

Humanitarian Situation Monitoring

Western and Northern Bahr el Ghazal States South Sudan January - March 2021

Introduction

The first quarter (Q1) of 2021 (January-March), was seemingly largely defined by persistent climatic shocks, pockets of insecurity, as well as the continued inflation of the South Sudanese Pound (SSP) and subsequent rising prices on the market. These developments have likely continued to drive humanitarian needs across Western and Northern Bahr el Ghazal States (WBeG and NBeG) for both host communities and internally displaced persons (IDPs).¹

To inform humanitarian actors, REACH has conducted assessments of hard-to-reach areas of South Sudan since 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 uses this data to analyse changes in observed humanitarian needs across WBeG and NBeG in the first quarter of 2021.

Methodology

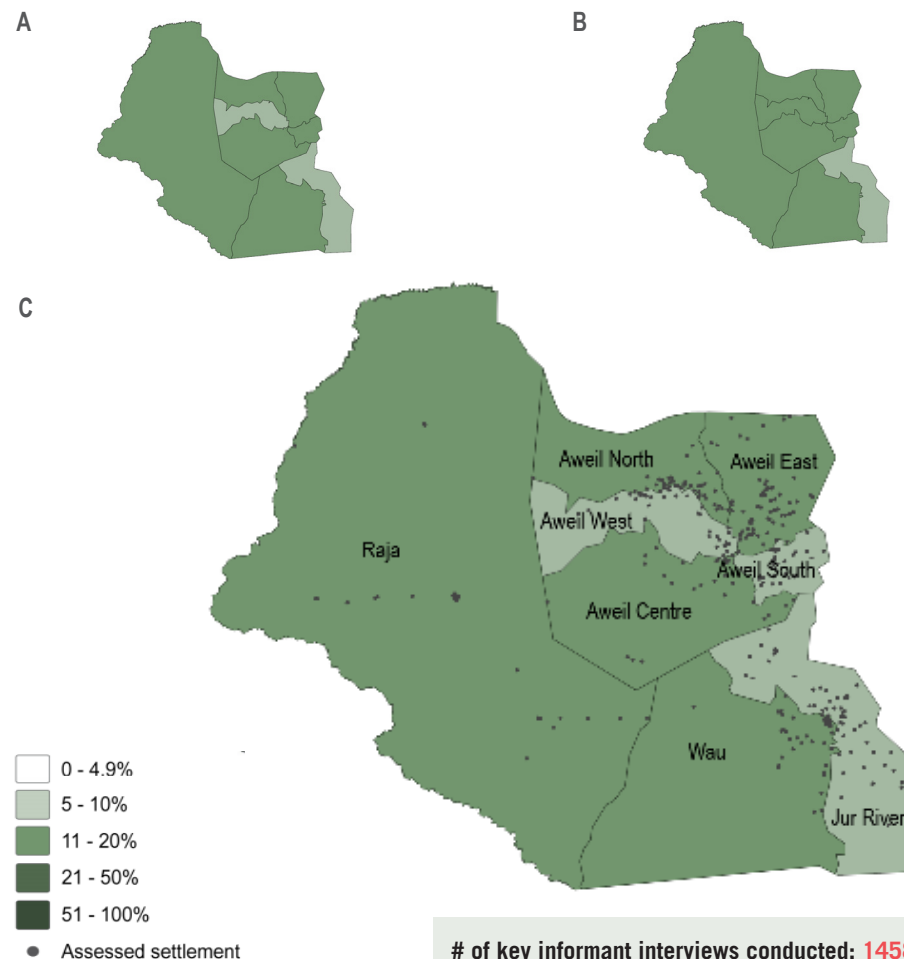
To provide an indicative overview of the situation in hard-to-reach areas of Western Bahr el Ghazal State and Northern Bahr el Ghazal State, REACH conducts interviews with key informants (KIs) who have recently arrived from, recently visited, or receive regular information from a settlement or "Area of Knowledge" (AoK). These interviews were conducted in the former protection of civilians (PoC) site, collective centres, and through phone calling throughout the reporting period. Findings should be considered indicative only of the situation in assessed settlements.

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 was found for a settlement, that settlement was not included in reporting.

Only counties with interview coverage of at least 5% of all settlements in a given month were included in the analysis.² Due to access and operational constraints, the specific settlements assessed within each county each month may 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 focus group discussions (FGDs) and secondary sources. FGDs with people displaced from hard-to-reach areas in Northern Bahr el Ghazal State and Western Bahr el Ghazal State took place throughout January - March 2021.

More details of the methodology can be found in the [AoK ToRs](#).

Map 1: REACH assessment coverage of Western and Northern Bahr-el Ghazal States, January (A), February (B) and March (C) 2021



of key informant interviews conducted: 1458
of assessed settlements: 848
of counties covered: 8 (of 8)
of focus group discussions conducted: 9

1. IDPs defined as someone forced to flee their home, but remaining within his or her country's borders.

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.

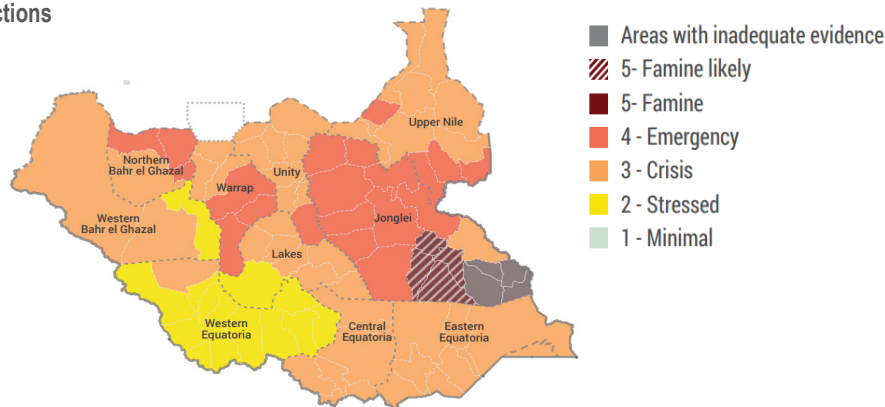
3. Payam is the administrative unit below the county-level.

