

Situation Overview: Western Equatoria, South Sudan

April - June 2019

REACH An initiative of
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ACTED and UNOSAT

Introduction

Episodes of conflict, displacement and associated food insecurity have had a negative impact on the humanitarian situation in Western Equatoria State. Information remains critical, however logistic and security constraints have limited humanitarian access to many areas across the region.

To inform humanitarian actors working outside formal settlement sites, REACH has conducted assessments of hard-to-reach areas in South Sudan since December 2015. Data is collected on a monthly basis through interviews with key informants with knowledge of a settlement and triangulated with focus group discussions (FGDs). This Situation Overview uses this data to analyse changes in observed humanitarian needs across Western Equatoria in the second quarter of 2019.

Key Findings

- In the second quarter of 2019, Western Equatoria experienced a continuing mixture of **internal returns, refugee returns, and protracted displacement** from past incidents of insecurity and hunger. Over half (58%) of assessed settlements reported the presence of IDP returnees while 93% reported IDP presence in June, but new displacement appeared to decline and few IDPs had arrived in the past 6 months.

- Thanks to a timely rainy season, **food security** improved for many parts of the state, as only 34% of assessed settlements reported inadequate access to food in June. However, Greater Mundri¹ experienced a contrasting *increase* in inadequate food access, affecting 91% of assessed settlements in June as belated local rains delayed the harvest.
- With security relatively improved in Western Equatoria, reported **protection** concerns were minimal; in particular only 1% assessed settlements reported fatal conflict incidents.
- Access to reliable **shelter** varied, as 44% of assessed settlements reported the main shelter type for IDPs to be less-solid structures such as rakoobas, tents, or improvised shelters, but host communities reported frequent use of solid structures for shelter. Like IDPs, returnees also appeared to face insecure shelter situations.
- Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) and health** needs were especially high in Ibba, Mundri West, and Mvolo, which reportedly faced overlapping shortages of latrines, health facilities, and boreholes. Hunger and malnutrition were also reported in Mundri West and Mvolo. Aside from these pockets of concern, walking-distance access to health services (81%) and functioning boreholes (68%) were fairly high for assessed settlements in Western Equatoria.

Map 1: REACH assessment coverage of the Western Equatoria region, April (A), May (B) and June 2019 (C)



of key informant interviews conducted: **446**

of assessed settlements: **407**

of counties covered out of 10: **10**

of focus group discussions conducted: **1**

METHODOLOGY

To provide an overview of the situation in hard-to-reach areas of Western Equatoria, REACH uses primary data from key informants who have recently arrived from, recently visited, or receive regular information from a settlement or "Area of Knowledge" (AoK). Information for this report was collected from key informants in Yambio and Maridi towns in Western Equatoria State in April, May, and June 2019.

In-depth interviews on humanitarian needs were conducted throughout the month using a structured survey tool. After data collection was completed, all data was aggregated at settlement level, and settlements were assigned the modal or most credible response. When no consensus could be found for a settlement, that settlement was not included in reporting.

Only counties with interview coverage of at least 5% of all settlements² in a given month were included in analysis. Due to access and operational constraints, the specific settlements assessed within each county each month vary. In order to reduce the likelihood that variations in data are attributable to coverage differences, over time analyses were only conducted for counties with at least 70% consistent payam³ coverage over the period.

Quantitative findings were triangulated with FGDs and secondary sources. More details of the methodology can be found in the [AoK ToRs](#).

¹ Mundri West, Mundri East, and Mvolo

² To calculate the percentage of AoK coverage, the total number of settlements per county is based on OCHA settlement lists in addition to new settlements mapped by KIs reached each month.

³ "Payam" refers to the administrative unit below the county level.

- Similarly, **education** remained reportedly accessible for most assessed settlements (with 87% reporting access), but some counties, particularly Ibba, Mundri West, and Mvolo, reported low service availability or enrolment.

Population Movement and Displacement

The second quarter of 2019 was characterised by steady returns within Western Equatoria as well as the continued presence of IDPs displaced by earlier insecurity and not yet ready to return. Internally, new episodes of displacement were rare, mostly affecting smaller populations, but displacement and returns from abroad due to poorer security or food and livelihoods continued to take place.

