

Humanitarian Situation Monitoring, Unity State

South Sudan October - December 2020

REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action

Introduction

Reported humanitarian needs remained high across Unity State from September to November, and slightly decreased in December 2020. From September to November, the continued impacts of flooding, insecurity, and the economic crisis, compounded existing humanitarian needs as affected populations were often unable to access essential services. In December, the onset of the dry season, the availability of harvests and improved access to humanitarian assistance reportedly led to a decrease in humanitarian needs. Nevertheless, needs remained high for conflict-affected populations in Central Unity, and flood-affected populations in Southern Unity.

Specific information about humanitarian needs in remote areas of the state remained scarce and difficult to obtain, creating barriers for humanitarian programming and targeting of assistance. 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 every month through interviews with key informants (KIs) with knowledge of a settlement and triangulated with focus group discussions (FGDs). This Situation Overview uses this data and secondary sources to analyse changes in observed humanitarian needs across Unity State, from October to December 2020.

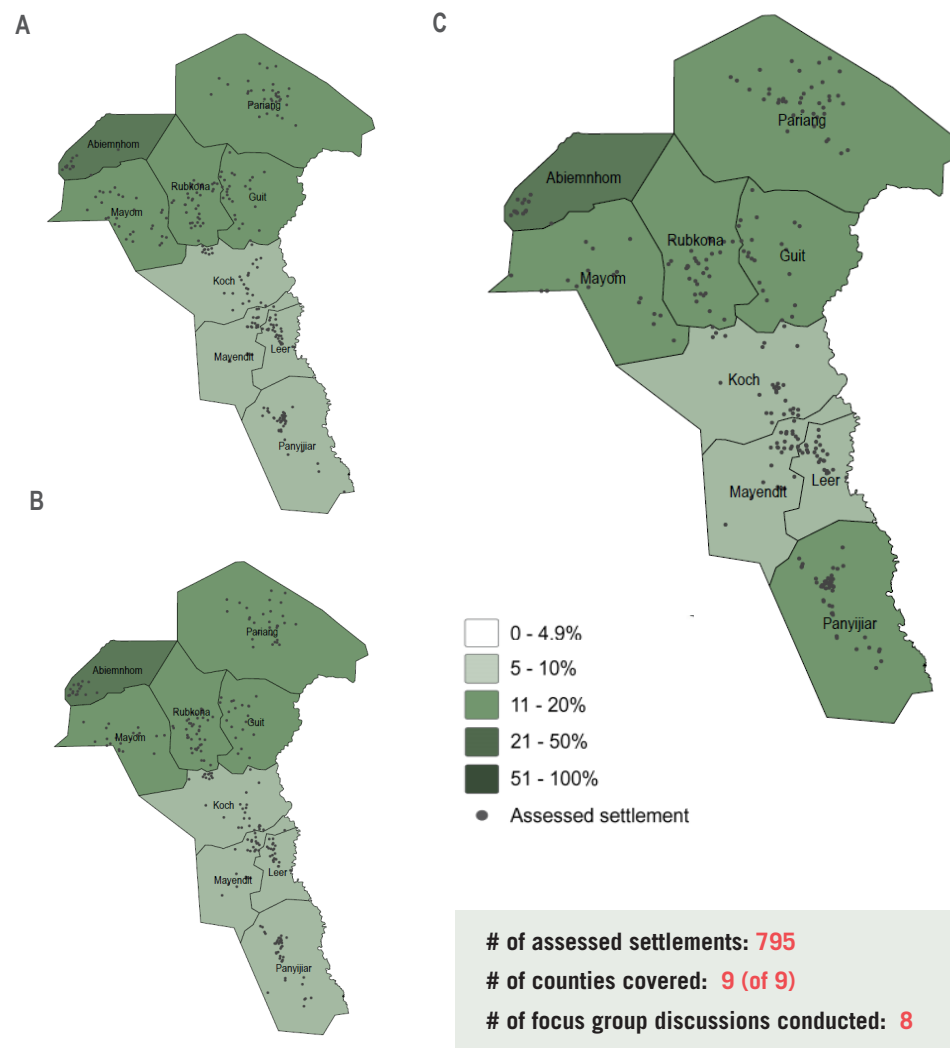
Methodology

To provide an indicative overview of the situation in hard-to-reach areas of Unity State, REACH uses primary data from key informants (KIs) 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 KIs in Bentiu Protection of Civilians (PoC) site, Nyal Town and Jamjang Town in Unity State in October, November, and December 2020.

In-depth interviews on humanitarian needs were conducted on a monthly basis 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 settlements¹ 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 payam² coverage over the period. Quantitative findings were triangulated with focus group discussions (FGDs) with people displaced from hard-to-reach areas, and secondary sources. More details of the methodology can be found in the [AoK ToRs](#).

Map 1: REACH assessment coverage of Unity State, October (A), November (B) and December (C) 2020:



1. 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.

2. Payam is the administrative unit below the county-level.

Key Findings

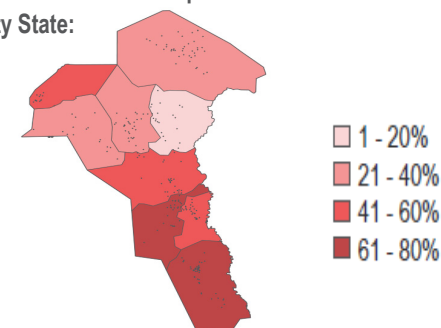
Displacement: In quarter 4 (Q4), findings indicate that population movement and displacement across Unity State were mainly driven by flooding in Southern Unity, and localised conflict in Central Unity. The proportion of assessed settlements where KIs reported the presence of internally displaced persons (IDPs) remained high across the state between September (51%) and December (68%). The atypical seasonal flooding that started in the beginning of Q3 continued to result in widespread displacement across Unity State in Q4, with flooding being reported as the main push factor for IDPs in assessed settlements from October (22%) to December 2020 (25%). Reflective of the continued violence affecting Unity,³ insecurity was the second most reported push factor for IDPs in assessed settlements across the State (15% in December 2020).

