

Situation Overview: Unity State, South Sudan

December 2016

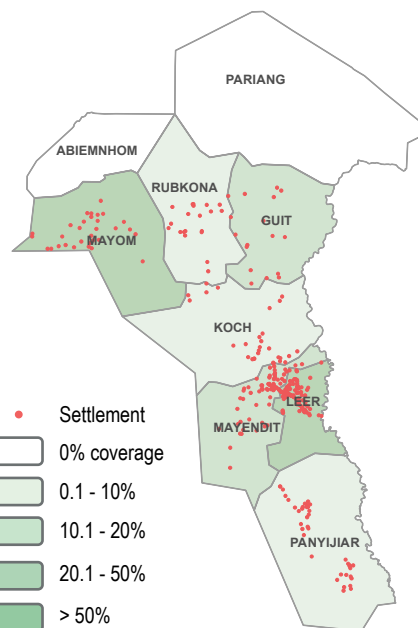
REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action

Introduction

Displacement trends, population needs and humanitarian access all continue to be negatively affected by the insecurity resulting from the ongoing fighting in Unity State since July. Following a resurgence of violence in November, the frequency of clashes decreased and displacement into Bentiu PoC stabilised in December. Ongoing fighting has nevertheless led to new displacement in Mayendit, Rubkona and Leer Counties.¹

The pronounced insecurity in large parts of Unity State has also had a negative impact on humanitarian activities outside formal displacement sites. This is illustrated by the high number of humanitarian access incidents that were reported in Unity State in December compared to previous months, including the relocation of 28 aid workers from Ganyiel in Panyijiar County due to tensions in the area.² Limited physical access has continued to present a challenge for humanitarians, despite substantial improvements in road conditions since mid-December.

To inform the response of humanitarians working outside of formal settlement sites, REACH is conducting an assessment of hard-to-reach areas in South Sudan, for which data on communities across the Greater Upper Nile region is collected on a monthly basis.



Map 1: REACH assessment coverage of Unity State, December 2016

Between 5 and 23 December, REACH interviewed 610 Key Informants (KIs) displaced from 317 settlements in 7 of the 9 counties in Unity State. These KIs were interviewed in the Bentiu Protection of Civilians site (Bentiu PoC), Nyal, and Juba PoCs 1 and 3. Findings have been triangulated using focus group discussions (FGDs), secondary data, port monitoring data collected by REACH in Nyal throughout December, and previous REACH assessments of hard-to-reach areas of Unity

State.

New arrivals were specifically targeted during the data collection phase to ensure a better understanding of current displacement dynamics. Eighty-six per cent of respondents interviewed had arrived in their displacement location in November or December, and therefore had up-to-date information about the village from which they had been displaced.

This Situation Overview provides an update to key findings from the November Situation Overview for Unity State. However, due to a change in methodology from community- to settlement-level analysis³, **the numbers in this report are not directly comparable with those in previous Situation Overviews.** The first section of this report analyses displacement trends in Unity State in December, as well as the push and pull factors that shaped patterns of displacement this month. The second section evaluates the population dynamics in the assessed communities, as well as access to food and basic services for both IDP and non-displaced communities.

Population Movement and Displacement

The improved security context in Unity State in December appears to have led to increased population movement to Nyal, while the overall

population of Bentiu PoC has remained stable.

The increase in the Nyal IDP population from 16,884 in November to 20,234 in December is likely attributable to the relative decrease in clashes, which has allowed for greater population movement from Leer and Mayendit. As a result, there were 3,882 new arrivals in Nyal in December, compared to only 1,889 in November.⁴

By contrast, the population of Bentiu PoC has remained constant. Following a resurgence of violence in southern Unity State, the PoC experienced a large population increase from 101,022 at the end of October⁵ to 120,333 at the end of November.⁶ However, the population appeared to stabilise in December, with 119,853 residents at the end of the month.⁷

In Bentiu Town, 695 new arrivals were registered, the South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission reported an additional 1,500 unregistered individuals, and 112 IDPs switched their registration from Bentiu PoC to Bentiu Town. Although biometric registration in Bentiu Town was interrupted in both November and December, it is believed that the rate of new arrivals there has increased since November.⁸

Route proximity and security are reportedly the primary decision-making factors for IDPs

1 FEWS NET, "Food Security Outlook Update", December 2016.

2 OCHA, "South Sudan: Humanitarian access situation snapshot", December 2016.

3 REACH used to aggregate and analyse data at the community, or sub-clan, level. As of December 2016, data is analysed at the settlement, or village, level.