Protracted Displacement

In a continuing trend, nearly all assessed settlements in Western Equatoria (93% in June) reported the presence of IDPs. But while settlements reporting the presence of at least some IDPs remained high, recent displacement appeared to decline. In June, 95% of assessed settlements reporting IDP presence stated that IDPs had arrived 6-12 months ago or more than a year ago, and only 5% reported that IDPs had arrived within the past 6 months. Comparatively, in April 45% reported that arrivals had occurred within the past 6 months, and in January 79% reported arrivals within the past the past 6 months. Similarly, among settlements reporting IDP presence, those reporting that IDPs made up less than half of the population increased from 48% in January to 64% in April and 75% in

Figure 1: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting IDP presence, June 2019



Figure 2: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting IDP returnee presence, June 2019



June.

Overall this consistent shift to lower proportions of IDPs relative to host communities and IDPs' arrival times reported as farther back each month supports the observation that IDP presence in Western Equatoria has been decreasing⁴ and that new displacement events are becoming less frequent. This is in the context of prolonged conditions of relative stability, albeit occasionally disturbed by small-scale violence and displacement.

At the same time, as the proportion of assessed settlements reporting that most IDPs arrived 6 months to over a year ago increases, this could indicate that those IDPs that *are* remaining face considerable barriers to return, namely poor conditions in their settlements of origin. In recent conversations with IDPs in Rimenze IDP camp (Yambio County) reported by the Relief and Rehabilitation Commission (RRC), those that remained expressed reluctance to return due to anticipation of inadequate

shelter conditions and construction materials.⁵ A focus group of returnees in Ikpiro similarly noted that many who had been driven from their settlement were prevented from returning because their homes and household goods had been destroyed and were not yet restored.⁶ More broadly, the RRC reported that some remaining IDPs in the Yambio area were hesitant to return to home settlements where they perceived a lack of water, health, and education services.⁷ Many concerns expressed by remaining IDPs were well-founded, as IDPs returning home to some areas of Western Equatoria have encountered obstacles to shelter or water access discussed in the Shelter and WASH sections.

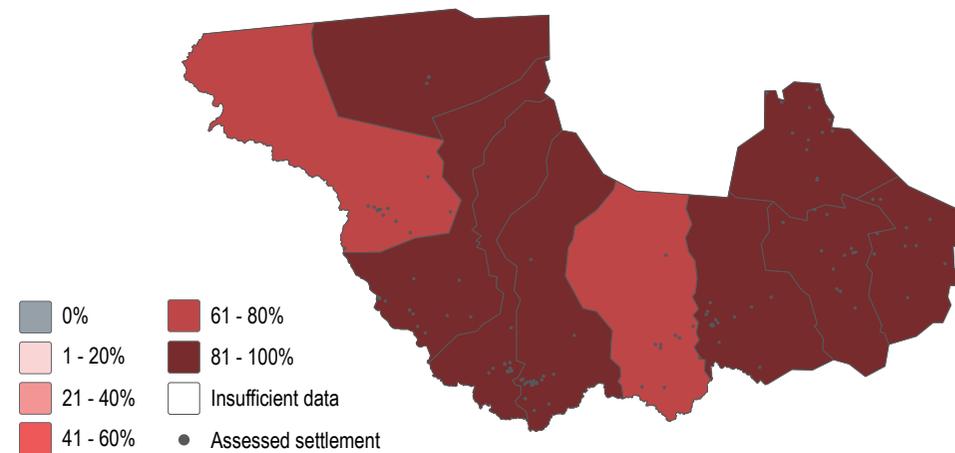
IDP Returnees

IDP returns continued at proportions similar to last quarter, with a short-term jump in the proportion of assessed settlements reporting the presence of IDP returnees in April to 68%

before dropping slightly to 58% in June. This temporary spike primarily took place in Nagero County, as IDPs who had been displaced to Tambura town and Mabia from Nagero County began returning to their homes in large numbers starting in late March.⁸

Many IDP returnees, including those in Nagero County, listed increasing confidence in security conditions and a desire to return to their homes as the driving forces behind their returns.^{9,10,11} However, some returns were driven by adverse situations in their displacement locations. Ikpiro returnees reported that food, water, and livelihood options had been seriously constrained in their displacement settings, where high rent costs were an additional financial burden. As such, many decided to return home where they owned land, enabling crops for sustenance and avoiding rent costs. Some FGD participants also reported that perceived tensions with

Map 2: Percentage of assessed settlements in Western Equatoria reporting IDP presence, June 2019.



