

Situation Overview: Western Equatoria, South Sudan

July - September 2019

REACH An initiative of
IMPACT Initiatives
ACTED and UNOSAT

Introduction

Despite some improvements, localised displacement and food insecurity as well as continuing issues of returns were still affecting Western Equatoria state (WES) through the third quarter of 2019. Information remains critical for informed response, yet rainy season and security constraints have limited humanitarian access to many areas across the region.

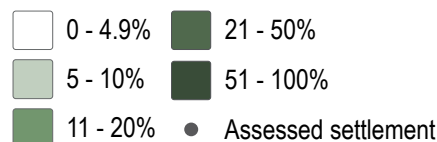
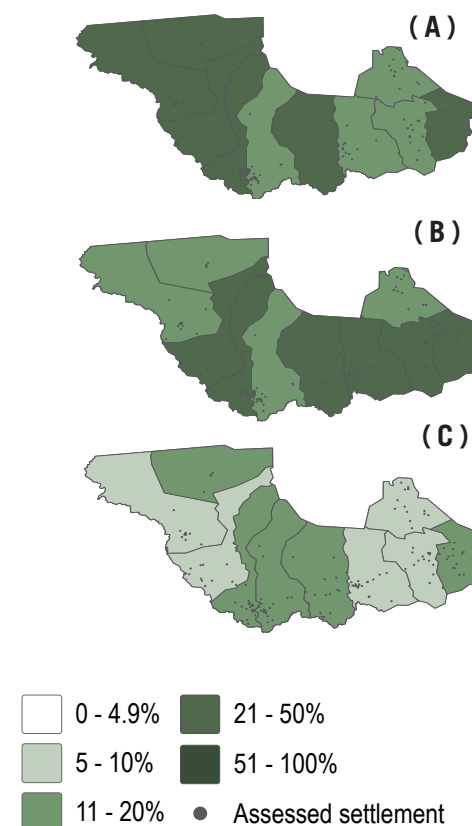
To inform humanitarian actors working outside formal settlement sites, REACH has conducted assessments of hard-to-reach areas in South Sudan since December 2015. Data is collected on a monthly basis through interviews with key informants (KIs) with knowledge of a settlement and triangulated with focus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

Key Findings

- In the third quarter of 2019, Western Equatoria continued to see a mixture of **internal returns, refugee returns, and protracted displacement** from past incidents of insecurity and hunger. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of assessed settlements reported the presence of IDP returnees while 85% reported IDP presence in September. While new displacement was low, some did take place in Maridi county and Greater Mundri.¹

- Food security** continued to improve in most of the state, as only 22% of assessed settlements reported inadequate access to food in September. Still, Nagero county's reported lack of access to food remained comparatively high (60%), and reported lack of access increased to 46% in Ezo county.
- Insecurity in Western Equatoria was mostly low, as only 1% of assessed settlements reported fatal incidents from conflict; however, looting incidents and **protection** concerns were reported in Maridi and Mvolo counties.
- Access to reliable **shelter** varied: 34% of assessed settlements reported the main shelter type for IDPs to be less solid structures, such as rakoobas or improvised shelters, while host communities reportedly mainly used solid structures for shelter (90%).
- Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)** and **health** needs were especially high in Ibba county and Greater Mundri, which reportedly faced overlapping shortages of latrines, health facilities, and boreholes. Even so, access to health services (84%) and functioning boreholes (74%) within walking distance were fairly high for assessed settlements throughout Western Equatoria.
- Similarly, though **education** reportedly remained accessible for most assessed settlements (81%), Mundri East and West reported low service availability or enrolment.

Map 1: REACH assessment coverage of Western Equatoria state, July (A), August (B) and September 2019 (C)



of key informant interviews conducted: **854**

of assessed settlements: **782**

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

of focus group discussions conducted: **6**

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 July, August, and September 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.

Population Movement and Displacement

The third quarter of 2019 was characterised by protracted displacement as many IDPs faced uncertainty over security and resource conditions in their settlement of origin, as well as both internal and cross-border returns, some of which were driven by access to food or land. New displacement did not take place on a large scale, but occurred nonetheless in Maridi and Mvolo counties, reportedly following insecurity incidents in both.

