

# Situation Overview: Unity State, South Sudan

September 2017

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ACTED and UNOSAT

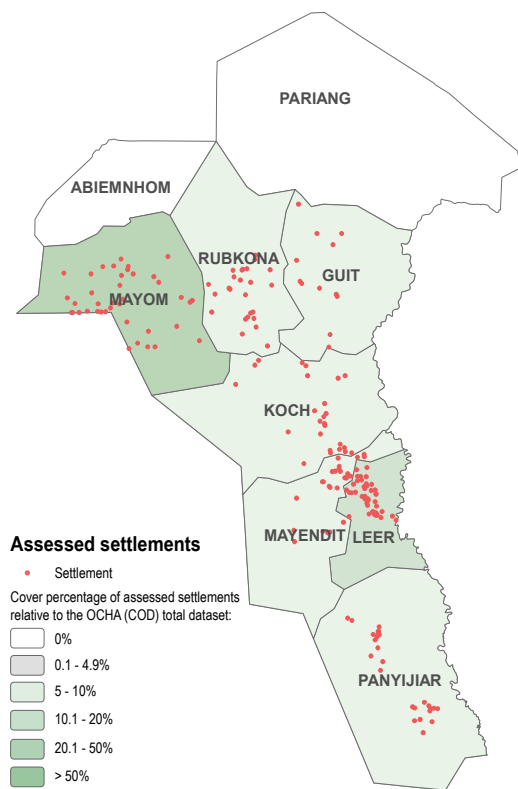
## Introduction

Displacement trends, population needs and humanitarian access have all been negatively affected by the insecurity resulting from the ongoing conflict in Unity State, which began in December 2013.

To inform humanitarian actors working outside formal settlement sites, REACH has conducted assessments of hard-to-reach areas in South Sudan since December 2015. The data is collected through interviews on a monthly basis from communities across the Greater Upper Nile region, Greater Equatoria region and Western Bahr el Ghazal region.

Between 7 and 22 September, REACH interviewed a total of 281 Key Informants (KIs) in Bentiu Protection of Civilians (PoC) site and Nyal. The KIs were from 198 settlements situated in 7 of the 9 counties in Unity State. The findings were triangulated through three focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted in Bentiu PoC, secondary data and previous REACH assessments of hard-to-reach areas of Unity State.

Since 65% of the respondents interviewed were either newly arrived IDPs or had visited the area in the last 30 days, they were providing an up to date understanding of displacement and population dynamics in



**Map 1: REACH assessment coverage of Unity State, Sep 2017**

the area. The remaining 35% of respondents were not new arrivals, but had received up to date information on a settlement from an intermediary (usually a relative) source that was living there.

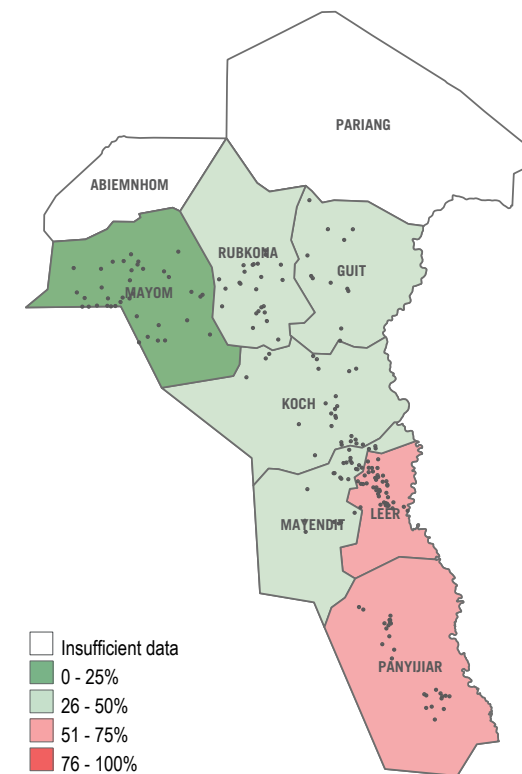
This Situation Overview focuses on changes

in humanitarian needs observed from the time of September 2016.<sup>1</sup> The first section analyses displacement trends in September, and the second section evaluates the population dynamics in the assessed settlements, as well as access to food and basic services for both internally displaced persons (IDPs) and local communities.