Food Security and Livelihoods (FSL): Findings suggest that the FSL situation across Unity State remained poor between September and November, and slightly improved in December 2020. The proportion of assessed settlements in which KIs reported that most people had adequate access to food remained stable from September (39%) to November (42%), and increased to 70% in December. The reported inadequate access to food was likely a consequence of the continued effects of climatic, conflict, and macroeconomic shocks that have affected markets, crops, and livestock.⁴ The proportion of assessed settlements across Unity where KIs reported the occurrence of a disease outbreak that resulted in livestock death remained high from September (54%) to December (59%). Diseases likely reduced production of meat and milk, jeopardized livelihoods for livestock dependent families, and increased vulnerability to food insecurity and malnutrition. With the onset of the dry season in December, the improvement in food security is likely attributed to the availability of harvests, fish and wild foods, and improved access to humanitarian assistance.⁵

Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH): Inadequate WASH facilities and conditions continued to be a major concern, reported across all counties of Unity State throughout Q4. In December, KIs in 47% of assessed settlements reported that surface water (including swamps, river and ponds) was the main source of drinking water, similar to Q3 (41% in September), while KIs in 83% of assessed settlements reported no latrine usage in Unity State (77% in September). Drinking from surface water sources can have serious health implications, increasing the risk of diarrhoea and the spreading water-borne diseases.

Health and Nutrition: Findings suggest that flooding that started in the previous quarter continued to affect access to health care in Q4, likely due to poor road conditions limiting medical supply. The counties most affected by floods⁶ were also the ones with the highest reports of a lack of medication, as the main barrier to accessing health (50% of assessed

Map 2: Proportion of assessed settlements where KIs reported that half or more children were malnourished in December 2020, per county in Unity State:



settlements in Panyijar County, 33% in Leer County, and 26% in Mayendit County). Furthermore, Q4 was characterized by several emerging and anticipated climatic and conflict shocks⁷ which likely impacted the nutrition situation of children as well as nutrition service delivery. Reflective of this, nutrition programs (Plumpy Sup, CSB++) were reportedly provided in 68% of assessed settlements in December, a decrease compared to September (90%).

Protection: Findings suggests that perceptions of safety improved across the state between September and December, possibly due to the improved access to food in December. Indeed, KIs in 82% of assessed settlements reported that most residents felt safe most of the time in December, an increase from 66% in September. However, reports of intercommunal violence, cattle raiding, and looting incidents were relatively high in this period, in particular in Central Unity.⁸ The proportion of assessed settlements in which KIs reported that most residents felt safe most of the time was particularly low in Rubkona (27%), Guit (27%) and Koch (44%) counties, in November 2020.

Shelter/ Non Food Items (NFI): Throughout Q4, flooding across Unity State seemingly continued to affect adequate access to shelter. The proportion of assessed settlements where flooding reportedly made people leave their homes remained high in December (53%), consistent with findings from September (53%), likely due to the continued impacts of past floods and dyke failure. In December, the most affected counties were Panyijar with 96% of assessed settlements where KIs reported that flooding made people leave their homes, followed by Mayendit (90%) and Leer (89%).

Education: Schools in South Sudan slowly started reopening for a selection of classes in October (Primary 8 and Senior 4 classes),⁹ nearly seven months after they were closed as part of the measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Correspondingly, the proportion of assessed settlements across Unity, where KIs reported that education services were available within walking distance increased from 6% in September to 42% in December 2020.

3. Humanitarian needs monitoring Situation Overview, Unity State. January-March 2020.

4. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) South Sudan key messages, October 2020-July 2021.

5. Ibid.

6. Inter-cluster coordination meeting (ICCG) Unity State. December 2020. Unpublished.

7. Ibid.

8. Inter-cluster coordination meeting (ICCG) Unity State. November 2020. Unpublished.

9. UNESCO, UNICEF. <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/unicef-and-unesco-welcome-decision-reopen-schools-south-sudan>. September 2020.

Population Movement and Displacement

During Q4, the proportion of assessed settlements where KIs reported the presence of IDPs remained high between September (51%) and December (68%). Findings indicate that population movement and displacement across Unity State were mainly driven by flooding and insecurity.