Internal Displacement and Returns

In the third quarter of 2019, overall levels of internal displacement and returns remained similar to last quarter. Moderately high internal returns were counterbalanced with continued presence of IDPs from previous episodes of displacement, with some newer displacement caused by insecurity in late August and September in Greater Mundri and Maridi county.^{4,5,6}

Across WES, 85% of assessed settlements reported presence of IDPs in September, while 65% reported the presence of IDP returnees. Among those settlements reporting the presence of IDPs in September, nearly all (87%) reported that the most recent IDPs had arrived 6 or more months ago, similar to last quarter. Among the IDPs remaining in their displacement settings in certain locations, some intended to integrate where they were, while others were waiting for services to be restored or for lingering security concerns to be resolved, according to a protection assessment carried out by partners in Nzara

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



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



and Yambio counties.⁷ This suggests that many IDPs remained in a state of protracted displacement for 6 months or more, as they weighed their options for service access and security.

For the IDPs that did return to their home settlements, the perception of increased stability in Western Equatoria continued to play a key role in many IDPs' decisions to return.⁸ At the same time however, assessed settlements reported that the main push factors causing IDP returnees to return was a lack of access to land in their displacement setting (26% of assessed settlements in September) or a lack of food (24%), indicating that a mixture of push and pull factors contributed to returnees' decision to go home.

New Conflict and Displacement

Relatively few counties reported new incidents

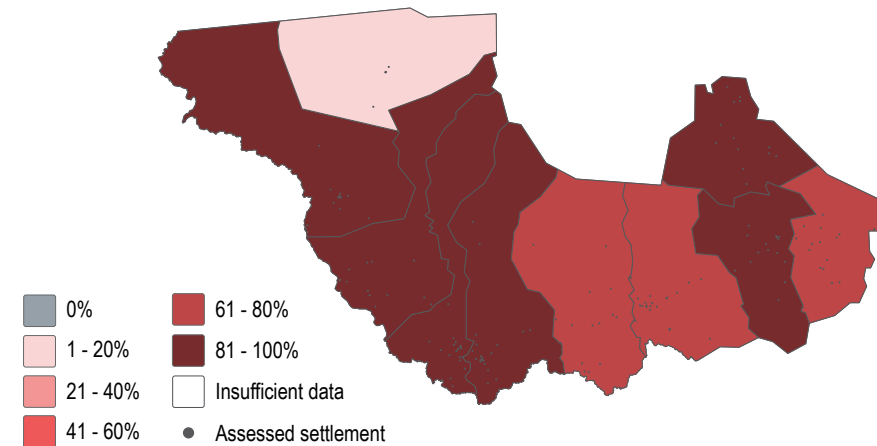
of large-scale displacement throughout the quarter. Nonetheless, smaller-scale displacement took place in the eastern half of the state. In August, following an uptick in violent activity in both counties, 14% of assessed settlements in Mvolo county and 8% of assessed settlements in Maridi county reported the presence of IDPs who had arrived within the past month, whereas settlements in most other counties did not report any IDPs arriving that recently. In particular, insecurity in August that continued into September in Maridi county caused some residents of Embe and surrounding settlements to flee to Maridi town, an unusual development in a county that has been stable for the past several quarters. During a focus group discussion (FGD) with IDPs in Maridi town, participants reported that at least 550 people had fled through the bush from Embe, Edde, and Meke, to Maridi town, while an unknown number of others had fled to Ras-olo. According to FGD participants, more

than half of those who had come to Maridi town were children.⁹ Maridi county also had the highest proportion of assessed settlements (13%) reporting IDPs arriving in the past three months during September, as the effects of insecurity continued to reverberate.