4 REACH, Nyal Port Monitoring Factsheets, November-December 2016.

5 IOM, Bentiu PoC Update: Population Count 29 - 31 October 2016.

6 IOM, Bentiu PoC Update: Population Count 28 - 30 November 2016.

7 IOM, Bentiu PoC Update: Population Count 29-31 December 2016.

8 IOM DTM records, December 2016.



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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 their pre-displacement location or “Area of Knowledge”.

Information for this report was collected from key informants in the Bentiu Protection of Civilians (PoC) site and Nyal in Unity State, and Juba PoCs 1 and 3, throughout December 2016.

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.

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

when choosing whether to flee to Nyal or to Bentiu PoC. Those located close to routes to Bentiu are more likely to flee north, while those who are not are more likely to head south. Furthermore, those with children often choose to go to Nyal due to the lack of hiding places north of Koch on the way to Bentiu, which makes this route more dangerous if traveling with children who cannot run quickly through the bush. The route to Nyal offers far more hiding places, allowing for slower travel with children.

It is highly likely that recorded movement to formal displacement sites does not adequately reflect the extent of ongoing displacement in Unity State. According to FGDs conducted by REACH with new arrivals from Koch County in December, as well as a multiagency rapid assessment conducted in Leer County in November⁹, many vulnerable people in the most conflict-affected areas of Unity have been displaced but are forced to remain in unsafe locations in the bush as they are physically unable to make the long and difficult journey to Bentiu PoC in the north, or to Nyal and the nearby islands to the south. These include young children, the elderly, the disabled and their caregivers. This may change as roads become increasingly accessible with the advent of the dry season, if the security situation allows for increased population movement.

Push and pull factors

Seventy per cent of KIs cited insecurity as the most important reason for leaving their homes. In southern Unity State in particular, armed

groups have reportedly attacked communities without warning, triggering high levels of displacement. During FGDs conducted with new arrivals in Nyal, participants from Koch and Mayendit Counties reported that armed groups were using informants from the local community to track IDPs from location to location, forcing them to flee multiple times. The South Sudan Protection Cluster has also noted that the prevalence of unlawful detentions and forced disappearances has created an environment of fear in Unity State that further promotes displacement.¹⁰

Similarly, perceived security was reportedly the primary reason for moving to their current location for 71% of surveyed KIs.

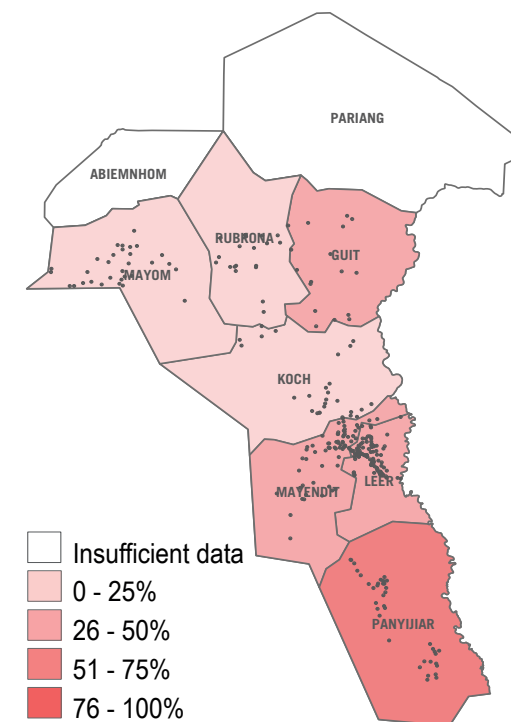
Situation in Assessed Communities

Demographic profile

Remaining population in assessed villages

Sixteen per cent of assessed settlements, primarily in conflict-affected Leer and Mayendit Counties, reported that the entire population had left the area. Of those settlements reporting that at least some of the population still remained there, 62% reported a population decrease of 50% or more, suggesting that **population displacement remains pronounced in Unity State**.