4 OCHA. Humanitarian Snapshot. April-May 2019

5 Gbudue State Partners' Forum meeting, Yambio town. 21 May 2019.

6 REACH. Displacement Focus Group Discussion, Ikpiro, Yambio County. 28 June 2019.

7 Gbudue State Partners' Forum meeting, Yambio town. 16 July 2019

8 Tambura and Nagero Counties Inter-agency Rapid Needs Assessment Report. 3-9 June 2019.

9 Ibid.

10 REACH. Displacement Focus Group Discussion, Ikpiro, Yambio County. 28 June 2019.

11 Amadi State Inter-agency Rapid Needs Assessment (IRNA) Report. 27 March-8 April 2019.

host communities influenced their decision to return.¹² The push factors reported in Ikpiro may not be generalisable to all IDP returnees, but regardless of motivations, many returnees have experienced serious needs, discussed in the WASH and Shelter sections, after returning to their places of origin throughout the quarter.^{13,14}

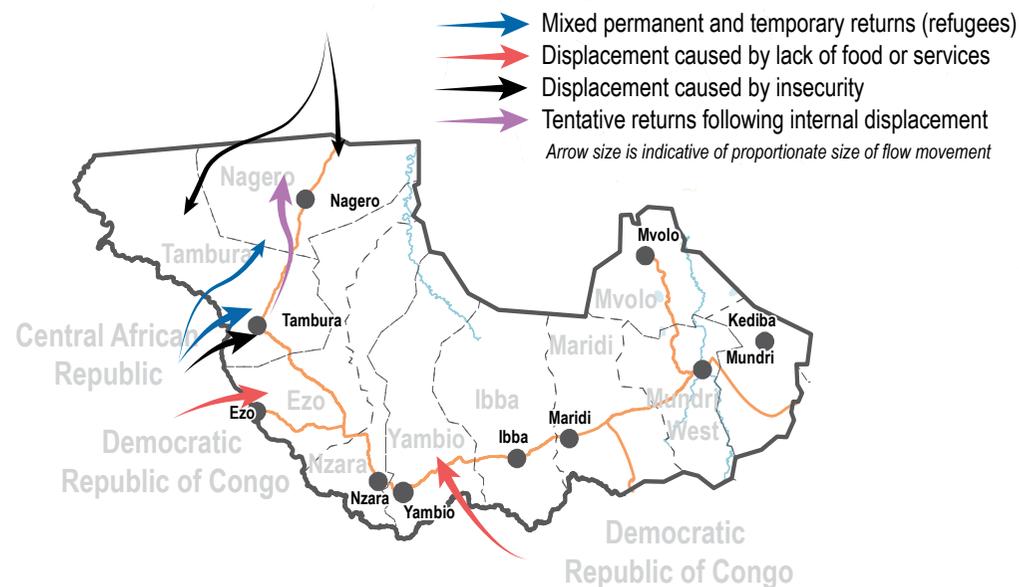
New Conflict and Displacement

New incidents of internal displacement over the quarter were relatively few and were mainly caused by insecurity across state borders, primarily from Western Bahr el Ghazal. In late April, inter-communal clashes between farmers and cattle herders in Jur River drove displacement into Wau and Kuarjena, and a small break-off group continued on to Tambura center.¹⁵ In addition, a small group of returnees in Zamoi, a settlement near the northern border of Nagero County, reported that inter-communal conflict in their displacement sites in Western Bahr el Ghazal drove them back to Nagero County, rather than a desire to return.¹⁶

Cross-border Travel

As relative security continued inside Western Equatoria while poorer conditions persisted in neighbouring countries, cross-border travel from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Central African Republic (CAR) favoured inflows over outflows, similar to last quarter. Border crossings from the DRC were reportedly comprised of mainly short-term travel for economic pursuits or service access mixed with South Sudanese returns, and movement from CAR was dominated by conflict displacement of both South Sudanese

Map 3: Displacement patterns across Western Equatoria, April - June 2019.



and CAR nationals.¹⁷ The reopening of the CAR-Tambura border in late April¹⁸ may also have had a modest effect as both incoming and outgoing crossings were higher in May compared to April and March.¹⁹

Returning South Sudanese refugees (typically only from border countries) remained a moderate presence in Western Equatoria during the second quarter. Although only 23% of assessed settlements reported the presence of refugee returnees in June, this proportion increased to 44% when excluding Ibba, Maridi, and Greater Mundri, which are cut off by the DRC's densely-forested Garamba National Park on the Ibba/Maridi border. The highest proportions of assessed settlements reporting the presence of South Sudanese returning from displacement abroad were in Ezo County

(71% in June), followed by Tambura County (46%).