Flooding-Driven Displacement

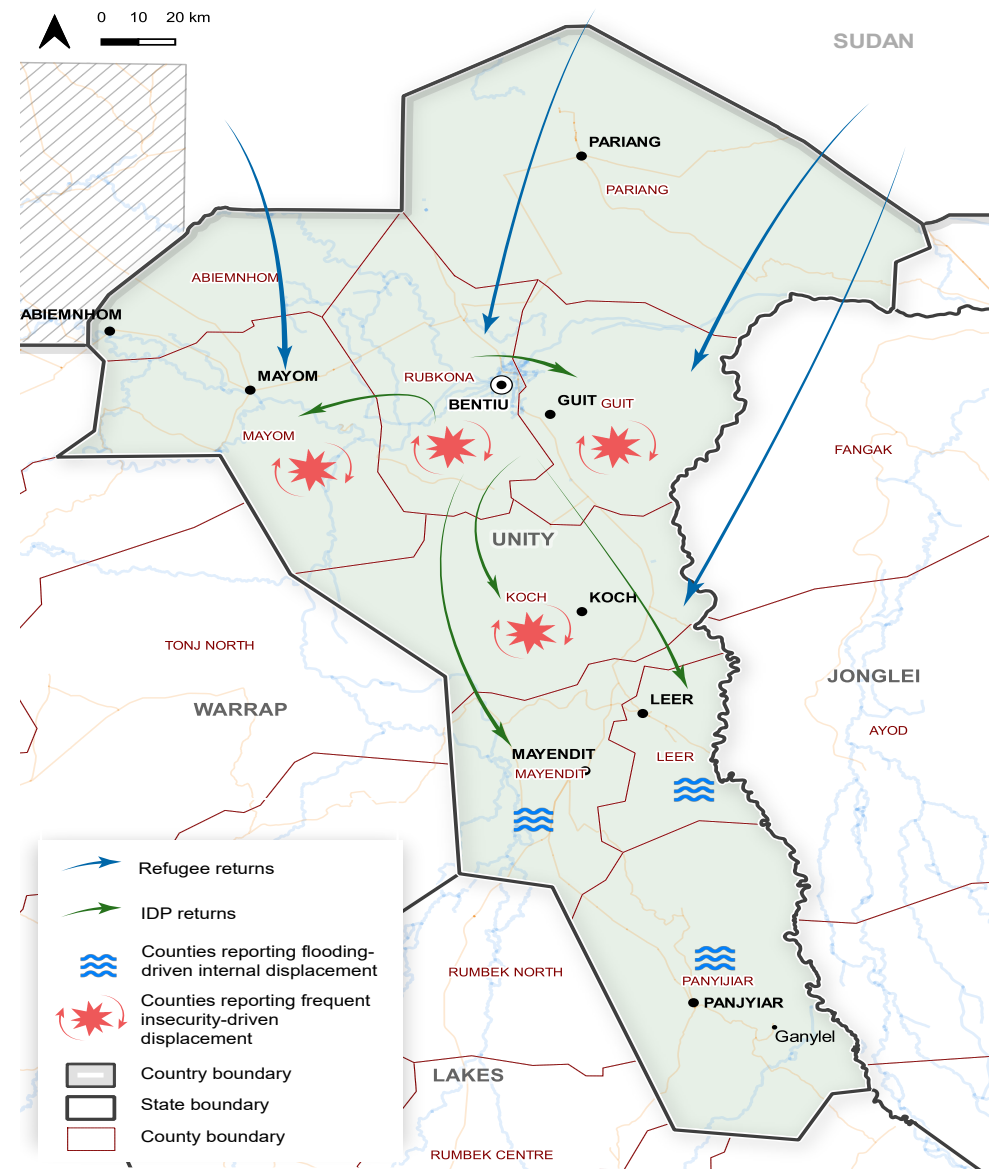
Flooding seemingly continued to be the main driver of displacement throughout Unity State in Q4. KIs reported that flooding was the main push factor for IDPs in assessed settlements in December (25%), similar to September (18%). The proportion of assessed settlements where KIs reported IDP arrivals in the past three months prior to data collection in December was the highest in flood-affected Southern Unity, Mayendit (46%), Panyijiar (45%) and Leer (39%) counties. Correspondingly, flooding was a commonly reported main push factor for displacement in the same counties in December, as it was reported by KIs in 70% of assessed settlements with IDPs presence in Panyijiar, 53% in Mayendit County, and 43% in Leer County. Consistent with AoK data, the REACH Ports and Roads Monitoring data revealed frequent flood-induced population movements across Southern Unity from September to November 2020.^{10,11,12} Most of these movements were localised movements accessing high and dry land within Panyijiar or in southern areas of Leer and Mayendit counties. According to FGD participants from affected communities, households were intending to return to their habitual residence within three months should the water levels recede.¹³

The impact of flooding likely worsened the food security situation, which drove food security related displacement in flood-affected Southern Unity. In November, the main reported pull factor from Southern Unity to Nyal Town was the perceived availability of food¹⁴ (33%), reflective of the limited availability of food goods in large parts of Panyijiar, Leer and Mayendit counties, aggravated by severe flooding and deteriorating road conditions. In this context, Nyal Town remained a commercial hub through which surrounding communities could access the goods coming from Juba through fluvial routes and via air cargo.

Insecurity-Driven Displacement

Reflective of the continued violence affecting Unity, insecurity was the second most reported push factor for IDPs in assessed settlements across Unity State throughout Q4. In assessed settlements where KIs reported IDP arrivals in the past three months prior to data collection in December, KIs reported insecurity as the main push factor for displacement in 15% of assessed settlements. This was particularly high in Central Unity, reported by KIs in 34% of assessment settlements in Koch County, 30% in Guit County, 29% in Rubkona County, and 28% in Mayom County. According to KIs, the majority of recently displaced IDPs travelled within their counties of origin, possibly due to the localised nature of the violence and insecurity affecting Unity State. In addition to localised displacement, FGD participants displaced from Koch County reported large-scale displacements from Koch County to the Bentiu PoC (Rubkona

Map 3: Population movement Unity State, September to December, 2020:



County) due to continued insecurity, in particular due to cattle raiding, in November 2020.¹⁵ It was in addition reported that persisting insecurity in their area of origin forced them to remain in the Bentiu PoC with no prospect to return back home in the near future.¹⁶

10. REACH Ports and Roads Monitoring, September 2020.
 11. REACH Ports and Roads Monitoring, October 2020.
 12. REACH Ports and Roads Monitoring, November 2020.
 13. FGD Nyal, "Impact of flooding," November 2020.
 14. REACH Ports and Roads Monitoring, November 2020.