Unlike in previous months, when virtually all communities were reporting that at least some of the population had left, in December, 7% of assessed settlements reported no



Map 2: % of settlements reporting an IDP presence, aggregated by county, December 2016

population decrease. The vast majority of these settlements are in stable Mayom and Panyijiar Counties.

Only 63% of assessed settlements with some population remaining reported that most of the local community continues to live in their normal residences. Alarmingly, **27% of assessed settlements, primarily in conflict-affected Leer and Mayendit Counties, reported that most of the local community is currently living in the bush**. This is consistent with FGDs conducted with new arrivals from conflict-affected areas of Unity State, which suggest

9 IOM, Concern, WHO, “Leer Temporary Protection Area Rapid Assessment”, November 2016.

10 South Sudan Protection Cluster, “Protection Trends South Sudan: April-September 2016”, November 2016.

that many tukuls have been burned down in the course of fighting, that many people feel it is too risky to remain in their tukuls, and that remaining populations regularly flee to the bush when fighting approaches.

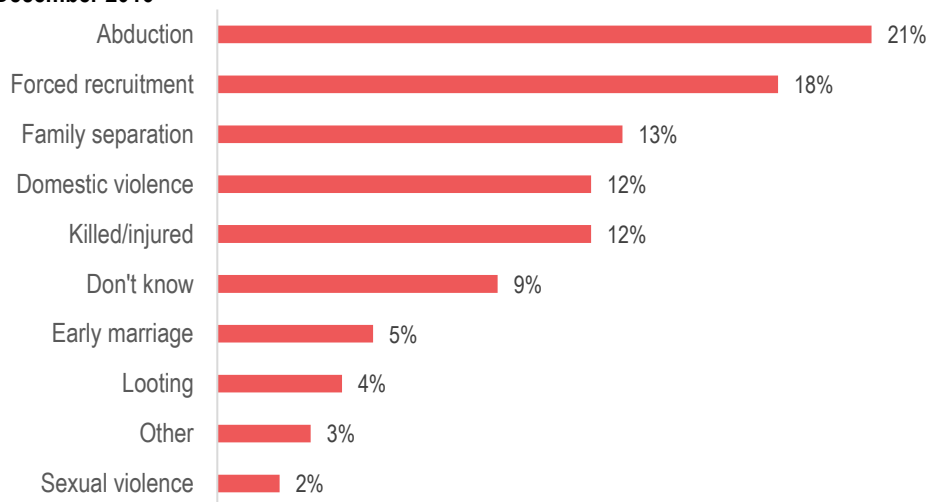
IDP population in assessed villages

Thirty-two per cent of assessed settlements reported that they were hosting IDPs in December. Of these, 67% reported that the IDPs had arrived following the July Crisis, and 35% reported that they had arrived following the resurgence of fighting in November. Very few settlements in Rubkona and Guit reported an IDP presence, possibly on account of the ease of access to Bentiu PoC in those counties.

Protection

The protection context in Unity State has changed in highly concerning ways since the

Figure 1: Most important protection concerns for children, as reported by assessed settlements, December 2016



month of July, with an increase in reports of major violence committed against civilians, particularly in counties such as Leer, Koch and Mayendit. According to FGDs conducted with new arrivals in Bentiu PoC and Nyal, this trend has continued into December, and has likely been exacerbated by the spreading of fighting to new areas in November, such as Nhialdu in Rubkona County. For example, **conflict was reported to be the biggest cause of death by 49% of assessed settlements in December, primarily in conflict-affected Leer and Mayendit Counties.**

Protection trends for men and women are comparable to those reported in the November Situation Overview¹¹, with killing or injury for men and sexual violence for women being the most commonly reported concerns. It is worth noting that forced recruitment continues

to be an important protection concern for men (as reported by 18% of assessed settlements in December), which was not the case in the months before July.