Cross-border Travel

While poorer conditions persisted in neighbouring countries, a situation of relative security continued inside WES, resulting in net inflows from the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Central African Republic (CAR), similar to last quarter.¹⁰ However, in September, cross-border flows in general decreased compared to the previous month for DRC, while increasing for CAR.¹¹ Border crossings from both DRC and CAR were reportedly comprised of mainly short-term travel for economic pursuits or service access mixed with smaller numbers of South Sudanese returns from displacement.¹²

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



4 ACLED. Political violence and protest data. July - September 2019.

5 Western Equatoria Humanitarian Coordination Forum meeting, Yambio town. 10 October 2019.

6 REACH. Displacement Focus Group Discussion, Maridi town, Maridi County. 21 September 2019.

7 UNHCR, JRS. Protection Assessment Report: Yambio and Nzara Counties.

29 July - 1 August 2019.

8 Ibid.

9 REACH. Displacement Focus Group Discussion, Maridi town, Maridi County. 21 September 2019.

10 IOM-DTM. Flow Monitoring Registry. July-September 2019.

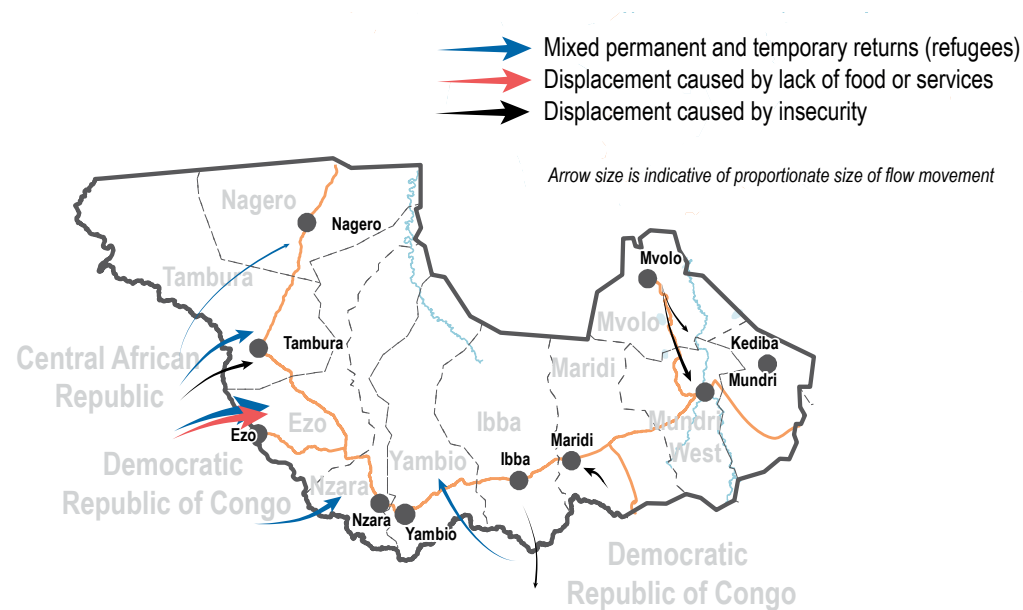
11 IOM-DTM. Flow Monitoring Registry. September 2019.

12 IOM-DTM. Flow Monitoring Registry. July-September 2019.

In the third quarter of 2019, the presence of returning South Sudanese refugees from DRC and CAR hovered at proportions similar to those seen last quarter. Excluding Ibba, Maridi, and Greater Mundri (which have either a restricted border or no border with another country), 36% of assessed settlements in WES reported the presence of refugee returnees. Refugee returnee presence remained high in Ezo county relative to other counties, and in fact increased in the third quarter: 100% of assessed settlements in Ezo county reported the presence of refugee returnees in September, up from 71% in June. Furthermore, the majority of assessed settlements (92% in September) reported that the most recent returnees had arrived within the past 6 months, with 46% reporting arrival in the past 3 months. Similar to last quarter,¹³ most returns were reportedly driven by difficulty accessing food in DRC, preferring to return to home locations where they could access land for cultivation. Many of these refugee returnees may have been short-term or uncertain returns, according to IOM.¹⁴

At the same time, some refugee returnees from DRC in Nzara county, which had the second-highest proportion of assessed settlements reporting presence of refugee returnees in September (44%), stated that increased insecurity in the DRC was what prompted them to return to South Sudan, according to a protection assessment carried out by partners in Nzara and Yambio counties.¹⁵ Some returnees also came to destinations *other* than their settlement of origin due to unresolved security issues in their particular

Map 3: Displacement patterns across Western Equatoria state, July - September 2019.



home settlements. This echoed the caution of some protracted IDPs as they balanced increased stability with uncertainty over future developments, according to the same assessment's discussion of internal returns.