Key Findings

Population Movement and Displacement: In WBeG, IDPs were reportedly drawn to return home by perceptions of increased security in their area of origin. KIs reported the presence of IDP returnees in 80% of assessed settlements in March, remaining high and consistent with findings in December (73%). Whilst in NBeG, the decrease in IDP presence across settlements in NBeG throughout Q1 (from 16% in December to 2% in March) suggests that, as flood water receded and roads became more passable with the dry season, people engaged in cross-border movements to Sudan where livelihood activities were perceived to be more accessible,⁴ indicative of deteriorating conditions and reduced coping options across the State.

Food Security and Livelihoods (FSL): Adequate access to food in WBeG and NBeG remained low despite improvements expected following the harvest season (which usually starts in October and lasts until February). In March, KIs from 31% of assessed settlements across the region reported that people were able to access enough food, which is consistent with findings from December. In WBeG, the key drivers of inadequate food access differed between counties: while the early depletion of harvested food stocks and insecurity likely contributed to inadequate food access in Jur River County, economic shocks seemingly limited access to food in Raja and Wau counties. Findings suggest that, in NBeG, access to food continued to deteriorate, likely due to low crop production caused by climatic shocks from the previous quarter. KIs in those assessed settlements where most people reportedly did not have adequate access to food (75% in March), commonly attributed this to crops having been destroyed by flooding (29% in March, 13% in December), drought (23%, unchanged since December), and exhaustion of the previous harvest (9%, unchanged since December). Due to the early depletion of harvested food stocks, high food prices, reduced household purchasing power, and the consequences of climatic shocks, the food security situation is expected to deteriorate further in the lean season period for both WBeG and NBeG.⁵

Map 2: Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, Acute Food Insecurity, December 2020 to March 2021 projections



Protection: While perceptions of safety in NBeG appeared to deteriorate slightly, likely due to the seasonal spike in intercommunal violence with the dry season; perceptions of safety seemingly improved in WBeG throughout Q1, likely due to the relative stability on sub-national level.⁶ Early marriage fears for girls also remained consistent throughout Q1, suggesting that early marriage is likely still being used as a negative coping strategy.⁷ The use of early marriage as a coping mechanism might be reflected by findings on Aweil South, which findings suggest to be the most food-insecure county of both NBeG and WBeG (with KIs in 78% of assessed settlements reporting inadequate access to food in March) as well as the county with the highest proportion of settlements where concerns over early marriage had been reported (31% in March).



Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH): In both WBeG and NBeG, inadequate WASH facilities and conditions likely continued to be a major concern in the first quarter of 2021. In March, KIs in 26% of assessed settlements reported the use of unsafe water sources,⁸ unchanged from December. This was perhaps reflected in the high proportion of settlements where KIs reported water borne diseases such as typhoid or diarrhea as one of their main health concerns (31% in March). Inadequate access to WASH services combined with high reported levels of food insecurity are likely to have negatively affected the nutritional status of populations in both WBeG and NBeG.



Health and Nutrition: Health problems appear to have continued in WBeG and NBeG throughout Q1, as deteriorating food security, low access to traditional livelihoods, and poor WASH conditions likely impacted people's ability to access health care. In March, KIs from assessed settlements in both states reported that the main barriers to accessing health care were the unavailability of medicine (76%, 66% in December), or facilities being too far away (36%, 48% in December). In addition, limited access to food and WASH, combined with high disease prevalence, are likely to have negatively affected the nutritional status of populations in parts of NBeG.



Shelter/Non Food Items (NFI): IDPs reportedly continued to live in less permanent shelter types in comparison with members of the host community. In March, KIs in 87% of assessed settlements across both states reported that most host community members were living in tukuls. In comparison, KIs in 40% of assessed settlements with IDPs reported tukuls as the main shelter type for IDPs. Poor IDP shelter conditions could be a legacy of conflict in Jur River County and overcrowding of IDP sites in Wau County,⁹ and flooding in most of NBeG.¹⁰



Education: While education resumed in October 2020 for Primary 8 and Senior 4 classes,¹¹ there were no classes between January and March 2021 to prepare for their national examinations scheduled for February and March.^{12,13} Perhaps reflective of this, the proportion of assessed settlements across WBeG and NBeG where KIs reported that education services were available within walking distance decreased from 63% in December to 24% in March.

4. REACH, December 2020. <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/northern-bahr-el-ghazal-climate-impact-displacement-profile-south-sudan-december>.
 5. Integrated Food Security Phase Classifications (IPC) Acute Food Insecurity projections for December 2020-March 2021. South Sudan October 2020.
 6. Mapping Actors and Alliances Project in South Sudan (MAAPSS) Update. February 2021.
 7. Rapid gender analysis, May 2020. <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/rapid-gender-analysis-on-covid-19-in-south-sudan/>
 8. Potentially unsafe water sources in this case are defined as coming from a pond, river, swamp, well or delivered by donkey.
 9. REACH Humanitarian Situation Monitoring Situation Overview. WBeG and NBeG. October-December 2020.