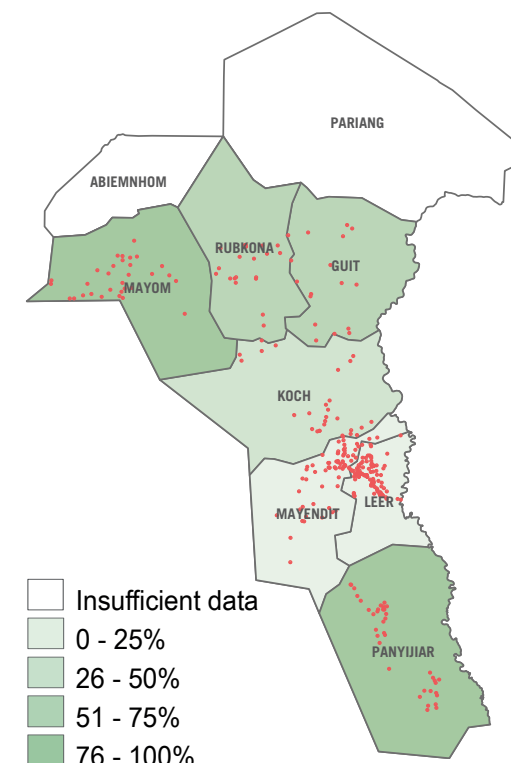
In December, REACH collected data on child protection concerns in Unity State for the first time. Conflict-related concerns such as abduction, forced recruitment, family separation, and killing or injury figured prominently among responses, particularly in the conflict-affected counties of Leer and Mayendit.

FGDs conducted in Nyal highlighted that child protection concerns are highly gender specific. **Boys are most at risk of forced recruitment, while abduction is the most important risk for girls** (usually for the purpose of being given to members of armed groups as 'rewards').

Domestic violence against children was also widely reported, particularly in stable Mayom County where populations are unlikely to be substantially affected by conflict-related problems, and where 54% of assessed settlements identified domestic violence as the biggest child protection concern.

Food security

Only 38% of assessed settlements reported that they had adequate access to food in December. In a likely reflection of the impact of instability on food security, only 11% of settlements reported being food secure in Leer County, which has been most affected by the fighting since July, while 90% and 94% reported the same in stable Mayom and Panyijiar Counties respectively.



Map 3: % of settlements reporting adequate access to food, December 2016

Furthermore, the most commonly reported reasons for inadequate access were conflict-related. Crops destroyed by fighting was reported by 36% of assessed settlements and a further 35% reported that it is too unsafe to access their land for cultivation or harvest.

As a result, **foraging was the most commonly reported source of food** (37% of assessed settlements), distantly followed by cultivation and humanitarian aid (23% each). However, it is worth noting that in December, ICRC was able to implement the first general food distribution

¹¹ REACH, Situation Overview: Unity State, November 2016.

in Leer County since the July Crisis.

FEWS NET's December update of their Food Security Outlook for South Sudan identified the food security situation in Southern and Central Unity State as being of the "highest concern" in the country.¹² For more information about food security in Unity State, please refer to the REACH October Situation Overview.

Livelihoods

Sixty-one per cent of assessed settlements reported that land was available for cultivation in December, likely representing a decrease since November, when 96% of assessed communities reported the same. According to the South Sudan Protection Cluster, thousands of IDPs from Unity State have fled fighting between communities over land since July.¹³ Furthermore, many FGD participants in Nyal reported that members of armed groups had taken over their land and that they risked being attacked if they tried to return.

Other livelihoods trends observed in December are comparable with those reported in the November Situation Overview, including fairly low access to agricultural inputs, extremely few casual job opportunities, and a relatively high incidence of cattle raiding with severe, negative impacts on settlement populations.