Likely motivated by inadequate food security and livelihoods,²⁰ most returnees arrived from DRC (77% of assessed settlements reporting refugee returnees), particularly those in Ezo County. The remainder were South Sudanese returnees travelling from CAR to Tambura and Nagero counties, as unsafe conditions in CAR prompted their return.²¹ CAR nationals also continued to travel to South Sudan in efforts to escape violence in their home country. Notably, the households crossing the border from CAR expecting to stay longer than a year in their destination decreased over the quarter.²²

Situation in Assessed Settlements

Food security and Livelihoods

With the timely arrival of rains ending the lean season for many households, the proportion of assessed settlements in Western Equatoria reporting inadequate access to food showed a modest improvement over the quarter, dropping from 44% in April to 34% in June. However, Greater Mundri (consisting of Mundri East, Mundri West, and Mvolo counties) and Nagero County did not share the improvements experienced elsewhere, and reports of inadequate access to food for Greater Mundri increased as the localised lean season continued.

Improved Access to Food

Assessed settlements in Western Equatoria reported to REACH that access to food was relatively high in the second quarter of 2019, consistent with the May 2019 Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) update, in which Western Equatoria had the lowest population projected to be in crisis, emergency, or catastrophe out of all states in South Sudan.²³ Excluding the two main areas of concern (Nagero County and Greater Mundri), the proportion of assessed settlements that reported adequate access to food rose to 90%.

The arrival of timely rains was complemented

Figure 3: Percentage of assessed settlements reporting inadequate access to food, June 2019.



34% of assessed settlements reported inadequate access to food

12 REACH. Displacement Focus Group Discussion, Ikpiro, Yambio County, 28 June 2019.

13 Tambura and Nagero Counties IRNA Report. 3-9 June 2019.

14 Amadi State IRNA Report. 27 March-8 April 2019.

15 IOM-DTM. Event Tracking Report, Tambura Western Equatoria. 7 June 2019.

16 Tambura and Nagero Counties Inter-agency Rapid Needs Assessment

Report. 3-9 June 2019.

17 IOM-DTM. Flow Monitoring Registry. April-May 2019.

18 Invisible Children. Crisis Tracker Quarter 1 2019 Security Brief. April 2019.

19 IOM-DTM. Flow Monitoring Registry. March-May 2019.

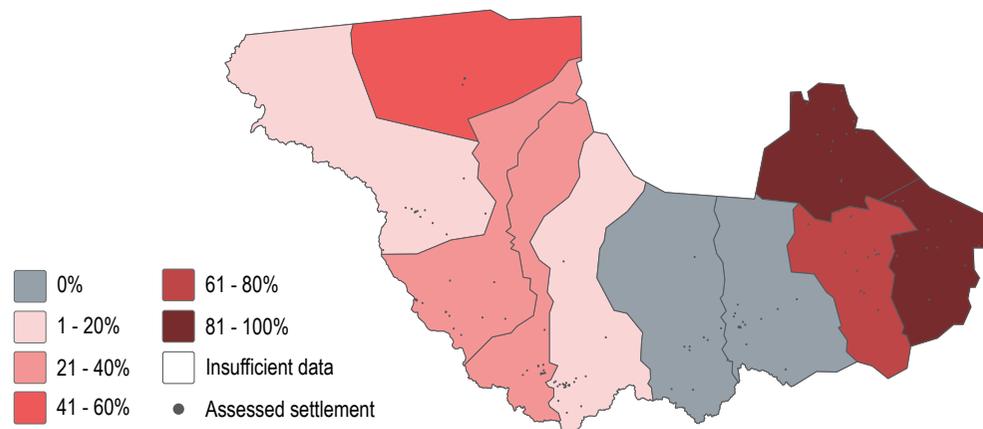
20 IOM-DTM. Flow Monitoring Registry. April 2019.

21 IOM-DTM. Flow Monitoring Registry. April-May 2019.

22 IOM-DTM. Flow Monitoring Registry. March-May 2019.

23 IPC. South Sudan IPC Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Analysis, May - July 2019. 14 June 2019.

Map 4: Percentage of assessed settlements in Western Equatoria reporting inadequate access to food, June 2019.



by months of relatively secure conditions for planting: in June 2019, nearly all assessed settlements reported having access to land for cultivation (99%), and only 3% reported insecurity as the main reason for inadequate food access. The results for most counties were relatively improved food conditions, as 74% of assessed settlements reported that most residents ate two or more meals per day.