10. REACH NBeG Climate Impact & Displacement Profile. South Sudan. December 2020.
 11. Primary 8 and Senior 4 are the first year of primary school and the last year of secondary school respectively.
 12. UNICEF, 21 April 2021. [Hope revived as schools reopen](https://www.unicef.org/south-sudan/news/2021/04/21/primary-schools-reopen).
 13. UNICEF, 10 February 2021. [Primary 8 National Exams, a Sign of Hope](https://www.unicef.org/south-sudan/news/2021/02/10/primary-national-exams)

Population Movement and Displacement

Findings suggest that there were low levels of displacement across both NBeG and WBeG during the first quarter of 2021. In both states, the proportion of assessed settlements where KIs reported the presence of IDPs reportedly decreased between December 2020 (20%) and March 2021 (5%). AoK findings indicate that the population movement and displacement that did occur was mainly driven by insecurity in WBeG and by a lack of food and work opportunities in NBeG. Moreover, in FGDs conducted throughout Q1, participants from WBeG continued to report insecurity as the main push factor for IDPs,¹⁴ and participants from NBeG reported that many households moved to Sudan to seek out livelihood opportunities or food assistance, both of which were perceived as more readily available across the border.¹⁵

WBeG

Displacement

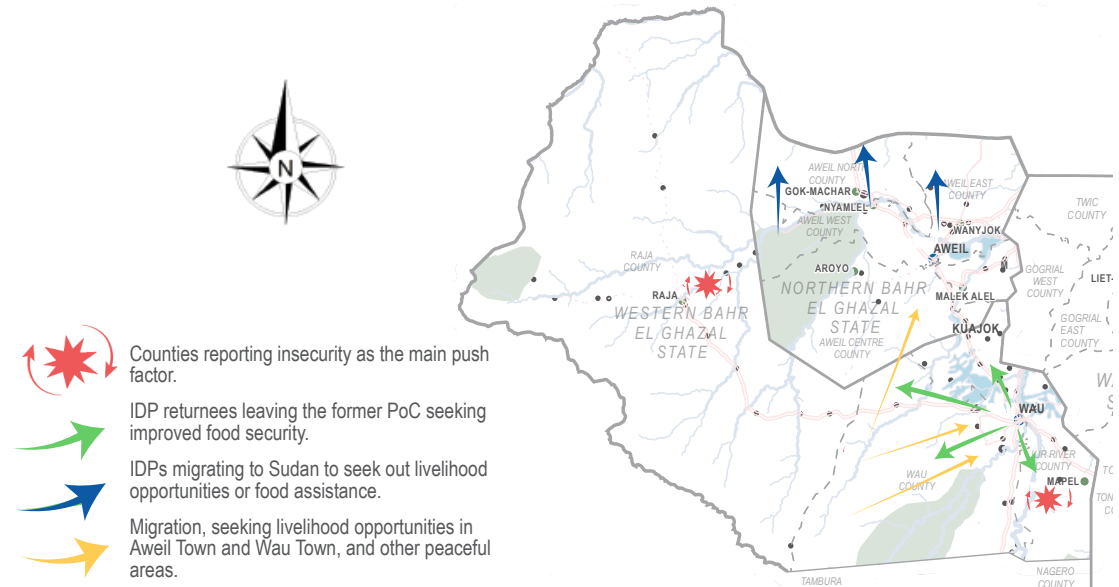
Insecurity continued to be a major push factor for IDPs from assessed settlements across WBeG and throughout Q1. AoK findings indicate that insecurity (including fighting, killing, looting, and rape) was reported as the main push factors for IDPs in all of assessed settlements across WBeG in March, relatively consistent with the previous reporting period (when KIs in all assessed settlements reported either insecurity or cattle raiding as the main push factor). In FGDs conducted in the former Wau Town Protection of Civilians (PoC) site in January, participants recently displaced from Jur River County reported that many IDPs were fearful of travelling back to their settlement because of persisting insecurity.¹⁶

Furthermore, FGD participants displaced from Raja and Jur River Counties reported that one of the main pull factors to the former Wau IDP PoC Site was access to food.¹⁷ Participants also reported that some IDPs were planning on returning to their settlement of origin if there was not enough humanitarian food assistance distributed in the Wau IDP Site.¹⁸ In March, in 49% of assessed settlements where the presence of IDPs had been reported (10%), KIs reported that the arrival of IDPs had a negative impact¹⁹ on the ability of most people to access enough food in the month prior to data collection. FGD participants displaced from Jur River added that they struggled choosing between returning to their area of origin where they were concerned about insecurity, and staying in the Wau IDP Site, where host communities reportedly were increasingly reluctant to share food.²⁰ This suggests that already vulnerable IDPs in WBeG are being forced into zero-sum decision making scenarios which can further increase their vulnerabilities.

Return movement

Overall, the proportion of assessed settlements in WBeG where KIs reported the presence of IDP returnees continued to remain high and consistent between December (72%) and March (80%). In an FGD conducted in December, participants interviewed in the former Wau PoC Site reported that the living conditions in the site were deteriorating and driving displaced people to return.²¹ Reflective of this, the 2021 Humanitarian Needs

Map 3: Population Movement, Displacement and Migration in WBeG and NBeG, January - March 2021



Overview (HNO) found that displaced people and returnees living in urban settlements, such as the former PoC site, tend to have higher proportions of damaged shelters.²² The deterioration of conditions in the former PoC site has likely prompted IDPs to return home, more than their readiness to return home.

In Jur River, access to land and food were the most commonly reported main drivers for returning IDPs (reported in 50% and 20% of assessed settlements, respectively). Because insecurity in Jur River is reportedly persisting, these findings suggest that Jur River IDPs in Wau and Jur River returnees from Wau in particular may be facing a choice between decreasing food access in the former PoC, which could be alleviated by land and food access in their Jur River homes, and an insecure environment in Jur River, which could be avoided in the former PoC.