Situation in Assessed Settlements

Food security and Livelihoods

As the rainy season continued to sustain cultivation and harvests were reaped from earlier planting, the proportion of assessed settlements in WES reporting adequate access to food increased for the second quarter in a row. Greater Mundri, which had experienced high food insecurity in the past quarter due to localised rain delays, saw noticeable improvements compared to Quarter

2, but still remained less food secure than other counties. Meanwhile, food conditions in Nagero county did not improve, and those in Ezo county reportedly worsened.

Improved Access to Food

Access to food in WES continued to improve in the third quarter of 2019, as assessed settlements reporting adequate food access increased from 66% in June to 77% in September. This is consistent with the August 2019 Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) release, in which Western Equatoria had the lowest population projected to be in Crisis (Phase 3) or above out of all states in South Sudan.¹⁶

A secure environment for planting and harvesting persisted in most areas throughout the quarter, as only 3% of assessed

settlements reported safety concerns as the main barrier to accessing enough food. Stable conditions allowed settlements to reap the benefit of continued rains, as 82% of assessed settlements reported eating two or more meals per day, with cultivation reported as the main food source for most people in each assessed settlement.

Areas of Concern

Despite positive trends across most of Western Equatoria, access to food continued to lag behind the rest of the state in Greater Mundri and Nagero county as it had last quarter, while worsening in Ezo county.

In Nagero county, challenges in accessing enough food due to the increase in IDP returns and tensions over land and resources have persisted for the past two quarters,¹⁷ and in September Nagero county had the highest proportion of both assessed settlements reporting inadequate access to food (60%) and assessed settlements reporting that safety issues were the main reason for lack of food (20%). In addition, the county remained heavily dependent on humanitarian food assistance; although the proportion of assessed settlements reporting NGOs as the main source of food decreased from 100%

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



22% of assessed settlements reported inadequate access to food

13 IOM-DTM. Flow Monitoring Registry. April-June 2019.

14 IOM-DTM. Flow Monitoring Registry. September 2019. IOM defines short-term or uncertain returns as "South Sudanese individuals travelling to their location of habitual residence who a) spent over three months elsewhere and report an unknown intended duration of stay at destination, or who do not otherwise fit the temporal criteria for medium- / long-term flows and b) report 'return from

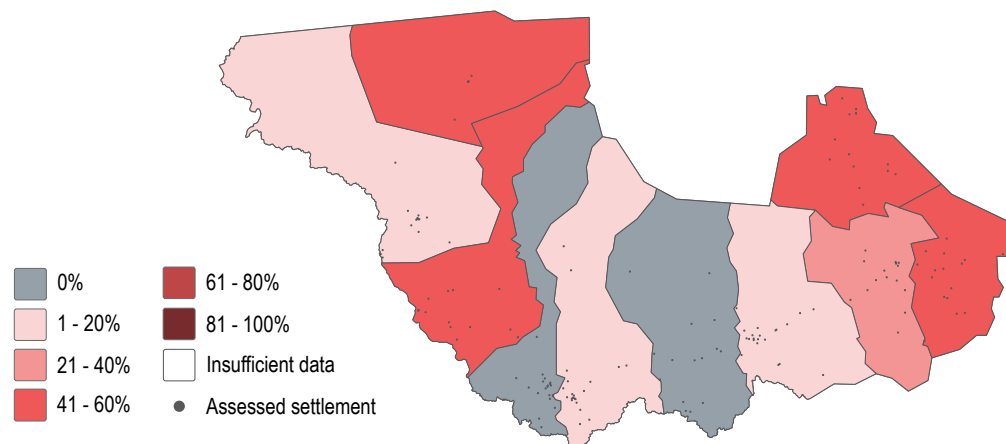
displacement' as their reason for travel or c) are being displaced by conflict, natural disasters or food insecurity."

15 UNHCR, JRS. Protection Assessment Report: Yambio and Nzara Counties. 29 July - 1 August 2019.

16 IPC. South Sudan IPC Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Analysis, August 2019 update.

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

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



in June to 40% in September, the only other source of food reported for the month was friends and family.