Areas of Concern

However, in Greater Mundri, assessed settlements reporting inadequate access to food *increased* from 78% in April to 91% in June, diverging from the rest of Western Equatoria. The situation was especially dire in Mvolo, where the proportion of assessed settlements reporting inadequate food access has hovered between 86% and 100% since March 2019. The main driver of the high food insecurity in this area appears to be the combination of last year's country-wide

dry spell²⁴ with a second year of delayed rain for Greater Mundri in 2019.²⁵ Consistent with findings of back-to-back low or delayed rainfall episodes by the January 2019 IPC analysis and OCHA's assessment in Amadi in March/April, lack of rain or a short growing period (also usually attributable to a poor rainfall) were the primary reasons reported to REACH as the cause of inadequate food in Greater Mundri. Furthermore, although lack of rain or a short growing period were most commonly reported as the main drivers of food insecurity across *all* of Western Equatoria (24% of assessed settlements with inadequate food access in June), the highest proportions of assessed settlements reporting low rainfall or a short growing period as the reason were in Mundri West (75%), Mundri East (91%), and Mvolo (92%). Following this localised delay of rain, which reportedly ran into late May and pushed back planting by several months, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting

that they eat one meal per day in Greater Mundri nearly doubled from 46% in April to 91% in June, as residents likely depleted food stores without being able to harvest crops that they had only planted in the last month. Past insecurity may have played a contributing role, both by disrupting livelihoods at the time, and by constraining coping strategies requiring freedom of movement as fear and uncertainty lingered afterwards.

Nagero County's food security conditions also differed from the general trend for Western Equatoria in Quarter 2, as 50% of assessed settlements reported that they did not have enough food in June (83% in May). In addition, Nagero County was notably dependent on humanitarian assistance for the food supplies it did have, with 100% of assessed settlements reporting NGOs as their main source of food in June. Unlike the rest of Western Equatoria, assessed settlements in Nagero County did not report lack of rain but rather insecurity, crops being destroyed by fighting, crops being stolen, and the conclusion of food distribution as the main reasons for not having enough food in the second quarter. As such, Nagero County's food insecurity appears heavily influenced by the context of returns and the reported tensions over land and resources initially left behind by IDPs who have now returned to reclaim them.²⁶

Coping strategies

Although food security was high for the state overall, when there was not enough food households adopted a variety of methods to cope, some of which had the potential to

increase their long-term vulnerability. Among the most common coping strategies were reducing the number of meals eaten, borrowing food, gathering firewood to generate more income, and selling home assets, all of which were reportedly employed by 80% of assessed settlements or more in June. Another coping strategy was consuming seeds meant for next year's harvest. In June 53% of assessed settlements across Western Equatoria reported resorting to this tactic in times of inadequate food. This was in fact a decrease from 68% in April, reflecting improving conditions as rainy season arrived for most of the state, but the consumption of seeds still raises concerns for future food security in a region highly dependent on agriculture. This risk may be heightened in Tambura and Ezo counties, where the proportion of assessed settlements reporting consuming seeds to cope were 77% and 79%, respectively.

Extreme coping strategies impacting daily food intake, such as skipping days of eating or adults not eating so that children could eat, were fairly low for Western Equatoria as a whole and decreased slightly over the quarter. The proportion of assessed settlements that reported skipping days dropped from 15% to 2% from April to June, and those only giving food to children dropped from 29% to 14% in the same time. However, these strategies were more common in Greater Mundri and particularly in Mvolo County during the month of May, when 38% of assessed settlements reported skipping days and 63% reported adults not eating so that children could eat. These severe strategies reflected the lingering,

24 IPC. South Sudan IPC Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Analysis, January - July 2019. February 2019.

25 Amadi State Inter-agency Rapid Needs Assessment Report. 27 March-8 April 2019.

26 Western Equatoria Humanitarian Coordination Forum meeting, Yambio town. 11 July 2019.

localised food insecurity in the area caused by delayed rains on top of a poor harvest in 2018.