## Population Movement and Displacement

Displacement indicators suggest that displacement within Unity State increased. In September, almost half (48%) of assessed settlements reported presence of IDPs, which represents an increase compared to August (34%). Settlements in Koch accounted for the vast majority of the increase in IDPs, followed by Panyijiar and Rubkona. This is consistent with reported armed clashes throughout Koch County, Mayendit and southern Rubkona County, which took place in September and led to large scale displacement of civilians as well as relocation of humanitarian workers.<sup>2</sup>

Correspondingly, movement trend tracking data showed a slight increase in displacement to common displacement sites such as Bentiu PoC in Rubkona County and Panyijiar. In Bentiu PoC, IOM population count recorded a slight increase in population from 114,683



**Map 2: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting an IDP presence, Sep 2017**

**Figure 1: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting IDP presence, September 2017**



**48% of assessed settlements reported IDP presence**

<sup>1</sup> Settlement aggregation has been applied to dataset starting from September data. AoK data collected before September will therefore not be taken into consideration for comparative referencing.

<sup>2</sup> OCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin 15, South Sudan, October 2017.

<sup>3</sup> IOM, Bentiu PoC Site Profile, July and September 2017. No Site profile was published for August.



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## METHODOLOGY

To provide an overview of the situation in largely inaccessible areas of Unity State, REACH uses primary data provided by key informants who have recently arrived, or receive regular information, from a location or “Area of Knowledge” (AoK).

Information for this report was collected from key informants in the Bentiu PoC site and Nyal in Unity State throughout September 2017.

The first phase of the assessment methodology comprised a participatory mapping exercise to map the relevant settlements in Unity State. 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.

This represents a change in data aggregation as of December 2016, as REACH previously analysed data at the community level. This means that although the data and data collection methods have remained the same since September 2016, this report is not directly comparable with Situation Overviews from before December 2016.


in July to 115,020 in September.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, REACH port monitoring in Nyal recorded an increased inflow from 195 IDPs in August to 248 in September (mainly from Mayendit and Leer). Those figures are however still remarkably lower than the inflow peak in March when 2,520 IDPs arrived in Nyal<sup>4</sup> and the Bentiu PoC population was at 212,255<sup>5</sup> due to heavy fighting as well as severe food insecurity around that time.<sup>6</sup>

Reflective of a deterioration in the security situation in parts of Unity State between July and September is evident as 44% of newly arrived IDPs reported that the primary reason for leaving their previous location was due to insecurity, which is comparable to August (36%) but represents an increase compared to July (29%). The second most cited reason for displacement was family reunification followed

**Figure 2: Primary reported reason newly arrived IDPs left their previous location, September 2017**

1. Insecurity	44%	
2. Far from family	19%	
3. Lack of health services	15%	

**Figure 3: Primary reported reason newly arrived IDPs came to their current location, September 2017**

1. Security	48%	
2. Access to healthcare	18%	
3. Joining family	18%	

by access to health services (Figures 2 and 3). It must further be noted that for the first time since REACH started recording push and pull factors in February 2016, lack of food had been absent from the top three primary push and pull factors in August and September, indicative of improvements in access to food (see Food Security section).

## Situation in Assessed Settlements

### Demographic profile

#### Remaining population in assessed settlements

Observed developments regarding depopulation in assessed settlements were consistent with displacement trends described above, suggesting that depopulation increased especially in central Unity State and Rubkona. Statewide, in September, 9% of assessed settlements reported that no member of the local community had remained in the settlement, which is comparable to August (2%). Depopulation was most notable in assessed settlements in Leer, Koch, Mayendit and Rubkona where 18%, 16%, 12% and 8%, respectively, were reportedly abandoned.

#### IDP population in assessed settlements

The majority (82%) of assessed settlements with IDP presence reported that most of the IDPs are living together with the host community, while in 14% the majority is living in spontaneous settlements. Those proportions are comparable to the preceding

month when in 91% of assessed settlements IDPs were reportedly living together with the host community and in 4% in spontaneous settlements. However, 2% of the assessed settlements still reported that the majority of IDPs were living in the bush (comparable to 6% in August). All of those settlements were located in Leer, one of the most conflict-affected areas, suggesting that insecurity has prevented the IDPs from settling down in villages.