NBeG

The decrease in IDP presence throughout Q1 and across settlements in NBeG (from 16% in December to 2% in March) suggests that, as flood water receded and roads became more passable with the dry season, people, including some who were internally displaced last quarter, engaged in cross-border movements to Sudan where livelihood activities were perceived to be more accessible.²³ According to a REACH NBeG Climate Impact and Displacement profile conducted in December, anticipated displacement from all NBeG counties to Sudan or areas on the border with Sudan was reportedly planned in the months of January or February 2021 as a result of 2020's unique combination of climate shocks and its impact on food security.²⁴ During FGDs conducted in January 2021 with people from Aweil North, West, and East, participants commonly reported that flood-displaced

14. FGDs, participants from Jur River and Wau Counties, January-March 2021.

15. FGDs with participants from Aweil North and West, January- February 2021.

16. FGD, participants displaced from Jur River County to Wau Town, January 2021.

17. FGDs, participants displaced from Jur River and Raja Counties to Wau Town, March 2021.

19. negative impact includes small or large impact on the ability to access enough food.

20. FGD with participants displaced from Jur River County to Wau Town, January 2021.

21. FGD, participants displaced to Wau County, December 2020.

22. OCHA [Humanitarian Needs Overview, 2021](#)

23. REACH [NBeG Climate Impact & Displacement Profile, South Sudan, December 2020](#).

24. Ibid.

populations started engaging in cross-border movements to Sudan to cope with food insecurity, as casual labour was perceived to be more accessible in Khartoum.²⁵ FGD participants also reported the perception that humanitarian assistance in IDP or refugee camps in Sudan was more readily available, driving some movement to those locations.²⁶ Furthermore, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) flow monitoring registry (FMR) from February 2021 reported that Aweil North and East were amongst the highest departure locations in South Sudan.²⁷ Displaced households reportedly moved in search of improved food access and livelihood opportunities,²⁸ indicative of deteriorating conditions and reduced coping options across NBeG.

Food Security and Livelihoods

Overall in WBeG and NBeG, the continued effects of climatic and economic shocks likely limited access to food during the first quarter of 2021. In March, KIs in only 31% of assessed settlements across the region reported that most people were able to access enough food, unchanged since December. These findings are broadly in line with the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification's (IPC) acute food insecurity projections for December 2020 to March 2021 for NBeG, which found the entirety of the state to be classified in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) or worse, including an estimated 179,000 people to be facing Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of food insecurity.²⁹ The IPC projections for WBeG indicated marginal improvements in food security due to seasonal harvests, the availability of wild foods, and expected increased market access during the dry season.³⁰ However, increased market access was perhaps limited due to remaining COVID-19 related cross-border and inter-state movement restrictions, as well as the economic crisis, which contributed to rising prices, and the erosion of household purchasing power.³¹

WBeG

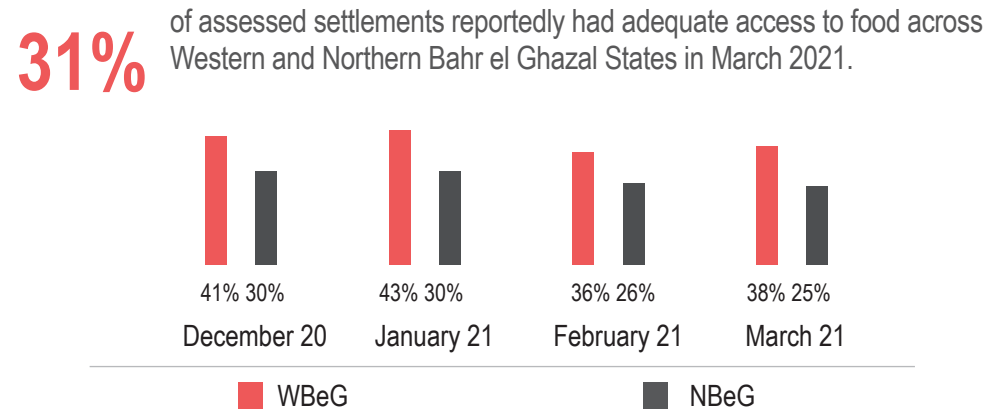
During Q1, the key reported drivers of inadequate food access differed between counties in WBeG. While the early depletion of harvested food stocks and insecurity likely contributed to inadequate food access in Jur River County, economic shocks seemingly limited access to food in Raja and Wau counties.

In Jur River County, findings suggest that assessed settlements faced considerable food security and livelihood challenges. KIs in 81% of assessed settlements reported that most people were not able to access enough food in March, a 24 percentage point increase since December (57%). In assessed settlements where KIs reported inadequate access to food in December (81%), the main reported barrier to accessing enough food was that there was no access to agricultural inputs³² (22%). Comparatively, KIs in almost three-quarters (74%) of assessed settlements reported most people did not have enough access to seeds, and KIs in 69% of assessed settlements reported that most people did not have enough access to tools, a 48 and 45 percentage point increase from December (28% and 24% respectively). The second most reported barrier to accessing enough food was that previous harvest was exhausted, reported by KIs in 11% of assessed

settlements. According to FGD participants from Jur River County, the cultivation of crops would, in a normal year, provide farmers with sufficient food until May.³³ However, the continued sub-national violence reportedly affected cultivation in almost all settlements in the southern and eastern parts of the county, leading to an early depletion of food stocks.³⁴ Furthermore, FGD participants reported that conflict also limited livelihood opportunities as cattle and livestock had been stolen and opportunities for casual work had become severely limited.³⁵