Water and Sanitation

Just over half of the assessed settlements (52%) reported access to safe drinking water (usually a borehole), of which only 60% reported that the safe water could be accessed, collected

and brought home in less than 30 minutes. These numbers, along with FGDs conducted with new arrivals, suggest that **the majority of the population of Unity State likely obtains their drinking water from unsafe sources such as rivers and swamps.**

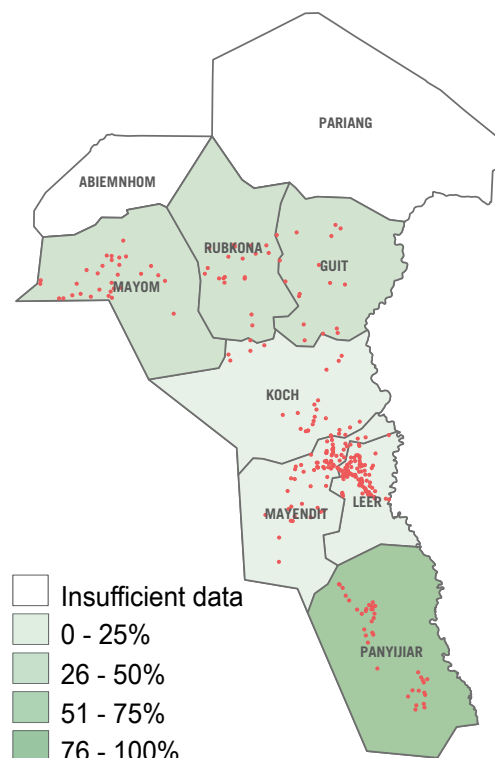
However, possibly on account of a change in REACH methodology for hygiene questions, slightly more settlements reported latrine use in December than in previous months. While previously 99% to 100% of assessed communities reported open defecation, in December, 7% of assessed settlements, primarily in Panyijiar, reported that at least 50% of the settlement population uses latrines.

For more information about WASH services and practices in Unity State, please refer to the October Situation Overview.¹⁴

Education

Thirty-six per cent of assessed communities reported access to education services in December, representing a substantial improvement compared to previous months. It should be noted that this is likely at least partly attributable both to adjustments in REACH questioning for the education sector, as well as to the adoption of settlement-level analysis, whereas previously some settlements reporting access to education may have been subsumed by other settlements in the same community reporting no access.

However, access to education remains extremely low and appears to vary widely by county. Panyijiar County reported the highest



Map 4: % of settlements reporting access to education, December 2016

levels of access (81% of assessed settlements), while Leer County reported the lowest levels at only 10%. This is likely due to the impact of the ongoing fighting on schools in counties such as Leer and Koch Counties, where many facilities have been destroyed and teachers and NGO staff have fled. This is supported by a recent Education Cluster assessment of education across South Sudan, which reports that schools in the Greater Upper Nile region, and particularly those in Leer, Koch, Rubkona and Guit Counties, have been the most affected

by the ongoing conflict.¹⁵ FGDs conducted in Bentiu PoC suggest that an exacerbating factor in the abandonment of schools is that most teachers are young men, which makes them particularly vulnerable to targeting for physical violence and forced recruitment.

Seventy-three per cent of assessed settlements reported that at least 50% of boys were attending school, while only 46% reported the same for girls. FGDs conducted by REACH in catchment sites in previous months have suggested that gender disparity in school attendance rates is linked to traditional gender roles.

Shelter

Shelter conditions appear to be continuing to improve for local community populations compared to previous months. Before December, a substantial majority of communities were reporting rakoobas as the primary shelter type. As rakoobas are temporary structures that are easily set up and taken down, a high proportion of them in a settlement is usually a sign of displacement, or that permanent shelters (tukuls) have been damaged, destroyed, or abandoned due to fighting in the area. However, for the first time since the outbreak of fighting in July, tukuls (47%) slightly outnumbered rakoobas (44%) as the most commonly reported shelter type in December.