In Greater Mundri, reported access to food improved significantly in comparison to the previous quarter, jumping from 9% of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food in June, to 57% in September. Since the cause of high food insecurity in Quarter 2 appeared to be a localised delay of the rainy season just as the lean season was at its peak, a belated harvest coming in most likely explains the improvement in Quarter 3. Nonetheless, after months of prolonged food insecurity, access to food in the area was still comparatively low in Greater Mundri, particularly in Mundri East and Mvolo counties, where 50% of assessed settlements in each county reported not having enough access to food in September.

In Ezo county, assessed settlements reporting inadequate food access rose from 21% in

June to 46% in September. Although the main reasons reported for not having enough food varied, new arrivals and safety issues were the two most common drivers reported across the quarter. This trend may partially be explained by the high number of recent refugee returnees in Ezo county. In addition, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting having enough food in Yambio county dropped slightly from 91% in June to 78% in September, as an outbreak of East Coast Fever killed hundreds of cattle and the lack of beef in the markets spilled over to temporarily increase prices for most food goods that people otherwise relied on.¹⁸ During an FGD with residents of Naagori settlement in Yambio town, participants reported that people in town typically bought the majority of their main meals from the market, relying on gardens for a smaller proportion. As such, the price increase reportedly caused town residents to shift to eating the same meal every day

and to over-rely on surplus crops from the garden that they would normally sell.¹⁹ This is consistent with assessed settlements in Yambio county reporting high prices as one of the main reasons for not having enough food.

Coping strategies

Although extreme coping strategies, such as skipping days of eating or adults not eating so that children could eat, were fairly low for WES as a whole, these strategies were more common in counties reporting inadequate food access, especially Mvolo county. The proportion of assessed settlements that reported skipping days of eating was highest in Mvolo (21%) and Ezo (15%) counties, whereas adults not eating was most frequently reported in Mvolo (50%), Mundri East (44%), and Nagero (40%) counties. Assessed settlements reporting some people selling livestock as a coping strategy also increased sharply in Mvolo county, from 33% in June to 71% in September. This may be attributable to both seasonal selling patterns for cattle traders, and to recent cattle raids prompting some to sell their cattle in order to reduce security risks.

Protection

In the third quarter of 2019, perceptions of safety appeared to improve slightly, as 82% of assessed settlements reported that most people felt safe most of the time in September, compared to 67% in June. However, despite a decrease in the perception of insecurity in Greater Mundri, insecurity seemingly increased in Maridi county. While reports of incidents of looting or conflict that resulted

in civilian deaths were low across Western Equatoria as a whole (4% and 1% respectively in September), Maridi county had the highest proportion of assessed settlements reporting such incidents in September: 5% of assessed settlements reported incidence of civilian casualties as a result of conflict in the last month, and 14% reported an incident of looting occurring within the last month.

In September, most protection concerns for women, men, girls, and boys remained fairly consistent with those seen in previous quarters in Western Equatoria. The most frequently reported primary protection concern among women was domestic violence (42% of assessed settlements in September), while among girls it was early marriage (54%). Notably, domestic violence was reported in higher proportions in counties with higher levels of food insecurity, namely Greater Mundri counties and Ezo county. The proportions reporting domestic violence as the main protection concern also showed changes from June to September that were similar to the changes seen in food insecurity for the same time period, suggesting a possible relationship between difficulty accessing enough food and violence against women in the home.

For men, assessed settlements continued to report that fighting between neighbours was the main protection concern in September (41% of assessed settlements), while for boys it was early marriage and domestic violence at 14% of assessed settlements each. Mvolo county was an outlier in that looting or criminality was strongly reported to be the main protection concern for boys (43% of assessed

¹⁸ WHO. Disease Outbreak Emergency Meeting Highlights. 25 August 2019.
¹⁹ REACH. Food Security and Livestock Outbreak Focus Group Discussion, Yambio town, Yambio County. 13 September 2019.

settlements), likely due to both cattle raids and crime on the roads in recent months, which can often involve male youth.^{19 20}

Shelter and NFIs

For most counties in September, shelter conditions in WES remained secure for host communities, while IDPs' and IDP returnees' shelter conditions neither improved nor deteriorated. Host community populations were reported by most (90% of assessed settlements in September) to be living in either permanent shelters or solid tukul structures. However, among assessed settlements reporting the presence of IDPs in September, 31% reported that the main shelter type for IDPs was the less-solid rakoobas,²¹ and 3% reported that IDPs were living in improvised shelters of plastic sheeting and found materials, both proportions on par with those of Quarter 2.