15. FGD Bentiu. "Population movement and protection." January 2021.
 16. Ibid.

IDP and refugee returns

Easing cross-border restrictions for personal travel from September onwards¹⁷ may have contributed to an increase in refugee returns during Q4. Reflective of this, the presence of refugee returnees was reported in 42% of assessed settlements across Unity in December, an increase of 27 percentage points since September (15%). The primary reported pull factor for returnees in December was security, reported by KIs in 19% of assessed settlements across Unity, possibly due to increased confidence in the peace process, following the announcement of the return to the ten states structure and the formation of South Sudan’s Revitalised Transitional Government of National Unity, and the appointment of the governor and deputy governor for Unity State, all in 2020.¹⁸

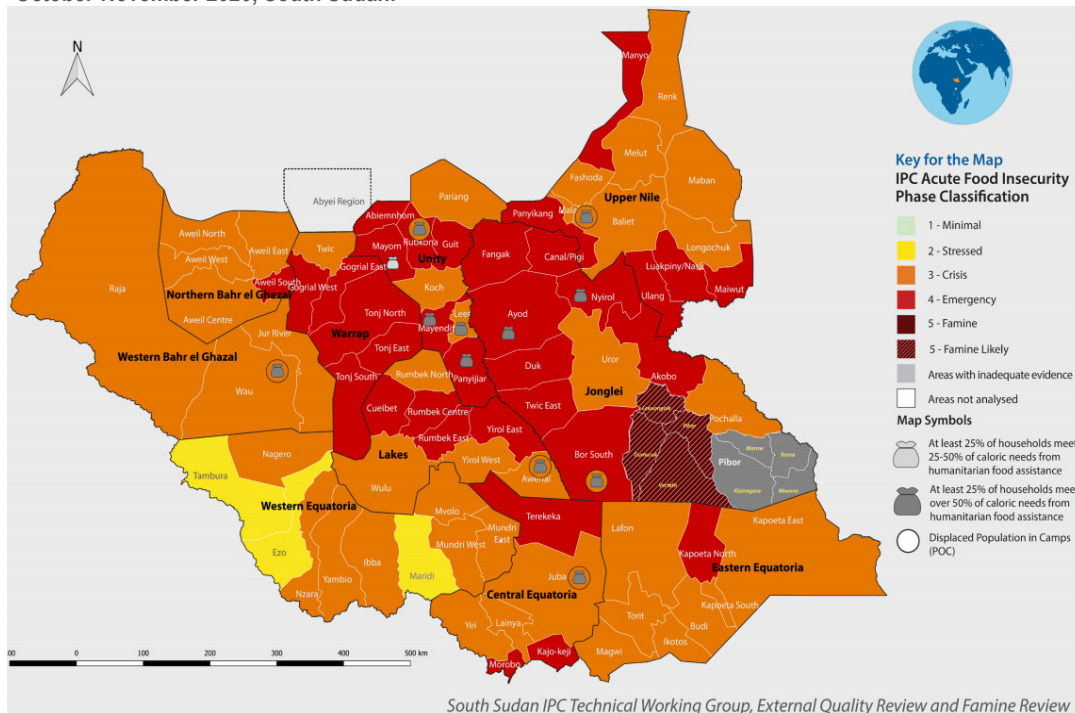
Reporting of returnee presence slightly increased throughout the reporting period, from 51% in September to 63% in December, potentially linked to improved road conditions during the onset of the dry season (except in flood-affected Southern Unity). The main reported reason for return was insecurity (killing, looting etc.), reported in 16% of assessed settlements across Unity State where IDP returnee presence was reported. As such, IDPs likely returned to their areas of origin due to deteriorating conditions in their displacement sites. Furthermore, as family reunification related population movement is common around the holiday season, another primary reported pull factor for returnees in December was rejoining family and home (also reported in 16% of assessed settlements across the State).

Food Security and Livelihoods

Findings indicate that the food security and livelihoods situation across Unity State remained poor between September and November, and slightly improved in December 2020. The proportion of assessed settlements where KIs reported that most people had adequate access to food remained stable and low from September (39%) to November (42%) across Unity State. This was likely a consequence of the continued effects of climatic, conflict, and macroeconomic shocks that have presumably limited access to crops, livestock, and markets. This is reflected by the Integrated Food Insecurity Phase Classification (IPC) analysis from October, when all counties in Unity State were classified in Emergency (IPC phase 4) acute food insecurity, except for Koch, Leer and Pariang, which were classified in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) acute food insecurity.¹⁹

The improvement in the food security situation in December is likely attributed to the availability of harvests and continued access to humanitarian assistance. With the onset of the dry season, the proportion of assessed settlements where KIs reported that most people had adequate access to food increased from 42% in November, to 70% in December. This corresponds to the December 2020 to March 2021 IPC projections, where almost all counties that were classified in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), were projected to be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in the first months of the dry season.²⁰ However, the proportion of assessed settlements in which KIs reported that most people had