Four per cent of assessed settlements reported that most host community members are not living in shelters at all. Virtually all of these settlements are in conflict-

12 FEWS NET, "Food Security Outlook Update: Extreme levels of food insecurity expected across South Sudan in 2017", December 2016.

13 South Sudan Protection Cluster, "Protection Trends South Sudan: April-September 2016", November 2016.

14 REACH, Situation Overview: Unity State, October 2016.

15 South Sudan Education Cluster, "Education Cluster Assessment: South Sudan", November 2016.

Conditions in Southern Unity State

Although the ongoing conflict has had a negative impact on living conditions across Unity State, KI responses indicate that conditions in Koch, Leer, and Mayendit Counties in Southern Unity State are particularly bad. Participants in FGDs conducted with newly arrived IDPs in Nyal reported that armed groups pursued them into the bush to multiple locations, often using local informants to track them. Most IDPs have had to retreat to islands deep in the swamps in southern Leer and Mayendit Counties to avoid being found by armed groups.

Protection, food and healthcare were the three most reported needs in Southern Unity State, all of which have been exacerbated by the insecurity. Targeted killings, abductions, and sexual and gender-based violence were widely reported, and graphic incidents of torture, immolation and cannibalism were described by several FGD participants.

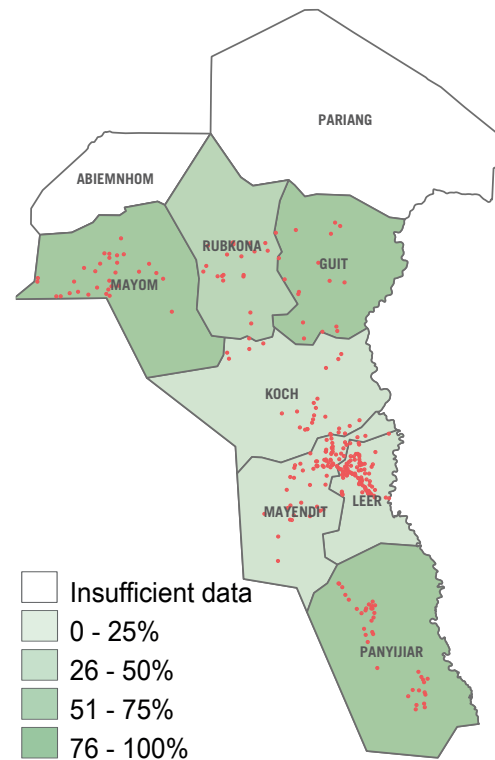
All settlements reported that most people were using a number of worrying strategies to cope with the lack of food, including eating wild foods (such as water lilies and khodra), reducing the number of meals eaten per day, and skipping days entirely.

Most health centres are reported to have been destroyed, and medical staff have fled. The health situation on the islands in Unity State is compounded by poor

hygiene conditions, and by a lack of clean water and mosquito nets. Most people are reported to be defecating directly into the swamp, thereby contaminating the drinking water supply, as potable water is otherwise unavailable.¹⁶ Most people are reported to have lost their mosquito nets, along with their other possessions, when they fled.

Port monitoring conducted by REACH between 1 - 31 December in Nyal revealed a net inflow of people from the rest of southern Unity State over the course of December, with 3,882 new arrivals, 97% of whom had arrived from Koch, Leer, or Mayendit Counties.¹⁷ Only 1,553 people left Nyal during the same period, 85% of whom were leaving for other parts of Panyijiar County, rather than returning home. Most reported fleeing for safety, and do not intend to return home until it is safe to do so.