Protection

In the second quarter of 2019, conflict-related protection concerns were reportedly few, but interpersonal violence continued to affect men, women, and boys, while early marriage persisted for girls and boys in Western Equatoria. Households' perceptions of security continued to fluctuate in response to small-scale violence and fears that neighbouring insecurity would spill across state and country lines, a pattern similar to previous quarters. In June 67% of assessed settlements reported that most people felt safe most of the time, but in Greater Mundri this percentage was a much lower 26%, likely due to cattle raiding violence in Mvolo and worries that the insecurity experienced in the Mundris in early 2019 could return.²⁷ Even so, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting incidents of conflict resulting in civilian death, or even theft or looting, remained at 5% or below throughout the second quarter.

Other protection concerns remained fairly consistent with those seen in previous quarters in Western Equatoria. The most frequently reported primary protection concern among women was domestic violence (53% of assessed settlements in June) followed by sexual violence (16%), while among girls it was early marriage (55%). Assessed settlements reported that fighting between neighbours was the main protection concern among both men (44% of assessed settlements) and boys (20%). Besides violence from

neighbours, early marriage was also a highly-reported protection concern for boys (19%); however, boys were the group most likely to be reported as facing no protection concerns out of women, men, boys, and girls (34% of assessed settlements). Killing or injury resulting from conflicts within or between tribes was reportedly highest in Mundri East, Mvolo, Tambura, and Ezo counties (primarily for men but occasionally for women and boys), but this was still rare, especially compared to previous quarters.

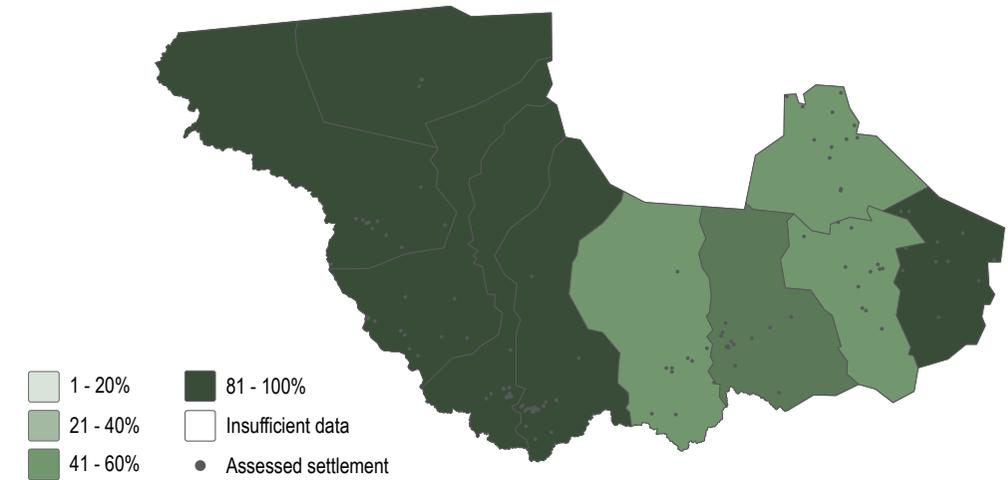
Shelter and NFIs

In a context of increasing stability, shelter conditions in Western Equatoria were consistently secure for host communities, but less reliable for IDPs and IDP returnees. Among the host community populations that were still living in their original settlement, most were reported to be living in solid structures such as tukuls (95% of assessed settlements in June, compared to 83% in June 2018, before the peace agreement in September 2018). However, the situation among IDPs was more precarious, particularly in Nagero County. Among assessed settlements reporting the presence of IDPs in June, 35% reported that the main shelter type for IDPs was the less-solid rakoobas,²⁸ and 9% reported that IDPs were living in very poor quality shelters such

Figure 4: Proportion of assessed settlements self-reporting primary causes of death, June 2019.



Map 5: Percentage of assessed settlements in Western Equatoria reporting adequate access to health care, June 2019.



as improvised shelters or tents. The majority of insecure shelter situations were reported among assessed settlements in Tambura and Nagero counties. Furthermore, in Nagero County, *all* IDPs were reported to be staying in either improvised shelters (75%) or tents (25%), with none staying in rakoobas. This most likely reflects the severe depletion of assets and property among small groups of IDPs recently displaced to Nagero County, as well as the IDP returnees coming back to Nagero from Tambura County who reported facing tensions and resource disputes with the receiving communities.³⁰