Of the 48% of assessed settlements reporting an IDP presence, two-thirds (67%) also reported that the majority or entirety of the IDP population is female. This uneven gender balance of IDP communities is a likely result of the conflict, as many boys and men have reportedly been forcefully recruited or killed by armed actors operating in Unity State.<sup>7</sup> Women, children and the elderly subsequently need to take over the livelihood tasks previously accomplished by men, such as fishing or cutting of trees.

### Food security

The proportion of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food peaked in August (85%) and remained comparably high in September (78%).<sup>8</sup> As illustrated by Figure 4, this proportion is remarkably higher than one year before, in September 2016, when only 42% of assessed settlements reported adequate access to food. While improvements between February and July are likely attributable to the upscale in humanitarian assistance in parts of Unity State, the further

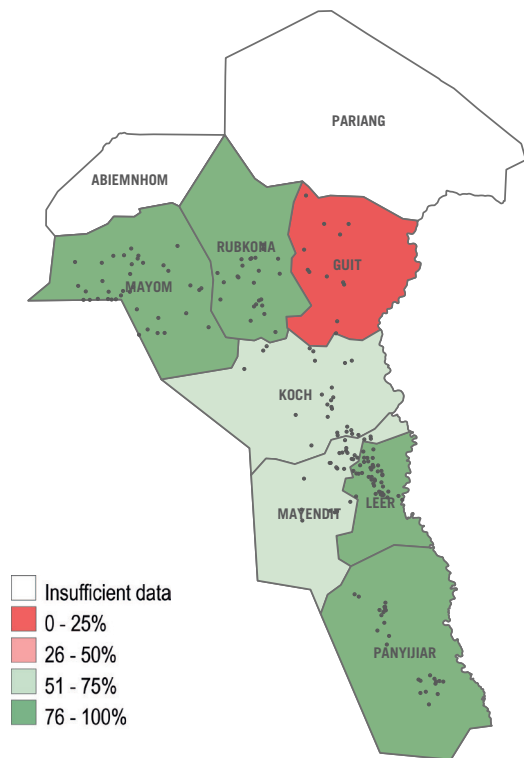
4 REACH, Nyal Port monitoring Fact Sheet, March, August and September 2017. These are indicative trends; REACH does not record all arrivals and departures.

5 IOM, Bentiu PoC Site Profile, March 2017.

6 REACH, Situation Overview: Unity State, March 2017.

7 Human Rights Watch, “We Can Die Too”, December 2015.

8 Across states assessed by AoK, Unity State reported by far highest proportion of assessed settlements with adequate access to food: Western Equatoria: 19%, Eastern Equatoria: 18%, Central Equatorias: 29%, Western Bahr el Ghazal: 34%, Upper Nile: 43%, Jonglei: 43%.



**Map 3: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food, Sep 2017**

increase in reported adequate access to food between July and August is likely related to first crop harvests, which have become an additional source of food. As a likely reflection of comparatively better access to food, from the total of assessed settlements, only 5% reportedly consumed one or less meals a day. This is far below the 42% of assessed settlements reporting the consumption of 1 or less meals countrywide.<sup>9</sup>

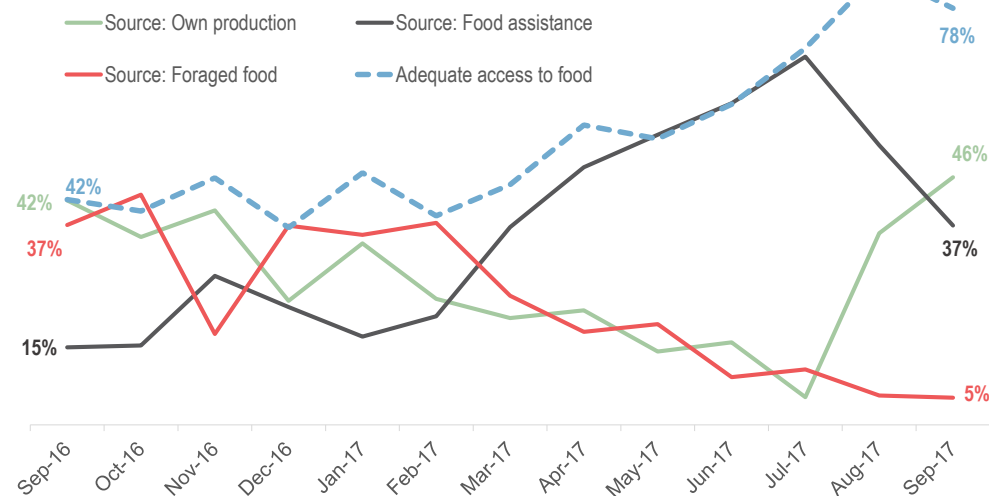
Reasons for inadequate access to food vary between regions. Due to the highly volatile