In most of WES, assessed settlements reported that no shelters had been either destroyed or partially destroyed by fighting (99% of assessed settlements). However, Mundri East, Mvolo, and Maridi counties were the exception, as 4-7% of assessed settlements in each county reported the presence of shelters completely or partially destroyed by conflict in either August or September. In Maridi county, an FGD of IDPs from the Embe area reported that shelters had been burned or destroyed due to conflict in their settlements of origin within the past month. Many of those IDPs were reportedly living in rakoobas in Maridi town, and those who participated in the FGD noted that NFIs were the second-greatest

need after education, especially cooking pots, jerry cans, and plastic sheeting.

Health and Nutrition

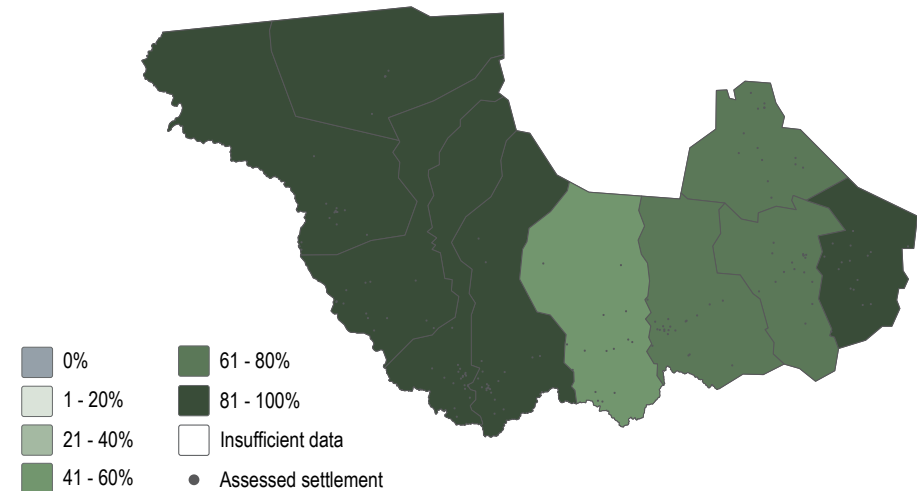
Similar to previous quarters, health services remained relatively accessible in WES, with 84% of assessed settlements reporting that there were at least some services that residents could walk to from their settlement in September. However, access issues persisted from last quarter in Ibba county and Greater Mundri. In Ibba county and Mundri West county, 33% and 31% of assessed settlements for each respective county reported that there were no health services within walking distance, mainly because health facilities were too distant or had never been there at all. Meanwhile, in Mvolo county and Mundri East county, 64% and 60% reported that healthcare services existed but took between 1 hour and half a day to walk to, and 7% of assessed settlements in Mvolo county reported that services took a full day to reach.

Perceived health issues also reflected those seen in previous quarters, as assessed settlements continued to self-report malaria as their main health problem (26% of assessed settlements in September), followed by waterborne diseases at 17%. Ezo county was perceived to be particularly affected by malaria, with 69% of assessed settlements

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

Malaria	23%	■
Other ²²	19%	■
Blood diseases/STDs	10%	■

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



self-reporting the disease as the main health problem in September. Malaria or fever was also the primary self-reported cause of death across WES, though it decreased slightly to 23% of assessed settlements in September after a high of 36% in June. Greater Mundri counties saw larger drops in proportions of assessed settlements reporting malaria as a the main cause of death from June to September. This may suggest that improvements in food security and nutrition experienced in Greater Mundri over the third quarter contributed to a lowered perception of malaria as a cause of death.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Despite continued access to at least one functioning borehole, which was reported by 74% of assessed settlements in WES in September, 50% of assessed settlements nonetheless reported primarily using a river

or well for their water supply in the same month, reflecting a common preference for water points that may be nearer or less crowded. Ezo county reported even higher use of unprotected water sources at 85% of assessed settlements in September, a factor which may have contributed to the similarly high proportion (69%) reporting malaria as the main health problem, since standing water can exacerbate the transmission of vector-borne diseases.