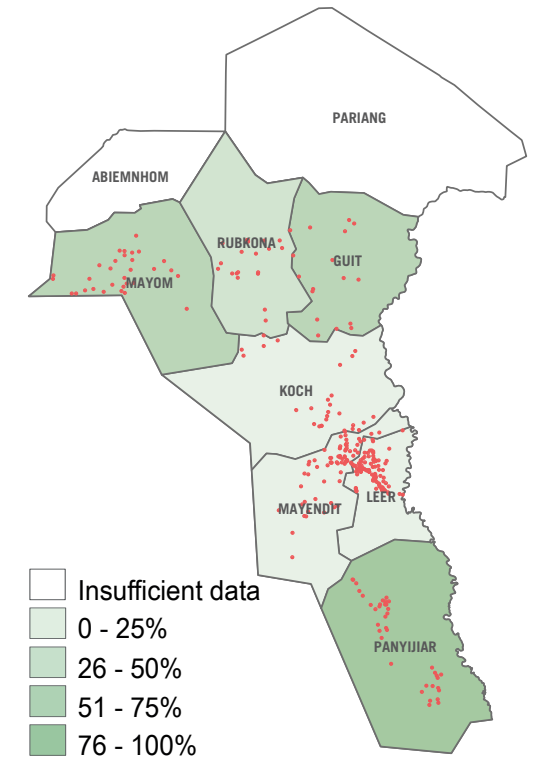
Panyijiar County was reported to be calm throughout December, with the exception of several incidents of cattle raiding in Central and Southern Panyijiar. Raids in Central Panyijiar were reported to have only occurred near cattle camps, leaving most villages untouched. In Ganyiel Town, several high profile security incidents led to fighting in and around the town, destroying a small number of shelters and displacing their inhabitants. Most of those affected have moved in with their neighbours, and the situation as of 31 December is reportedly peaceful.



Map 5: % of settlements reporting tukuls as the primary shelter type for local community, December 2016

affected Leer County, accounting for 7% of assessed settlements in that county. FGDs with recently displaced residents indicate that large numbers of people in Leer have been forced to flee to the bush and live for extended periods without shelter.

The most commonly reported shelter type for IDPs remains the rakooba (as reported by 45% of assessed settlements with IDPs), except in Leer County, where most settlements with an IDP presence reported that the majority of IDPs



Map 6: % of settlements reporting access to health services, December 2016

are living in improvised shelters. Furthermore, 48% of assessed settlements reported that at least 50% of IDPs were sharing shelters with the host community.

Health

Access to health services in Unity State may also have improved in December. Although 66% of assessed settlements reported that they did not have access to health services, this represents a substantial improvement

¹⁶ Amnesty International, We are still running: War Crimes in Leer, July 2016.

¹⁷ REACH, Nyal Port Monitoring, Panyijiar County, Unity State, South Sudan, December 2016.

compared to the August-November period. At the time of reporting, comprehensive data on functioning health services in Unity State was not available for verification.

For more background information about the ongoing outbreak of cholera in Unity State, please refer to the October Situation Overview.

Conclusion

The fighting that began in Southern and Central Unity State in July has continued to negatively affect displacement trends, population needs and access to basic services in December. The population of Bentiu PoC increased by more than 15% in November, and despite a (likely temporary) improvement in the security situation in December, displacement trends remained pronounced.

Many host communities have either been directly affected by the fighting (with consequences such as violence, looting, destroyed property and displacement), or have been cut off from humanitarian access due to the resultant insecurity. However, the reported increase in tukuls may be a positive sign of increased stability in parts of Unity, as it possibly suggests that some populations are increasingly able to build or return to permanent shelters.

Access to basic services has remained low since the beginning of the July Crisis, and continues to do so in December despite apparent improvements in the health and education sectors. Food security remains the most pronounced challenge, as cultivation has been impeded by insecurity and flooding, humanitarians have been prevented from

implementing general food distributions in some of the most food insecure parts of Unity State, and access to markets is extremely limited.

While improvements in road conditions and humanitarian access are expected to continue in early 2017, instability is also expected to increase as armed groups will be able to mobilise more easily. It is therefore likely that the volatile security context will continue to have a negative impact on population needs and on humanitarian access to hard-to-reach areas.

About REACH Initiative

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 or to our global office: geneva@reach-initiative.org.

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