security situation, particularly in central Unity State, half of the assessed settlements reporting inadequate access to food noted unsafe planting conditions as the primary reason. Furthermore, 10% of assessed settlements reported destruction of crops by fighting as the primary reason, all of which were located in Koch county, consistent with reports of armed clashes in September.<sup>10</sup> Another 15% of assessed settlements, mainly those in northern Unity State, reported that the growing season had been too short (due to lack of rain).

Statewide, the advent of the harvest season in August and September allowed far more settlements to rely on their own cultivation. Almost half (46%) of assessed settlements reported own production as their primary source of food, which represents a remarkable increase compared to July (5%). The proportion is furthermore comparable to 42% of assessed settlements reporting own production as primary food source one year ago, in September 2016 (Figure 4). However, a much higher proportion than last year reported food distribution as a primary food source, which confirms that increased food assistance resulted in notable improvements in reported adequate access to food. As a likely reflection of increased food assistance and first harvest since August, the proportion of assessed settlements relying on foraged food as primary food source has therefore decreased from 38% in February down to 5% in September.

However, the positive effect of the cultivation season on access to food might be short-lived

**Figure 4: Primary food source per proportion of assessed settlements vs. reported adequate access to food, Sep 2016-Sep 2017**



due to reported low crop yields. In most parts of Unity State, insecurity prevented small- and middle scale farmers from cultivating bigger acreages. As a result, farmers mostly cultivated reduced acreages around their shelters, which negatively impacted harvest outputs. Additionally, dry spells in the north of Unity further reduced harvest amounts.<sup>11</sup> It is therefore likely that low food stock levels will have a negative impact on food availability during the next lean season, potentially increasing the risk of further reliance on food distributions, assuming food assistance were to continue. Otherwise a relapse into previous conditions of food insecurity can be expected during the upcoming lean season.

In September, adequate access to food was reportedly lowest in Guit where only 25% of

assessed settlements reported access (Map 3), compared to 89% in August. This is likely due to a combination of two factors. FGDs with participants from Guit reported that at the end of August, most of the maize harvest had reportedly been consumed. In addition to that, two of the four distribution sites could not be served in September due to inaccessibility of the roads (due to rain),<sup>12</sup> which likely contributed to the quick deterioration of reported adequate access to food. These factors suggest that low harvest outputs have led to continuous reliance on food assistance in Guit. Crops from other counties with low harvest outputs will likely be rapidly depleted which will further increase the risk of continuous reliance on food assistance (if continued) or relapse into previous conditions of food insecurity.

9 "Countrywide" in this report refers to settlements assessed by AoK in Greater Upper Nile, Greater Equatorias and Western Bahr el Gazhal.

10 OCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin, Issue 15, October 2017.

11 REACH, Unity FSL County Profiles, July 2017.

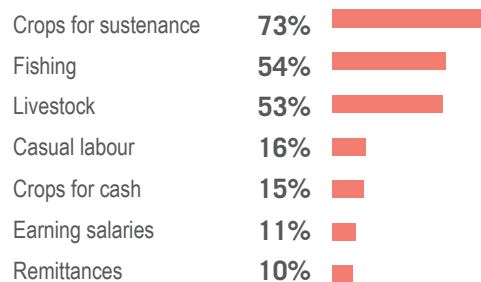
12 Confirmed by FSL partners in charge of food distribution in Guit.

Market access in Unity State has been consistently low. In September, only 61% of assessed settlements reported access to functioning markets, of which only 55% were able to walk to the market in an hour or less. As a likely reflection of low market access coupled with deteriorating macro-economic conditions (hyperinflation, erratic trade flows due to insecurity),<sup>13</sup> only 2% of assessed settlements reported purchased food as primary food source in September, which is far below the 14% reported countrywide. Such consistently low proportions reporting purchased food as the primary food source suggests that households' alternatives to cover for food consumption gaps (besides own production and food assistance) have eroded.