For a second consecutive quarter, accessing water seemingly remained a fairly safe activity, with only 7% of assessed settlements reporting safety issues accessing their preferred water source. While Nagero county was once again the county with the highest proportion of assessed settlements reporting insecurity as a barrier to water access (20% in September), that proportion decreased compared to 50% in

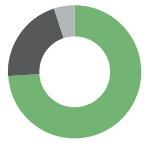
19 Idris Iffat. "Livestock and conflict in South Sudan." Governance and Social Development Resource Centre, University of Birmingham. 29 October 2018.

20 Mageng Wade Deng. "Communities in the Lakes Region Urged to End Culture of Violence to Enable Development." UNMISS. 22 October 2019.

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

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

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



74% of assessed settlements reported access to a functioning borehole

June.

Latrine use in Western Equatoria decreased slightly in the third quarter of 2019, with 77% of assessed settlements reporting that half or more than half of the population used latrines in September, compared to 90% in June. Sanitation and hygiene was notably poor in Greater Mundri and especially Mvolo county, where in September 43% of assessed settlements reported that less than half of the population uses latrines and 64% of assessed settlements reported that most people do not wash their hands. Across all counties, the primary reason reported for low or no use of latrines was that none were available.

Education

Education trends in the third quarter of 2019 remained similar to those in the previous quarter, with access to education services relatively high but attendance lagging, particularly for girls. Across WES, 81% of assessed settlements reported that there were at least some education services that people could walk to from their settlement in September, with no reports of conflict as a barrier to education services. However, amidst this continued stability, Mundri East and Mundri West had the highest proportions of settlements reporting no availability

of education services (44% and 38% respectively), reportedly due to long-standing lack of services and lack of teachers. In a slight shift from last quarter, Greater Mundri counties replaced Ibba county as the area with the lowest access to education services among all counties in WES.

Similar to last quarter, enrolment rates remained modest, despite relative availability of education services, with lower rates reported for girls than for boys. Among assessed settlements with access to education services, 58% stated that the proportion of boys 6-17 years old 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. The proportion of assessed settlements reporting that less than half of girls were attending was highest in Greater Mundri and Ibba county. As the cultivation season

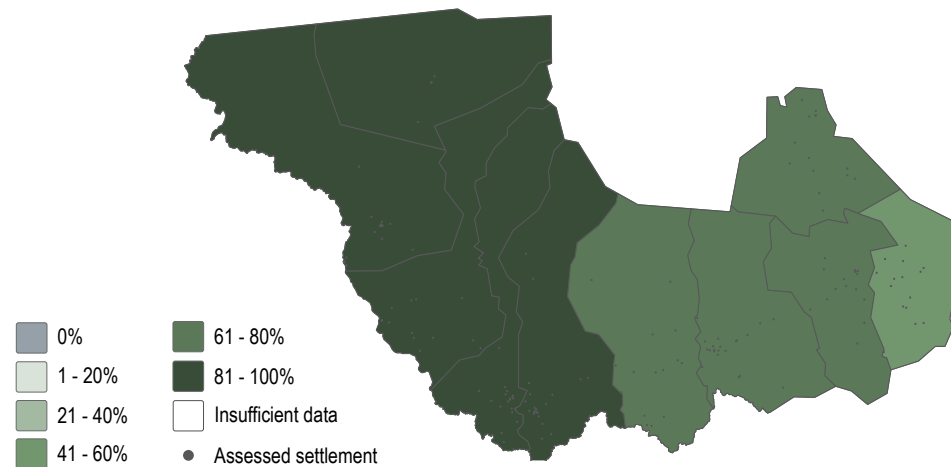
continued, the most frequently reported main barrier to attendance for boys was the need to keep them home for agricultural work, reported by 12% of assessed settlements in September. For girls, on the other hand, early marriage or early pregnancies persisted as the most frequently reported impediment to girls' attendance, with 25% of assessed settlements reporting one or the other in September.

Conclusion

As both stable conditions and seasonal rainfall continued for most of Western Equatoria, food security continued to improve while returns kept pace from the previous quarter. However, pockets of looting and insecurity prompted some new displacement in Maridi and Mvolo counties and led to localised shelter and NFI needs, while in Ezo county food security deteriorated, compounded by refugee

returnees moving back to Ezo from DR Congo seeking access to food or land.

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



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. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and All REACH 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).

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