Map 4: Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Acute Food Insecurity Situation Map for October-November 2020, South Sudan:



adequate access to food was still particularly low in Mayom (39%), Mayendit (40%), and Koch (52%) counties. This could be attributed to low harvest yields because of flooding in these counties during the agricultural season, in addition to the state-wide effects of COVID-19 restrictions on livelihoods and incomes, the ongoing economic crisis and currency devaluation that continues to erode purchasing power, and limited access to milk and wild foods.²¹

Access to crops

Findings suggest the severe impact of flooding on harvest yields presumably continued to be felt throughout Q4. Of the assessed settlements where KIs reported that most people did not have enough access to food (61%), more than half (51%) reported that this was because crops were destroyed by flooding in September, consistent with findings in December (48%). Reporting of crops destroyed by flooding was particularly high in assessed settlements in Panyijiar (86%), Mayendit (77%), Mayom (72%) and Leer (61%) counties in December 2020. According to FGD participants from Northern Unity, the cultivation of crops including sorghum and maize would, in a normal year, provide farmers with sufficient food until the next available harvest in November.²² However, the flooding of 2020 reportedly destroyed almost all crops in flood-affected counties,²³ also reflected in the IPC Phase 4 (Emergency)

17. FGD Bentiu. "Population Movement." October 2020.
 18. Mapping Actors and Alliances Project in South Sudan (MAAPSS) Update. February 2021.
 19. Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) South Sudan key messages, October 2020-July 2021.
 20. Ibid.
 21. Ibid.
 22. FGD Pariang. "Food Security and Livelihoods," January 2021.

23. REACH South Sudan Joint Market Monitoring Initiative (JMMI) 1-7 December 2020

classifications. Therefore, food stocks will likely run out more quickly further into the lean season, leaving households dependent on already limited market supplies.²⁴

The seasonal availability of the harvest in non-flood affected areas, wild foods, and fish likely sustained improved food security outcomes in December. Based on the Famine Early Warning System Network's (FEWSNET) monitoring and preliminary information from the 2019 Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM), 2020 national crop production was expected to be slightly higher than in 2019 as a result of improved security that would lead to an increase in planted areas and higher crop yields in areas not directly affected by the flooding.²⁵ Reflective of this, KIs in a majority of assessed settlements in Pariang (80%) and Abiemnhom (79%) reported a better crop production in 2020 compared to 2019 in December 2020. Furthermore, AoK data indicates that KIs in only 2% of assessed settlements across Unity State reported that crops were destroyed because of fighting in December 2020.

Access to livestock

Barriers to livestock access caused by the flooding have been further exacerbated throughout Q4. Findings indicate that the limited availability of grazing pastures caused by flooding, resulted in livestock malnutrition, disease, and death, and continued to limit access to cattle. The proportion of assessed settlements across Unity where KIs reported the occurrence of a disease outbreak that resulted in livestock death increased from 54% in September to 66% in November, and remained high in December (59%). In November, the proportion of assessed settlements where KIs reported this, was particularly high in Pariang (83%), Koch (78%), Guit (77%), Mayom (75%) and Panyijiar (67%) counties. The effect of flooding on livestock disease was further reflected during FGDs with participants displaced across Unity State. According to FGD participants displaced from Panyijiar, Leer and Mayendit counties, the majority of cattle in flood-affected settlements had died because of disease in September 2020.²⁶ Most of the remaining cattle reportedly suffered from malnutrition, as flooding limited the availability of grazing pastures, which reportedly resulted in the inability of cows to produce milk.²⁷ As such, diseases reduced production of meat and milk, and likely jeopardized livelihoods for livestock dependent families, increasing vulnerability to food insecurity and malnutrition.

Humanitarian assistance

Humanitarian food assistance continued to be critical to preventing large food consumption gaps throughout Q4 and across Unity State. In December, KIs in 72% of assessed settlements across Unity State reported that people received food assistance (including general food distribution, food for work, or cash for work), consistent with September (77%). While the KIs in assessed settlements in Abiemnhom and Pariang counties reported cultivation as the main food source (in 86% and 83% of assessed settlements respectively) in December, the proportion of assessed settlements in which KIs reported humanitarian assistance from non-governmental organisations as the main source of food for most people remained particularly high in other counties of Unity: 74% in Guit, 68% in Leer, 53% in Rubkona, 52% in Panyijiar, 45% in Koch, and 20% in Mayendit. However, severe flooding in

Southern Unity likely affected the timely delivery of food assistance and made it difficult for affected populations to access food distribution points, particularly concerning in counties such as Mayendit where KIs in 20% of assessed settlements reported humanitarian assistance as their main source of food.

Coping Strategies

Corresponding with the seemingly high levels of food insecurity, people across Unity State continued to adopt a range of coping strategies. In all assessed settlements, KIs reported the use of coping strategies in the 30 days prior to data collection. In October, the most frequently reported food consumption coping strategies were consuming less expensive food (80%), and limiting portion sizes (KIs in 76% of assessed settlements). Food consumption coping strategies seem to often be implemented in conjunction with livelihood coping strategies. In October, the most frequently reported livelihood coping strategies were borrowing food (85% of KIs in assessed settlements), and borrowing money (51%). Indicative of the decrease in severity of food insecurity, there was a decrease in the proportion of assessed settlements where use of extreme consumption-based coping strategies²⁸ were reported between September and December. During this period, the proportion of assessed settlements where KIs reported that some residents did not eat for an entire day decreased notably in Panyijiar County (58% in September to 14% in December) and Leer County (20% in September to 7% in December), likely due to improved humanitarian access, and increased availability of food post-harvest. Furthermore, the proportion of assessed settlements in which KIs reported that adults skipped meals so that children could eat also decreased sharply in Panyijiar County (96% in September to 28% in December), and in Leer County (47% in September to 4% in December). However, the proportion of assessed settlements where extreme food consumption coping strategies were reported in Koch, Mayom and Mayendit counties remained relatively high and stable throughout Q4, indicating that conflict and flood-affected areas of Unity State remain severely food insecure. Moving into the lean season, assistance will be critical for vulnerable populations, as needs are expected to rise during this time of year.



Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene

Water

During Q4, barriers to accessing safe drinking water remained stable, but high compared to earlier in the year, likely due to infrastructure being damaged by flooding. In December 2020, almost half (48%) of KIs in assessed settlements reported having no access to a borehole in the settlement, consistent with September (44%). This might be due to severe flooding during Q3 (April to September 2020), as only 18% of assessed settlements reported no access to boreholes in April 2020. FGD participants from Southern Unity indicated that flooding submerged most boreholes in the region forcing affected population to mainly rely on surface water sources.²⁹ In December 2020, 47% of KIs in assessed settlements reported that surface water³⁰ was the main source of drinking water.

24. REACH South Sudan Joint Market Monitoring Initiative (JMMI) 1–7 December 2020

25. FEWSNET South Sudan, Updated Assumptions, December 2019–May 2020.

26. FGD Nyal. "Impact of flooding." October 2020.

27. Ibid

28. Here "extreme coping strategies" refer to adults skipping meals so that children can eat, or going an entire day without eating.

29. FGD Nyal. "FSL, WASH." January 2021.

30. Here surface water refers to river, lake, pond, or stream.

Sanitation

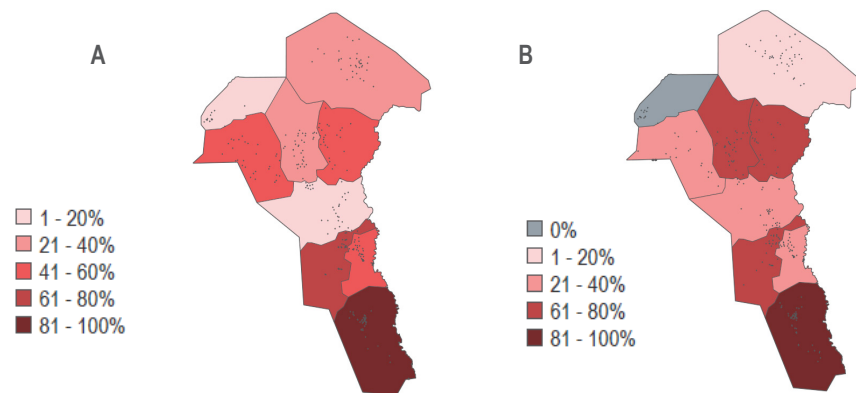
In Q4, open defecation reportedly remained a common practice. In December, KIs in 83% of assessed settlements reported that most people were not using latrines, consistent with September (77%). Low latrine usage is reportedly related to large gaps in sanitation infrastructure in Unity State. In December, KIs in more than half (53%) of assessed settlements reported the main reason people were not using latrines was that there were none available. Lack of latrines was particularly evident in flood-affected areas and rural settings, where communities were unable to access tools, materials or technical advice for the construction and maintenance of latrines.³¹

In 27% of assessed settlements where no usage of latrines had been reported (83%), KIs reported that cultural reasons were the main reason people were not using latrines in December 2020. WASH projects aimed at encouraging the use of latrines came to a halt with the start of the crisis in 2013.³² Since late 2018, these initiatives have gradually restarted, although their impact remains limited presumably due to limited awareness about the health risks associated with open defecation, and access constraints.³³

Hygiene

Consistent with Q3, handwashing practices were found to be low across Unity State during Q4. In December, KIs in over half (52%) of assessed settlements reported that people only used water for handwashing, and in 16%, KIs reported that most people did not wash their hands. Reports of the use of soap for handwashing remained low and stable throughout Q4, despite multiple awareness campaigns following the declaration of the COVID-19 emergency earlier in the year. Indeed, between September and December, there was no increase in the proportion of assessed settlements in which KIs reported that most people used soap for handwashing, from 19% in September to 17% in December, likely due to limited purchasing power for soap.³⁴

Map 5: % of assessed settlements where KIs reported the use of an unimproved water source in October (A) and December (B) 2020, by county in Unity State:



Health and Nutrition

During Q4, malaria remained the most commonly reported perceived health problem across the majority of assessed settlements in Unity State. In December, KIs in 70% of assessed settlements reported malaria as the main health problem, followed by lung-related conditions (15%). Although reports of the presence of a functional primary healthcare facility within walking distance from the settlement remained stable between October (KIs in 47% assessed settlements) and December (54%), FGD participants displaced from Southern Unity reported that, while there were health facilities in Leer, Mayendit and Panyijiar counties, many people were reliant on traditional herbal medicines to treat malaria, diarrhoea and typhoid, due to a reported lack of medication.³⁵ This lack of medication might be explained by the impact of severe floods in Q3 (July to September 2020), which likely affected road conditions and limited supply. The counties that were the most affected by floods were also the ones with the highest reports of a lack of medication as the main barrier to accessing health (50% in Panyijiar County, 33% in Leer County, and 26% in Mayendit County).