### Livelihoods

Reflective of improvements in the security situation, the vast majority of assessed settlements (95%) reported having access to land for cultivation, a proportion that has gradually increased since last year when only 68% reported access. As a result, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting cultivation as a livelihood source gradually increased from 15% in March to 73% in September (79% in August), in line with cultivation cycle. Following seasonal patterns, cultivation activities will likely decrease with the onset of the dry season, during which only minor cultivation activities (mainly vegetables) will be conducted until the crop cultivation cycle starts again around April next year.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 5: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting that at least some members of the community engage in livelihood sources, September 2017<sup>14</sup>**



In September, the second most cited livelihood source was fishing, as reported by 54% of assessed settlements (Figure 5) (compared to 23% in August), with highest proportions along the Nile basin in the east of the state (Guit, Leer, Panyijiar). The increase in fishing is consistent with a livelihood zone report published by Fews Net, which suggests that households tend to compensate low harvests with intensified fishing activities.<sup>16</sup>

Unity State is traditionally considered a livelihood zone for cattle rearing.<sup>17</sup> Reflective of this, 78% of assessed settlements reported that at least some members of the community possessed cattle in September, which is the second highest proportion after Jonglei State at 96%. However, FGDs indicated that the amount of cattle owned per household in 2017 is remarkably lower than the amounts owned prior to the conflict outbreak in December 2013, due to frequent cattle raids which have led to large cattle losses.

In addition to already low access to livestock as a livelihood source, over one-third (38%) of assessed settlements also reported livestock selling as a resource-based coping strategy to meet immediate household needs. According to FGDs, households usually rely on selling of livestock in cases of unexpected expenditures such as healthcare or to cover for harvest losses through purchasing of food. Distress sales of livestock might limit the households' resilience against adverse shocks rendering it an unsustainable strategy. Additionally, such a practice reduces populations' food diversity due to reduction of access to livestock products such as milk and meat.

### Protection

Suggestive of a deterioration in the security situation across Unity State between August and September, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting no protection concerns for men and women has decreased from 57% to 35% for women and 42% to 32% for men. In addition, in September, 41% of assessed settlements reported incidents during which civilians were killed or property was damaged (Figure 6).<sup>18</sup> The highest proportion of security incidents were reported in Koch, Mayendit and **Figure 6: Reported incidents during which civilians were killed or property damaged, September 2017**



**41% of assessed settlements reported conflict-related incidents**

Rubkona as a result of armed clashes, as well as FGDs reporting persistent attacks by youth of unknown affiliations on settlements in Leer.

Protection concerns for both men and women remained similar to preceding months with sexual violence being the primary protection concern for women. In comparison, the primary protection concerns for men were killing and injury (predominantly in central Unity State) and forced recruitment (predominantly in northern Unity State). For more detailed information on these protection trends, please refer to August Situation Overview.<sup>19</sup>

### Education

Access to education has remained stable since July when slightly over half (52%) of assessed settlements reported access to education (53% in September). Prior to July, access to education improved, rising from 20% in February to 52% in July. The improvement in access until July was likely due to improvements across other indicators such as the security situation, which allowed for easier expansion of education services and movement of students and teachers between the settlements.

In contrast to development in all other assessed counties where access stabilised, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting access to education notably decreased in Koch county from half of assessed settlements reporting access in August to 20% in September, the lowest proportion among all assessed counties in Unity State (Map 4).

<sup>13</sup> Fews Net, Price Watch, September 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Respondents could chose more than one answer.

<sup>15</sup> Fews Net, South Sudan Livelihood Zones and Descriptions, August 2013.

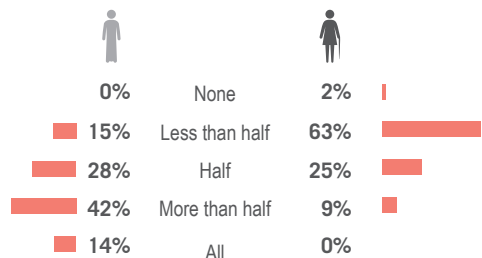
<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid

<sup>18</sup> These two indicators has been newly added to the AoK tool, therefore no comparative data for previous months available.