In Raja County, findings suggest a slight improvement in access to food, likely due to the availability of harvests. KIs in 61% of assessed settlements reported that most people were not able to access enough food in the month of March, a marginal improvement from December (78%). In March, the main reported sources of food in assessed settlements in Raja were from cultivation (48%) and purchasing food from the market (41%), corresponding with the main sources of food FGD participants reported during consumer focused FGDs conducted in Raja in March.³⁶ However, even with the availability of harvests,³⁷ AoK findings suggest that assessed settlements in Raja County were facing considerable food security and livelihood challenges in Q1, likely due to economic shocks. In assessed settlements where KIs reported insufficient access to food in March (61%), the main barriers to accessing enough food were high food prices (33%), and the ending of food distributions (30%), indicating a reliance on markets and humanitarian food assistance (HFA) in order to access enough food in assessed settlements. Reflective of this, in an FGD conducted in March, participants displaced from Raja County suggested that the food insecurity that they were experiencing was primarily fueled by high prices of goods in the market, as a result of inaccessible trade routes and COVID-19 related restrictions limiting supply.³⁸ Indeed, while Raja's proximity to international borders with Sudan and the Central African Republic has made it a part of regional trade routes for the transportation and trade of goods, COVID-19 restrictions and insecurity have limited the use of the roads for transportation and trade.³⁹

Figure 1: Proportion of assessed settlements in WBeG and NBeG where adequate access to food was reported, December 2020 - March 2021



25. FGD with participants from Aweil North, West and East, January 2021.

26. Ibid.

27. IOM DTM. [Flow Monitoring Registry \(FMR\)](#). February 2021.

28. Ibid.

29. IPC Acute Food Insecurity (AFI) analysis. South Sudan October 2020.

30. Ibid.

31. REACH South Sudan. [Joint Market Monitoring Initiative \(JMMI\)](#). 1-7 March 2021.

32. agricultural inputs refer to either seeds or tools.

33. FGD, participants displaced from Jur River County to Wau Town, January 2021.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. FGD, participants displaced from Raja County to Wau Town, March 2021.

37. The harvest is normally available from December.

38. FGD, participants displaced from Raja County to Wau Town, March 2021.

39. Conflict Sensitivity Resource Facility (CSRf) South Sudan. [Raja County profile](#).

Furthermore, FGD participants from Raja County indicated that although people heavily depend on HFA, there are not enough food distributions to feed everyone who needs it in the county.⁴⁰ In March, KIs in only 7% of assessed settlements in Raja County reported that people received food assistance (including general food distribution, food for work, or cash for work), unchanged since December. Moving into the lean season,⁴¹ assistance will be critical to close food gaps, as there will likely be an increased reliance on HFA when households run out of stored food.

In Wau County, the food security situation seemingly remained unchanged from December 2020, to March 2021, as the county seemingly continued to experience high prices in the market throughout the reporting period, severely affecting the purchasing power of many people who rely on market goods, particularly following a poor harvest season.⁴² KIs in 44% of assessed settlements reported that most people were not able to access enough food in the month of March (unchanged since December). In an FGD conducted in March, participants displaced from Wau County suggested that the current food security situation was due to a combination of poor harvests and high prices of goods in the market, as a result of inaccessible trade routes limiting supply.⁴³ Correspondingly, KIs in 39% of assessed settlements reported that the main challenges to market access in Wau County were distance (unchanged since December) and bad road conditions (10%, 0% in December). Furthermore, the REACH Joint Market Monitoring Initiative (JMMI) found increases in the price of the multi-sectoral survival minimum expenditure basket (MSSMEB) in Wau County (25% from February to March), representing a 167% price increase compared to the same time in 2020.⁴⁴ High market prices have perhaps decreased the purchasing power of many households in WBeG, and consequently people have likely had to resort to consumption and livelihood coping strategies at a time of year when they would normally have food stores from the harvest. Indeed, although the harvest should have provided enough food until May, negative coping strategies, such as reduction in the number of meals eaten in a day (34% in March, unchanged since December), purchasing food on credit (46% in March, unchanged since

December), and consumption of seed stock meant for the next season/harvesting crops that are not yet ready (17% in March, unchanged since December), were commonly reported in assessed settlements in March.

Due to the early depletion of harvested food stocks, high food prices, and reduced household purchasing power, the food security situation is expected to deteriorate further in the lean season period.⁴⁷ The IPC acute food insecurity analysis projected all of WBeG to be in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) levels of food insecurity for April-July 2021.⁴⁸

NBeG

Findings suggest that access to food continued to deteriorate across NBeG throughout Q1, likely due to low crop production caused by climatic shocks from the previous quarter.⁴⁹ KIs in those assessed settlements where most people reportedly did not have adequate access to food (75% in March), commonly attributed this to crops having been destroyed by flooding (29% in March, 13% in December), drought (23%, unchanged since December), and exhaustion of the previous harvest (9%, unchanged since December) (see figure 2 for a full breakdown of food access barriers in March by county and state). Irregular climate and weather events have likely led to the reported early depletion of food stocks, which were expected to last until June/July of 2021, prompting a potentially severe food security situation across the state.⁵⁰

Across NBeG, AoK findings suggest that the early depletion of food stocks has severely affected the severity of hunger and the level of dependence on humanitarian aid. In March, KIs in 63% of assessed settlements with insufficient access to food (75%) reported that hunger was severe for most people, consistent with findings in December. AoK findings also suggest humanitarian food assistance was particularly critical to preventing large food consumption gaps in Aweil South, where KIs in 76% of assessed settlements reported that people received food assistance in the three months prior to data collection, a 62-percentage point increase from December (14%), indicative of severe food insecurity and a lack of access to livelihood opportunities in the county. The severity of the food security situation in Aweil South is also reflected in the United Nations Organisation for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (UNOCHA) situation report, in which Aweil South was part of the six counties identified in late 2020 as priority 1 areas for a multi-sectoral response scale-up, including FSL, health and nutritional support, protection services and WASH assistance.⁵¹

In line with the seemingly high levels of food insecurity in NBeG, findings suggest that people continued to adopt a range of coping strategies to cope with the diminishing food stocks and lack of livelihood opportunities. In March, the most frequently reported food consumption coping strategies were limiting portion sizes and reducing the number of meals eaten in a day, both reported by KIs in 60% of assessed settlements across NBeG (75% and 65% respectively in December). In 23% of assessed settlements in NBeG, adults forgoing meals so that only their children eat was also reported as a consumption coping strategy in March (unchanged since December). AoK findings suggest that food consumption coping strategies seem to often be implemented in conjunction with livelihood coping strategies.