While not all returning IDPs faced the same tensions in their home communities, similarly degraded shelter conditions and lack of NFIs were reported by a focus group of IDP returnees in Ikpiro. Participants reported that many shelters had been destroyed months or

years ago and never rebuilt, keeping some of the displaced from returning. For those that did return, many reported that they were relying on improvised shelters of poles and palm leaves that were inadequate to withstand the weather and heightened malaria risk of the rainy season. In addition, most reported that their household goods had been abandoned during their displacement and subsequently looted, so that they faced a shortage of NFIs when they returned. In particular participants noted the needs for saucepans/cooking pots, tents, and jerry cans (cooking pots were also reported as the most-needed NFIs for IDPs in Western Equatoria as a whole). Humanitarian actors report that the shelter and NFI conditions faced by FGD participants in Ikpiro are likely similar to many returning IDPs.^{31 32 33}

Health and Nutrition

Patterns in health were mostly similar to those

27 OCHA. Assessment Report for Displaced Population from Minga Payam, Kediba County Amadi State into Dulamaya Boma of Rokon County Jubek State. 14 March 2019.

28 Rakoobas are more temporary shelters made from straw, while tukuls are mud huts with more permanence.

29 Most "other" cases are case when deaths are perceived to be due to old age.

30 Western Equatoria Humanitarian Coordination Forum meeting, Yambio town. 11 July 2019.

31 Amadi State IRNA Report. 27 March-8 April 2019.

32 Tambura and Nagero Counties Inter-agency Rapid Needs Assessment Report. 3-9 June 2019.

33 Gbudue State Partners' Forum meeting, Yambio town. 21 May 2019.

of previous quarters in Western Equatoria, as availability of health services remained relatively high while malaria persisted as the main self-reported health problem and cause of death. Less typical, however, were the assessed settlements reporting malnourished children and death due to hunger in Greater Mundri in the second quarter of 2019.

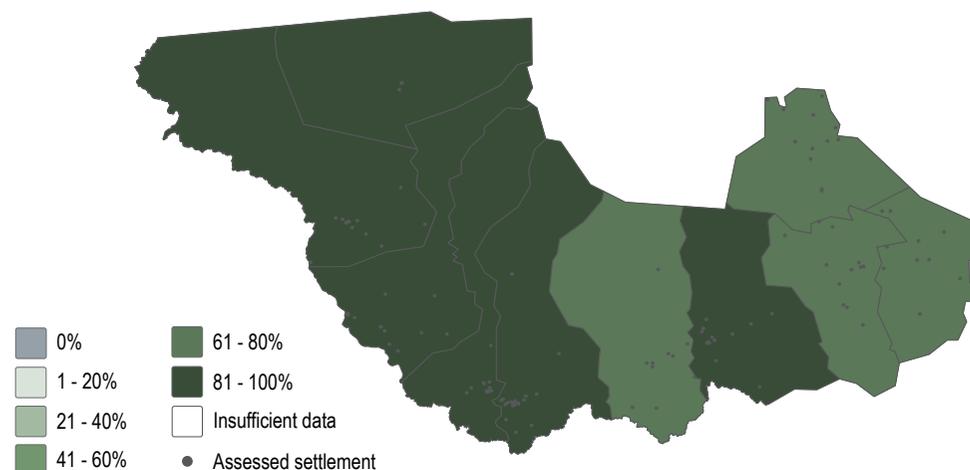
Health services remained relatively accessible in Western Equatoria. Similar to last quarter, with 81% of assessed settlements reporting that there were at least some services that residents could walk to from their settlement in June. Two notable exceptions were Ibbra County and Mundri West, where half of all assessed settlements for each county reported that there were no health services within walking distance. Among all assessed settlements reporting a lack of accessible health services in June, most (76%) reported that health services were either too distant or had never been there at all, though Nzara County was a conspicuous outlier; 100% of assessed settlements which reported a lack of services stated a lack of drugs as the cause. For those that did report accessible health services, two-thirds reported that travel time to those services was under an hour, although one-third, concentrated in the Greater Mundri area, reported travelling between 1 hour and half a day to reach health services.

Similar to previous quarters, assessed settlements continued to self-report malaria as their main health problem (22% of assessed settlements in June), with diarrhoea and skin disease (18% each) also prominent. Malaria or fever was also the primary self-reported

cause of death across Western Equatoria, increasing slightly from 24% of assessed settlements in April to 36% in June as the rainy season settled in.