<sup>19</sup> REACH, Situation Overview: Unity State, August 2017

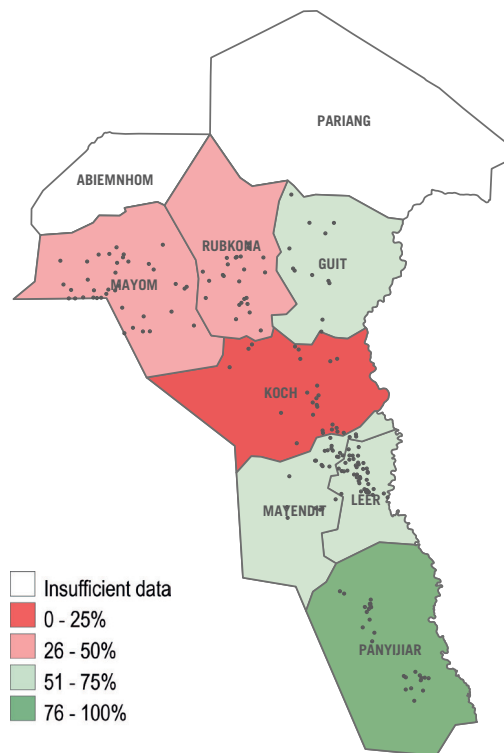
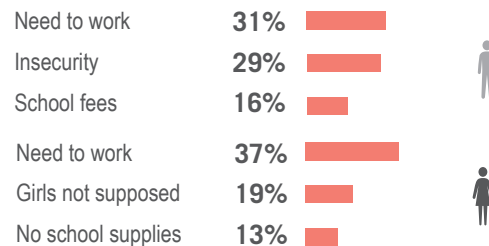
**Figure 7: Percentage of assessed settlements reporting the proportion of 6-17 year old girls and 6-17 year old boys attending school with access to education, Sep 2017**



This rapid deterioration might be attributable to clashes throughout Koch in September, which led to insecurity and displacement, which likely affected the provision of education services.

The most cited reason for the lack of formal and informal education services was that there were never any education facilities nearby, as reported by 45% of the assessed settlements without access to education. This was followed by conflict-related reasons such as displacement of teachers, insecurity and destruction of school facilities during fighting, reported by 15%, 14% and 8% of assessed settlements without access to education, respectively.

**Figure 8: Most commonly cited reasons girls and boys don't attend school, Sep 2017**



**Map 4: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting access to education, Sep 2017**

Reported attendance rates suggest that far more boys attended school than girls, as illustrated by Figure 7. While only 9% of the settlements with access to education reported that more than half or all of the girls attend school, 56% reported the same for boys. The main cited reasons for children not attending school vary between the two genders. For boys the primary reason has been that boys need to work (31% of assessed settlements with access to education) followed by insecurity (29%) (Figure 8). FGDs confirmed

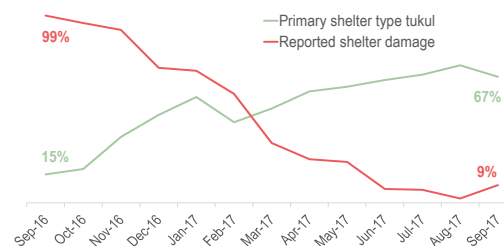
that schools are considered an easy target for forced recruitment so families therefore often opt not to send the boys to school. For girls, the main reason in 37% of assessed settlements with access to education was that girls needed to work, followed by the cultural belief that girls are not supposed to attend schools (19%), suggesting that girls in Unity State remain structurally disadvantaged in accessing education services.

## Shelter

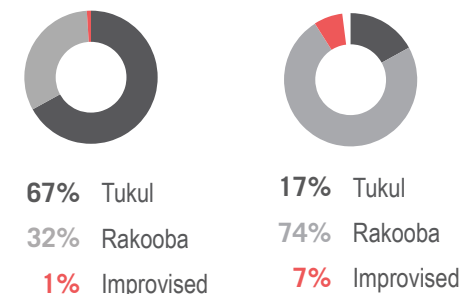
### Local community shelter conditions

As illustrated by Figure 9, statewide, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting shelter destruction due to fighting has dropped sharply from almost all (99%) in September 2016 to 2% in August 2017 and remained low since (9% in September). However, especially in Koch and Mayendit, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting conflict-related shelter damage increased sharply between August and September from only 2% to 26% (Koch) and 6% to 24% (Mayendit), which is in line with reported clashes in those counties in September.<sup>20</sup>

**Figure 9: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting tukul as primary shelter type vs. reported shelter damage**