Figure 2: The main reported reasons why people could not access enough food, by % of assessed settlements in WBeG and NBeG where inadequate access to food was reported in March 2021.⁴⁶

	Jur River	Raja	Wau	WBeG	Aweil Centre	Aweil East	Aweil North	Aweil South	Aweil West	NBeG
Food distribution stopped	2%	30%	8%	13%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Crops destroyed by floods	0%	0%	0%	0%	4%	21%	34%	41%	49%	29%
Harvest exhausted	11%	0%	5%	6%	25%	31%	10%	17%	19%	22%
High food prices	6%	33%	56%	32%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Lack of rain	0%	0%	0%	0%	21%	24%	24%	31%	14%	23%

40. FGD with participants displaced from Raja County to Wau Town, March 2021.

41. In a normal year, the lean season starts in May and lasts until July.

42. International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). [South Sudanese face food shortages](#). March 2021.

43. FGD, participants displaced from Wau County to Wau Town, March 2021.

44. REACH South Sudan. [Joint Market Monitoring Initiative \(JMMI\)](#), 1-7 March 2021.

45. IPC AFI analysis key messages. South Sudan October 2020.

46. Note that not all possible responses are represented, only the most common.

47. IPC AFI analysis key messages. South Sudan October 2020.

48. Ibid.

49. REACH [NBeG Climate Impact & Displacement Profile](#). South Sudan, December 2020

50. Ibid.

51. OCHA South Sudan. [Response scale-up for highly food insecure areas](#). 30 April 2021.

In March, the most frequently reported livelihood coping strategies were selling more livestock than usual this time of year (in 58% of assessed settlements), collecting firewood in dangerous places (48%), consuming seed stock meant for next season or harvesting crops that are not yet ready (46%), and selling home assets (33%). In the Bahr el Ghazal region, livestock is the foundation of pastoral and agropastoral communities' livelihoods and is their main source of nutrition, particularly for children and pregnant and lactating women.⁵² The sale of more livestock than usual is a significant food security and nutrition concern, and will likely contribute to weakening the resilience and livelihoods of communities across the region.⁵³

Moving into the lean season, the food security situation in NBeG is expected to deteriorate further, particularly for households whose crop production was negatively affected by compounding climatic shocks during the cultivation cycle (drought, late rain, heavy rain and flooding).⁵⁴ The IPC projections for April to July 2021 indicate that all counties in NBeG are classified in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of acute food insecurity, except for Aweil Centre which is classified in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) acute food insecurity, with Aweil South particularly worrying with an estimated 7,000 people likely to be facing IPC Phase 5 (Catastrophe) levels of acute food insecurity.⁵⁵

Protection

While perceptions of safety and security in NBeG appeared to deteriorate slightly, perceptions of safety seemingly improved in WBeG throughout the reporting period. KIs in 60% of assessed settlements across NBeG reported that most people did not feel safe most of the time in March, an 18 percentage point increase from December (42%), likely due to the seasonal spike in intercommunal violence with the dry season. Reflective of this, in FGDs conducted in NBeG throughout Q1, participants reported that intercommunal violence usually increases with the dry season, as flood water usually recedes and roads become more passable.⁵⁶ Comparatively, KIs in more than half (55%) of assessed settlements across WBeG reported that most people felt safe most of the time in March, a 26 percentage point increase from December 2020 (29%). Participants in FGDs conducted with recently displaced people from Wau County reported that sub-national violence has reduced during the reporting period, as a result of political stability in the area.⁵⁷ The relative stability on sub-national level probably follows the implementation of the revitalized Peace Agreement, and recent political appointments in the State.⁵⁸

Reported early marriage fears for girls remained consistent throughout the first quarter of 2021, suggesting that early marriage is likely still being used as a mitigating factor or coping mechanism to help with the difficult financial conditions being faced in many parts of the region.⁵⁹ In 20% of assessed settlements across both states, early marriage was reportedly the main safety concern for girls in March (unchanged since December). The most food insecure county of both WBeG and NBeG, Aweil South, (where inadequate access to food was reported in 78% of assessed settlements) is also the county with one of the highest proportion of assessed settlements where fears of early marriage had been reported, with KIs in 31% of

assessed settlements reporting that early marriage was the main safety concern for girls. Increasing risk of early and forced marriage and other negative coping strategies, and a significant lack of access to key services in relation to child protection, were also identified as key protection issues through protection monitoring exercises in Aweil South.⁶⁰

WASH

Water

In Q1, reported barriers to accessing safe drinking water remained high in both WBeG and NBeG, likely due to infrastructure being damaged by flooding and insecurity.⁶¹ KIs in 32% of assessed settlements across NBeG and WBeG reported that most people did not have access to a borehole in their settlement in March, unchanged from December (25%). Most people being unable to access boreholes was particularly commonly reported in assessed settlements in Jur River (74%), Aweil Centre (50%), and Wau (44%). Furthermore, KIs in 26% of assessed settlements reported the use of unsafe water sources.⁶² It is possible that the use of unsafe water sources is largely due to access constraints; as KIs in 19% of assessed settlements in Jur River County reported that it took people over one hour to reach their preferred water source in March, unchanged since December. FGD participants from both WBeG and NBeG reported that boreholes that had been damaged during the flooding have largely not been repaired, likely resulting in people drinking from unsafe sources (see figure 3 for a full breakdown of water sources). FGD participants from Jur River and Aweil West counties indicated that some families were forced to drink dirty water from rivers and swamps,⁶³ which puts them at risk of waterborne diseases such as cholera and diarrhoea, a leading cause of death among children across the country.⁶⁴