Furthermore, the last quarter of 2020 was characterized by several emerging and anticipated shocks,³⁶ which likely impacted the nutrition situation of children as well as nutrition service delivery. Reflective of this, the proportion of assessed settlements where KIs reported access to nutrition programs appeared to deteriorate slightly in Unity State from September (90%) to December (68%), likely due to flooding limiting access and insecurity related to cattle raiding. In addition, high reported levels of food insecurity combined with high disease prevalence, inadequate access to clean water and functional healthcare services, and low dietary diversity and quality³⁷ are likely to have negatively affected the nutritional status of populations across Unity State. Based on the IPC Acute Malnutrition (AMN) analysis for November 2020-March 2021, all counties in Unity State are in phase IPC AMN Phase 3 (Serious) and above, and 217,052 children are affected by acute malnutrition and in need of treatment.³⁸ The IPC AMN classification indicates that the situation is progressively deteriorating, and morbidity levels and/or individual food consumption gaps are likely to increase with increasing levels of acute malnutrition.³⁹

Protection

Findings suggest that perceptions of safety improved in Q4, with KIs in 82% of assessed settlements reporting that most residents felt safe most of the time in December, compared to 66% in September. The proportion of KIs in assessed settlements that reported that most residents felt safe most of the time remained unchanged from September (66%) to November (65%). In November, the proportion of assessed settlements in which KIs reported that most residents felt safe most of the time was particularly low in Rubkona (27%), Guit (27%) and Koch (44%) counties. This may be related to the proportion of assessed settlements where an incident of conflict in which a civilian had been killed had reportedly taken place in the month prior to data collection, which was particularly reported in the same counties: Koch (50%), Guit (48%) and Rubkona (29%). The majority of these incidents were reportedly related to cattle raiding and inter-communal violence.

31. FGD Nyal. FSL, WASH. December 2020.

32. UNICEF. "WASH briefing note" December 2019.

33. Ibid.

34. FGD Nyal. WASH, Health, Education. October 2020.

35. Ibid.

36. Inter-cluster coordination meeting (ICCG) Unity State. December 2020. Unpublished.

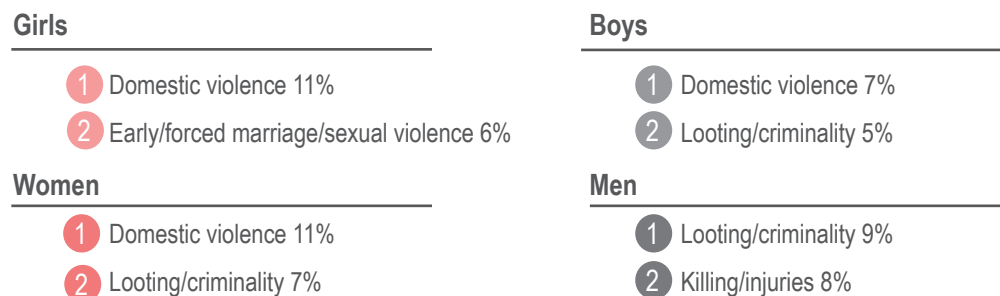
37. Ibid.

38. IPC South Sudan. Key messages Acute Malnutrition. November 2020.

39. IPC Technical Manual. Version 3. April 2019. http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo/manual/IPC_Technical_Manual_3_Final.pdf

Incidents of looting were also reported by KIs in a high proportion of assessed settlements in Guit (64%), Koch (59%), Rubkona (49%), and Pariang (47%) counties in November. This insecurity is likely driven by the continued food insecurity and lack of livelihood prospects across the State, presumably leading to an increase in looting and cattle raiding as coping strategies. Correspondingly, with an increase in reporting of access to food, perceptions of safety across the state improved, with KIs in 82% of assessed settlements reporting that most residents felt safe most of the time in December, an increase from 66% in September. Although intercommunal violence, cattle raiding, and looting incidents have historically increased in December, this decrease suggests that improved food security might have improved the situation this year.

Figure 1: Top 2 most commonly reported protection concerns for girls, boys, women, and men, by proportion of assessed settlements in Unity State in December 2020



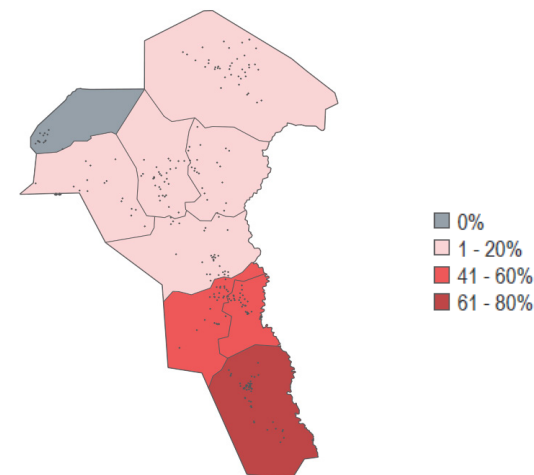
Shelter/ NFI

In Q4, shelter conditions for host communities appeared to have remained stable compared to the previous reporting period. In December, KIs in 83% of assessed settlements reported tukuls⁴⁰ as the main shelter type for the host community, while 14% reported rakoobas.⁴¹ Frequent reporting of host communities living in tukuls was likely due to the reduction in conflict-related shelter damage, which was reported in no assessed settlements in the nine months prior to data collection.