**Figure 10: Primary shelter type of local community (left) and IDP community (right), September 2017<sup>21</sup>**



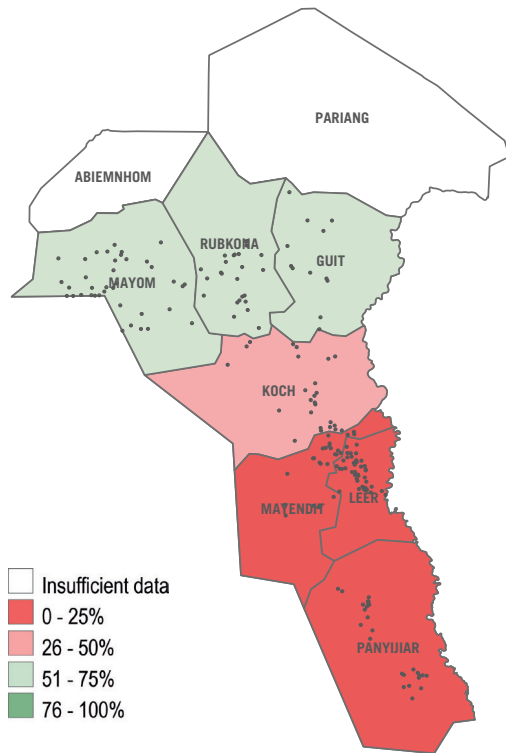
Additionally, statewide, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting that the primary structure in the location was a tukul increased from 15% in September 2016 to a peak of 73% reporting the same in August 2017, while the proportion remained similar in September (67%). These developments suggest that improvements in security encouraged local communities to construct or reconstruct tukuls, while recent clashes in parts of Unity State have disrupted those upwards trends.

### IDP shelter conditions

Shelter conditions for IDPs have remained comparable throughout preceding months, with the majority of assessed settlements (74%) reporting rakooba to be the primary shelter type for IDP communities, followed by tukul and improvised shelter (see Figure 10). As shown by Map 5, shelter conditions are comparatively worse in those counties where IDP presence had been reported highest (Leer, Mayendit, Panyijar followed by Koch). This suggests that the local community's capacity to absorb IDP influx and adequately meet

20 OCHA, Humanitarian Bulletin, Issue 15, October 2017.

21 To note, primary shelter type for IDPs also includes tent and no shelter, which equates to 2%.



**Map 5: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting tukuls as the primary and secondary shelter type for the IDP community, Sep 2017**

their shelter needs is exhausted. As a result, assessed settlements identified plastic sheets and mosquito nets as the top two most cited required NFIs to meet IDP shelter needs, predominantly in central Unity State.

### Health

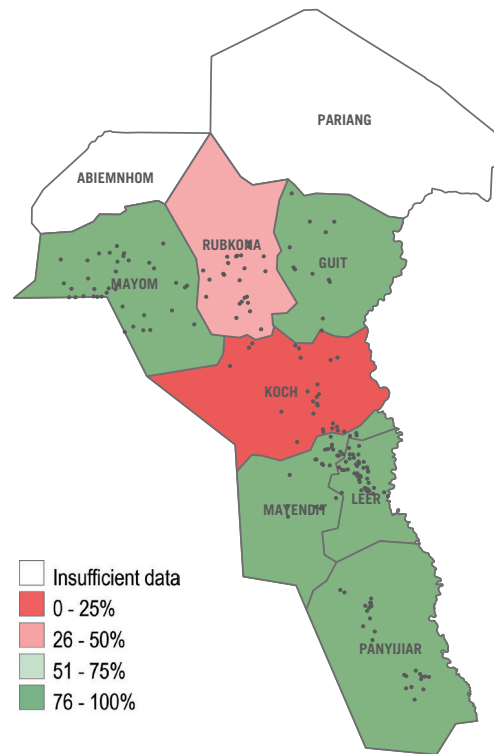
The proportion of assessed settlements reporting access to health services increased gradually between September 2016 and September 2017 from 28% to 72%. This

development is likely due to improvements in the security situation, allowing for easier movement of patients and expansion of health services. Of the assessed settlements reporting access to health services, 58% reported that the service could be reached by walking for one hour or less.