Figure 3: Main water sources reported by KIs in assessed settlements in WBeG and NBeG in March 2021⁶⁵

	Jur River	Raja	Wau	WBeG	Aweil Centre	Aweil East	Aweil North	Aweil South	Aweil West	NBeG
Borehole	26%	76%	25%	40%	50%	80%	93%	90%	89%	82%
Donkey Cart	0%	0%	37%	14%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Pond	15%	0%	5%	7%	7%	3%	0%	0%	0%	2%
River	15%	2%	5%	8%	0%	3%	2%	3%	0%	2%
Well	31%	4%	5%	14%	29%	11%	5%	3%	8%	11%

52. FAO. [South Sudan Emergency Livelihood Response Programme](#). 2021-2023.

53. Ibid.

54. REACH [NBeG Climate Impact & Displacement Profile](#). South Sudan, December 2020.

55. IPC Acute Food Insecurity (AFI) analysis. South Sudan October 2020.

56. FGDs with participants from Aweil West, North and East February-March 2021

57. FGD, participants displaced from Wau County to Wau Town, March 2021.

58. Mapping Actors and Alliances Project in South Sudan (MAAPSS) Update. February 2021.

59. Georgetown. [Rapid gender analysis](#), May 2020.

60. OCHA South Sudan. [Response scale-up](#), 30 April 2021.

61. REACH. Situation Overview, WBeG and NBeG. Q4 2020.

62. Potentially unsafe water sources in this case are defined as coming from a pond, river, swamp, well or delivered by donkey.

63. FGDs with participants from Jur River and Aweil West, February-March 2021.

64. UNICEF South Sudan. WASH Briefing Note. January-March 2021.

65. Note that not all possible responses are represented, only the most common.

Sanitation

In Q1, open defecation likely remained a common practice across both states. In March, KIs in more than half (57%) of assessed settlements in both WBeG and NBeG reported that most people were not using latrines, consistent with December (53%). Low latrine usage is perhaps related to large gaps in sanitation infrastructure in both States. In March, the main reported reasons people were not using latrines was that there were none available (KIs in 64% of assessed settlements) and overcrowding of latrines (25%), consistent with findings in December (65% and 24% respectively). FGD participants from Jur River County reported that 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.⁶⁶

Hygiene

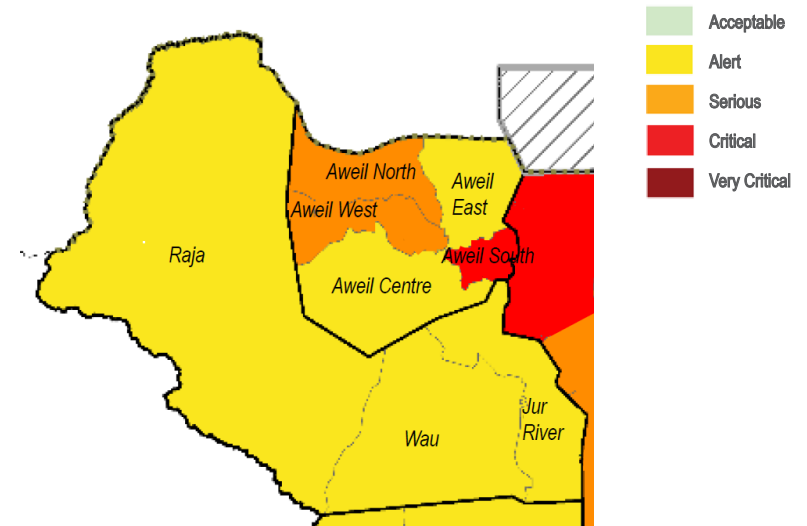
Consistent with the previous quarter, effective hand-washing practices were found to be low across WBeG and NBeG during the first quarter of 2021. KIs in only 32% of assessed settlements reported that most people were using soap to wash their hands in March, consistent with findings in December (34%). Alternatives to washing hands with soap were washing hands with water (36%), ash (16%), and sand (5%). Reports of the use of soap for handwashing remained low and stable throughout Q1, despite multiple awareness campaigns following the declaration of the COVID-19 emergency in 2020, which might be partly due to high prices of essential NFIs in the markets, and limited purchasing power for soap.⁶⁷

Health and Nutrition

Health problems appear to have persisted in WBeG and NBeG throughout Q1, as limited access to food and livelihoods and poor WASH conditions likely impacted people's health and their ability to access health care. In the HNO for 2021, UNOCHA reported that violence and flooding damaged many existing health facilities in 2020, with WBeG and NBeG reportedly amongst the worst affected states.⁶⁸ This likely made it much harder for already vulnerable populations to access essential health services across both states. In March, KIs from assessed settlements in both states reported that the main barriers to accessing health care were unavailability of medicine (76%, 66% in December), or facilities being too far away (36%, 48% in December). These barriers have reportedly impacted people's ability to access health care throughout the reporting period.

Likely due to high prices for NFIs such as mosquito nets, findings suggest that malaria remained the most common health problem in both states throughout Q1. In March, KIs in 42% of assessed settlements reported malaria as the main perceived health problem, followed by typhoid (16%), and diarrhoea (15%). FGD participants displaced from Jur River reported that, while there were health facilities in Jur River County, many people were reliant on traditional herbal medicines to treat malaria, diarrhoea and typhoid, due to a reported lack of medication and medical staff.⁶⁹ This reported poor access to medication was also reflected in the AoK data, where according to KIs in over three quarters (76%) of assessed settlements across the region,

Map 4: Integrated Food Security Phase Classifications, Acute Malnutrition, WBeG and NBeG, November 2020 to March 2021⁷⁰



the main reported barrier to accessing healthcare at the nearest healthcare facility was that there were no medicines available (66% in December).