However, flooding taking place in the previous quarter continued to affect shelter conditions and drive NFI needs during the reporting period. The proportion of assessed settlements in which KIs reported that flooding make people seek shelter outside their homestead remained unchanged between September and December (53% of assessed settlements), likely due to the continued impacts of past floods and dyke failure. In December, the most affected counties seemed to be Panyijiar, with 96% of assessed settlements where flooding had reportedly made people leave their homes, followed by Mayendit (90%) and Leer (89%) counties. FGD participants from Southern Unity reported that some families had

experienced shelter damage by the water from past floods.⁴² In 28% of assessed settlements where IDP presence was reported (68%), KIs reported the main NFI need was plastic sheeting, which was notably high in flood affected Panyijiar (68% of 86% with IDP presence), Mayendit (50% of 73%), and Leer (46% of 89%) counties in December.

Map 6: % of assessed settlements with IDP presence (68%) where KIs reported plastic sheets as the primary NFI need for IDPs in December 2020, per county in Unity state.



Education

Schools in South Sudan slowly started reopening for a selection of classes in October (Primary 8 and Senior 4 classes),⁴³ nearly seven months after they were closed as part of the Government's measures to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Reflective of this, the proportion of assessed settlements across Unity in which KIs reported that education services were available within walking distance increased from 6% in September to 42% in December 2020. In 20% of assessed settlements where education centres were reportedly unavailable within walking distance, KIs reported that the main reason was that there were no facilities (down from 72% in September), and in 11% of those settlements, facilities had reportedly been destroyed by conflict or floods. School closures likely have had negative effects on children, and especially girls, as it increases their vulnerability to child labour, sexual exploitation, and abuse, including child marriage.⁴⁴ FGD participants from southern Unity reported that girls had lower access to education than boys after the reopening of schools.⁴⁵ Of the assessed settlements with reported presence of education facilities within walking distance in December (42%), half or more of boys were reportedly attending school in 13% of assessed settlements (65% in February 2020), while the same was reported for girls in 3% of assessed settlements (59% in February 2020).

40. Here tukul refers to a cone-shaped mud hut with a thatched roof.

41. Here rakooba refers to a boat made from a tree.

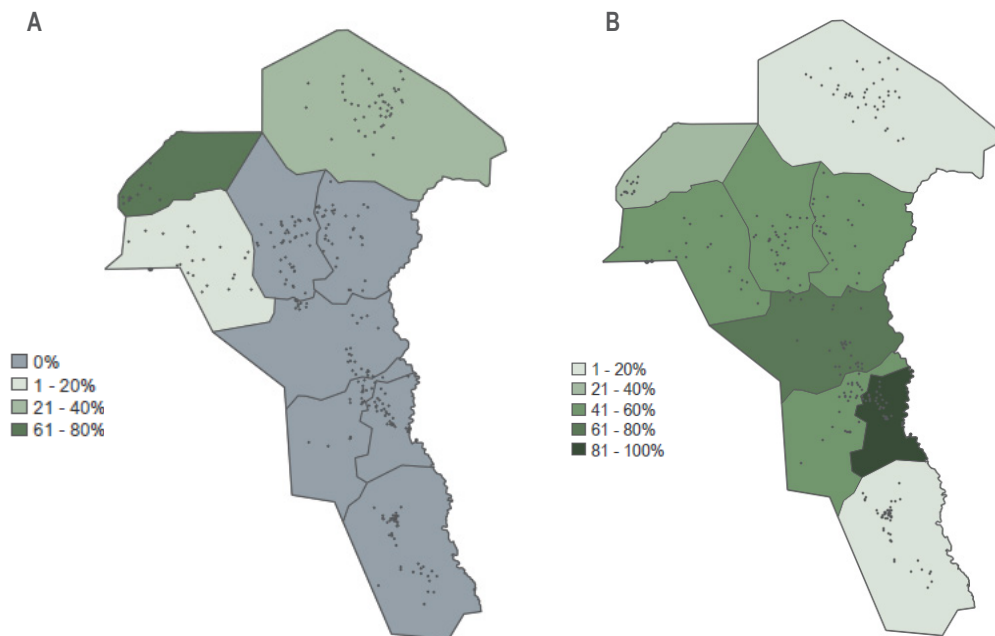
42. FGD Nyal. "Impact of flooding." January 2021.

43. UNESCO, UNICEF. <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/unicef-and-unesco-welcome-decision-reopen-schools-south-sudan>. September 2020.

44. UNESCO. <https://en.unesco.org/news/time-has-come-reopen-schools-south-sudan-children-are-better-protected-school>. September 2020.

45. FGD Nyal. "WASH, Health, Education." October 2020.

Map 7: % of assessed settlements where KIs reported available education services in September (A), and December (B) 2020, per county in Unity State:



Conclusion

In the last quarter of 2020, KIs in assessed settlements in Unity State reported improved access to food towards the end of the quarter, due to the onset of the dry season and humanitarian food assistance. However, improvements in access to food were limited in areas affected by recent natural shocks (flooding) in Southern Unity, or localised insecurity, which seemed to spike in Central Unity. Nevertheless, easing of population movement restrictions from September and relative stability on sub-national level following the implementation of the revitalized Peace Agreement in February,⁴⁶ may have contributed to a rise in IDP and returnee returns. Access to health and WASH services remained largely inadequate across Unity State, likely due to flood damage, and may impede the ability to effectively respond to the spread of COVID-19 in the first quarter of 2021. Because limited access to food, health and WASH services will have cumulative effects on affected populations, an inter-sectoral understanding of the situation will be needed for an appropriate response. Overall, improved access to humanitarian assistance from December seems to have decreased high humanitarian needs, but assistance will still be needed for vulnerable populations heading into 2021, as needs are expected to rise moving into the lean season.

About REACH Initiative

REACH Initiative 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. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).