In September 2017, access to health services was reported lowest in Koch and Rubkona counties, where only 20% and 33% of assessed settlements reported access, respectively (Map 6). This is likely attributable to clashes in Pakur and Bieh in Koch county and Nhialdiu in Rubkona county in September, which led to the relocation of health workers and looting of health facilities.<sup>22</sup>

Similar to reasons cited for the absence of education services, the most commonly identified reasons for absence of health services had been the absence of facilities nearby the settlement (never there or too distant), as cited by half of the assessed settlements that reported no access to healthcare. This confirms the assumption that remote settlements are often hard to reach by service providers and therefore underserved. Other commonly cited reasons were insecurity,

**Figure 11: Five main reason that health care is not available, September 2017**



**Map 6: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting access to health services, Sep 2017**

lack of medical staff and lack of drugs (Figure 11).

In absence of medical services, people regularly resort to traditional medicines such as leaves and roots.<sup>23</sup> For example malaria, which had been cited as the most common health concern in 74% of assessed settlements, is reportedly cured with leaves from the “rep”-tree and “neem”-tree. Where traditional medicine is not enough to cure the sickness, or in case of serious injury, people (usually family members) carry the person to

the closest facility, often exposing themselves to insecurity along the way.

### Water and Sanitation

In August, only 55% of assessed settlements reported presence of boreholes in the settlements, of which 98% of assessed settlements reported functional boreholes. This is far below the countrywide AOK average of 75% of assessed settlements reporting presence of boreholes. In the vast majority of the assessed settlements (98%) in Unity State, the inhabitants were reportedly able to walk to the water source, fetch water and walk back in one hour or less. In terms of improved water sources, 52% of assessed settlements reported boreholes as their main source of water, whilst in contrast, 33% of assessed settlements reported swamp, an unimproved source of water. In addition, open defecation remained a common practice in the majority of assessed settlements (92%), a proportion that



**45% of assessed settlements reported no access to boreholes**

has been consistently high, which contributes to poor hygiene and sanitation conditions.

### Conclusion

After notable improvements across displacement trends, population needs and access to services in Unity State between September 2016 and July/August 2017, it

appears that most indicators have stabilised and shown worrying signs of possible downturns. This is likely due to the outbreak of fighting in southern Rubkona, Mayendit and Koch in September which led to a renewed wave of displacement of civilians as well as relocation of humanitarian workers.

The proportion of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food improved between February and August from 39% to 85% in August, while it stabilised since (78% in September). However, this proportion is still very high compared to the countrywide average of only 46%, likely due to high levels of food distributions in response to localised famine declaration in February coupled with first harvests in August.

However, REACH data suggests that those high levels might be short-lived due to dry spells in northern Unity State and reduced cultivation in central Unity State (due to insecurity) which have reportedly led to lower than average harvest outputs. As a result, low food stocks will likely be rapidly depleted with the onset of the lean season, which will potentially increase the likelihood of further reliance on food distributions (assuming assistance remained at similar levels) or a relapse into previous conditions of food insecurity.

After notable improvements in reported access to education between February and July, proportions of assessed settlements reporting access to education have stabilised at slightly over half of assessed settlements. This disruption of the recorded upwards trend

might be attributable to a deterioration in the security in parts of Unity State. Attendance rates suggest that even where education is available, obstacles such as the need for children to work, insecurity, unaffordable school fees or, for girls, the cultural belief that girls are not supposed to attend school, hamper school attendance.

Similar to trends observed for education, shelter conditions improved notably between September 2016 and August 2017, while proportions stabilised since. This might be attributable to a deterioration in the security in parts of Unity State which have resulted in an increase in reported conflict-related shelter destruction, predominantly in Koch and Mayendit.

In contrast to developments observed for all other indicators, WASH indicators were the only ones that did not show any notable improvements over the course of the year. Access to improved sources of water and latrine usage remained continuously below the countrywide average. This might be attributable to very few WASH actors operating in Unity State likely due to the higher resources needed to implement WASH programmes and a general cultural resistance to using latrines. This suggests that WASH remained a key concern in September.

Access to health services is the only indicator that gradually improved over the course of the year from 28% one year ago to 72% in September, despite localised spikes of insecurity. This is likely due to the expansion

of health services.

To reverse and stem negative impact on humanitarian situation caused by conflict and economic crisis over recent years, a sustained, large-scale humanitarian effort would be required to address their needs. However, this can only be possible if general stability of the area is ensured and reliable, unrestricted access is assured to humanitarian actors in both the immediate and longer term.

### 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.

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