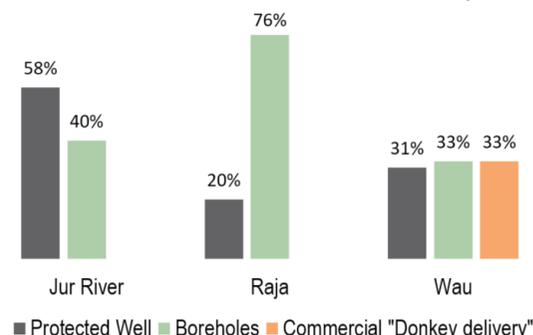
13, 14 IPC, Key IPC Findings: September 2017 – March 2018, September 2017

needs are not being met, leading to an increase in criminality to fill unmet needs.

## Shelter

Reported shelter damage in WBeG slightly increased from October to November. Given no large-scale episodes of violence were reported, it is likely that occasional looting and accidental fires caused damage to shelters.<sup>15</sup> In Wau, 32% of assessed settlements reported the presence of damaged shelters in November, a similar proportion to last month. In Raja and Jur River Counties, the proportion of settlements that reported an increase in shelter damage increased from 13% to 26% in Raja County between October and November and from 23% to 36% in Jur River County.

The proportion of assessed settlements reporting tukuls as the primary shelter type increased from 72% in October to 89% in November, likely due to the stabilising security environment. Substantial improvements were reported in Wau County, where tukuls were the primary shelters in 82% of assessed settlements in November, as compared to 66% in October, indicating that



**Figure 3: Most often reported sources of water in Raja, Wau and Jur River Counties in November, 2017**

some people who were previously displaced have since rebuilt their shelters.

## Non-food items (NFIs)

In settlements where IDPs were present, more than half of KIs reported that some of the essential NFIs were not available. Only 40% reported the availability of cooking pots, 62% mosquito nets and 46% jerry cans. In October, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting the availability of cooking pots was significantly higher (72%). This decline is likely due to occasional incidents of looting reported across WBeG.<sup>16</sup>

## Water and Sanitation

An increase in assessed settlements reported access to functional boreholes in November, which can be attributed to the scaling up of humanitarian activities from the WASH cluster to rehabilitate boreholes in Jur River and Wau Counties.<sup>17</sup> The overall percentage of functional boreholes increased across WBeG, specifically in Jur River and Wau Counties in November. In Jur River County, the reported percentage of functioning boreholes nearly doubled from 41% in October to 84% in November. In Wau County, reported borehole functionality increased from 54% in October to 80% in November. Meanwhile, assessed settlements in Raja County reported a consistently high proportion of functional boreholes (81%).

## Health

Healthcare availability and health concerns in November were consistent with previous months; 76% of assessed settlements in WBeG reported access to healthcare. In Raja

County, access to healthcare remained over average with 94%, likely due to the presence of several humanitarian actors from the health cluster in the areas where most of the assessed settlements are located.<sup>18</sup>

For the relatively few settlements that did not report access to healthcare, 43% reported the destruction of facilities as a reason while for 33% it was due to the lack of qualified staff when facilities were available. Given that these facilities were primarily reported in Wau County, the cause of destroyed facilities and lack of staff is likely from the conflict earlier in the year.

Although the beginning of the dry season has led to a decrease in mosquitoes; malaria continued to be the most reported health concern (36% of assessed settlements) across WBeG. Meanwhile, malnutrition was reported as the primary health concern by 16% of assessed settlements. Settlements in Raja County reported a drop in malnutrition from 20% of assessed settlements in October to 8% in November, likely the result of targeted nutrition programming and the positive impacts of the harvested food.<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

The humanitarian situation and needs dynamics in WBeG did not substantially change in November, as compared to the previous month. The outbreak of conflict in the early months of 2017 has had strong reverberating effects on the food security and livelihoods of assessed settlements in Raja and Wau Counties as seen in recent months. With much of the harvest destroyed during the violence, food access remained critically low in

Raja and Wau Counties, which forced large parts of the population to resort to unsustainable food and livelihoods coping strategies. Meanwhile, the lack of violence and displacement in Jur River County allowed assessed settlements to successfully harvest their crops and enabled greater access to food.

Thus, the assessed settlements in counties most affected by violence in 2017 continue to struggle, while the areas least affected by conflict have managed to sustain themselves. Given this trend, it is likely that there will be an inflection point in the coming months in which sustained shocks from the conflict over the year are likely to have a compounding effect, which may lead to a dramatic drop in food security in WBeG. The scaling up of humanitarian assistance in Wau and Raja Counties will likely abate some of these consequences. Thus, it is important that the humanitarian community continue to closely monitor the evolution of the food security and livelihoods situation in WBeG.

## About REACH

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. All REACH activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms.

For more information, you can write to our in-country office: [southsudan@reach-initiative.org](mailto:southsudan@reach-initiative.org) or to our global office: [geneva@reach-initiative.org](mailto:geneva@reach-initiative.org).

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<sup>15</sup> It is a common practice in WBeG to cut the grass around shelters in the beginning of the dry season, in order to avoid shelters being damaged by accidental or intentional bush fires.

<sup>16</sup> UNSC, Interim Report of the Panel of Experts on South Sudan, November 2017

<sup>17</sup>, <sup>19</sup> ICWGs September-November 2017 in Wau

<sup>18</sup> Most settlements that were assessed in Raja County are located along the main Raja road