While reported as the primary cause of death infrequently for Western Equatoria as a whole, hunger and malnutrition were the second most commonly reported cause of death for Mundri West and Mvolo counties in June, likely owing to persisting food insecurity in the Greater Mundri area. Consistent with this trend, in June, Mundri West and Mvolo also had the highest proportion of assessed settlements (67% and 100% respectively) reporting that half of children were malnourished, in comparison to most other counties reporting malnourishment in less than half or none of the settlements' children. Given the longer distances to healthcare facilities throughout Greater Mundri, these reports of child malnourishment

Map 6: Percentage of assessed settlements in Western Equatoria reporting adequate access to education services, June 2019.



indicate a vulnerable population who had low access to health services in June.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Over two-thirds (68%) of assessed settlements in Western Equatoria reported access to at least one functioning borehole in June, fairly similar to previous quarters. Despite this access, 54% of assessed settlements reported primarily using a river or well for their water supply in June. Throughout the quarter, many assessed settlements reported that even when the settlement had a functioning borehole, it would often be crowded, overused, or farther away, making other sources of water preferable.

Most counties reported relative safety in accessing water in the second quarter of 2019, particularly in comparison to the first quarter. While in February 22% of assessed

Figure 6: Assessed settlements reporting access to a functioning borehole, June 2019.



settlements reported that someone had been prevented from accessing their preferred water source by safety issues, this dropped to 3% in June as insecurity in Greater Mundri largely decreased. This did not hold true for Nagero County, however. In Nagero County, 50% of assessed settlements in June reported safety issues preventing access to their preferred water source, likely due to tensions between IDP returnees and host communities over water points.³⁴

Latrine use in Western Equatoria showed a moderate increase during the second quarter, with 90% of assessed settlements reporting that half or more than half of the population used latrines in June, up from 74% in April. Still, pockets of low latrine use persisted in Ibbra and Mvolo counties, where 30% and 25% of assessed settlements reported that less than half of the population used latrines. These two counties were also among the counties reporting the lowest borehole access and handwashing in June, increasing the potential for waterborne diseases. Across all counties, the primary reason reported for low or no use of latrines was that none were available.

Education

In the second quarter of 2019, education trends continued to reflect a divergence between fairly high availability of education services on

35 Western Equatoria Humanitarian Coordination Forum meeting, Yambio town. 11 July 2019.

the one hand, and mediocre attendance rates on the other, with girls facing particular barriers to attendance. Ibba County also stood out as having both the lowest attendance of girls and the lowest access to education services.

Education remained accessible for most assessed settlements in Western Equatoria, as 87% of assessed settlements reported that there were at least some education services that people could walk to from their settlement in June. As evidence of an increasingly stable environment in Western Equatoria, none of the settlements reporting a lack of access to education services attributed this to conflict or security-related reasons at any point during the quarter, down from 17% in March 2019. Even so, Ibba County, Mundri West, and Mvolo County had the highest proportions of settlements reporting no availability of education services (30%, 25%, and 25%, respectively), reportedly due to long-standing lack of services and lack of teachers to support education services.

Despite high accessibility of education services for most counties, enrolment rates remained modest, with lower rates reported for girls than for boys. Among assessed settlements with access to education services, 54% stated that the proportion of boys 6-17 years of age regularly attending school was half or less than half, and 66% of settlements reported that half or less of girls in the same age range were attending. Furthermore, assessed settlements were more likely to report that less than half of *girls* were attending school. In Ibba, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting

that less than half of girls were attending was particularly high, at 57% in June. Girls' and boys' reasons for not attending varied; for boys, school fees were most frequently reported as the main barrier to attendance, reported by 18% of assessed settlements. For girls, a similar proportion of assessed settlements (15%) identified school fees as the cause of low attendance; however, the most frequently reported impediment to girls' attendance was early pregnancies, reported by 25% of assessed settlements in Western Equatoria. This suggests that although early marriage was reported as a key protection concern for both boys and girls in the second quarter, girls in particular face additional impacts of early marriage, as early pregnancy deprives them of education opportunities that may still be afforded to their young husbands.

Conclusion

As improvements in security that began in 2018 combined with regular rainfall for most of Western Equatoria, much of the state appeared to carry out planting season activities with an increased sense of safety; food access began to improve and returns continued as some formerly-displaced expressed increasing hope for peaceful conditions. However, the lasting effects of years of conflict on livelihoods, homes and assets, and infrastructure for services were felt by many who did return to their home settlements, and feared by many IDPs still not ready to do so. Impacting IDPs, returnees, and host communities alike, low availability of health and education services as well as boreholes stood out in Ibba and

Greater Mundri, and in Greater Mundri weakened service infrastructure overlapped with worsening food security as stalled rains at

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