In addition, high reported levels of food insecurity combined with high disease prevalence and inadequate access to WASH services, have perhaps negatively affected the nutritional status of populations in parts of NBeG. Reflective of this, the IPC Acute Malnutrition (AMN) analysis for November 2020-March 2021, indicates that Aweil North and Aweil West are in IPC AMN Phase 3 (Serious), and Aweil South is in IPC Phase 4 (Critical), with an estimated 179,499 children aged between 6 and 59 months affected by acute malnutrition and in need of treatment across the State.⁷¹ The IPC AMN classification indicates that the situation is progressively deteriorating for these counties,⁷² and morbidity levels and/or individual food consumption gaps are likely to increase with increasing levels of acute malnutrition.⁷³

Shelter/ NFI

In the first quarter of 2021, IDPs reportedly continued to live in less permanent shelter types in comparison with members of the host community. In March, KIs in 87% of assessed settlements across both states reported that most host community members were living in tukuls.⁷⁴ In comparison, KIs in only 40% of assessed settlements that reported the presence of IDPs (5%), also reported that IDPs in these settlements used tukuls as their main shelter type. Poor IDP shelter conditions could be a legacy of conflict in Jur River County and overcrowding of IDP sites in Wau County, and flood-affected areas of NBeG.⁷⁵

66. FGD, participants displaced from Jur River County to Wau Town, March 2021.
 67. REACH South Sudan. [Joint Market Monitoring Initiative \(JMJI\)](#), 1-7 March 2021.
 68. OCHA [Humanitarian Needs Overview](#) 2021
 69. FGD, participants displaced from Jur River County to Wau Town, March 2021.
 70. IPC South Sudan. Key messages Acute Malnutrition. November 2020.
 71. Ibid.

72. Ibid.
 73. IPC Technical Manual. Version 3. April 2019. http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo/manual/IPC_Technical_Manual_3_Final.pdf.
 74. Here tukul refers to a cone-shaped mud hut with a thatched roof.
 75. [REACH Situation Overview](#). WBeG and NBeG. October-December 2020.

In the 2021 HNO, WBeG was the state identified with the highest proportion of shelter damage across the country, with IDPs and returnees living in camp settings or small urban settlements reportedly facing higher shelter damage ratios.⁷⁶ In an FGD conducted with recently displaced people from Jur River County in January, participants reported that many shelters in their settlements had been burned during conflict, which was also the reported main reason why they could not return to their settlements of origin.⁷⁷

The continued rise of the prices of goods in the market have likely made essential NFIs, needed in order to repair shelters, inaccessible for the most vulnerable people. In NBeG, KIs in all assessed settlements reported plastic sheeting as their main NFI need, and in an FGD conducted in January, participants reported that the reason why they could not access plastic sheeting was that prices for NFIs were too high and that they would rather spend their money on food items.⁷⁸ The living conditions of displaced people perhaps continued to contribute to increased vulnerability for populations whose shelters could not be fixed or repaired due to high prices in the market. Without shelter, women, children, older people and people with disabilities are especially vulnerable as their health, wellbeing, safety and security are at risk.⁷⁹



Education

While education resumed in October 2020 for Primary 8 and Senior 4 classes,⁸⁰ there were no classes between January and March 2021 to prepare for their national examinations scheduled for February and March.^{81,82} Perhaps reflective of this, the proportion of assessed settlements across WBeG and NBeG where KIs reported that education services were available by foot, decreased from 63% in December 2020 to 24% in March 2021. Furthermore, FGD participants from WBeG also reported schools were closed during the reporting period to allow students to study for their respective exams.⁸³

Challenges with accessing education seemingly persisted due to a lack of facilities and teachers, which were reported barriers in 11% and 8% of assessed settlements where KIs reported education was not accessible (76%). Furthermore, in FGDs conducted in both states, participants reported that, normally (without COVID-19 restrictions), the main barrier preventing boys from attending school was helping their families find food, whilst for girls, the main barrier was a lack of money to pay for school fees.⁸⁴ These findings are in line with AoK data, as in the month prior to data collection, the main reason boys were not attending schools in March was needing to work (reported by KIs in 50% of assessed settlements), and the main reasons girls were not attending schools were a lack of money to pay for school fees (reported by KIs in 20% of assessed settlements), early marriage (20%) and long distance (20%). Being out of school is known to increase the risk of teenage pregnancies and early marriage.⁸⁵ In addition, being out of school does not only limit children's access to education, but also their access to school feeding programs, increasing the risk of malnutrition among children.⁸⁶

Conclusion

Across Western and Northern Bahr el Ghazal, compounding shocks, such as consecutive poor harvests, climatic shocks, and inflated prices at the market, likely led to the early exhaustion of food stocks and higher, irregular usage of livelihood and food consumption coping mechanisms. Furthermore, reported inadequate access to food, combined with high disease prevalence and limited access to WASH services, is likely to further negatively affect the nutritional status of populations across the two States, especially in NBeG's Aweil South County.

FGD participants in all parts of NBeG suggested that the poor harvest in 2020 seemingly led to an earlier lean season in 2021, as many households had already exhausted food stocks as early as November 2020,⁸⁷ with the lean season beginning six months early for the more vulnerable households. Accordingly, access to food in NBeG will likely remain low in the next reporting period, and both acute food insecurity (AFI) and global acute malnutrition (GAM) were projected to deteriorate further at least until July 2021.⁸⁸ Whilst in WBeG, reduced household purchasing power and high food prices will likely worsen the food security situation moving into the lean season period; both AFI and GAM were also projected to deteriorate in WBeG until July 2021.⁸⁹

Because limited access to food, health, and WASH services will have cumulative effects on affected populations, assistance will be essential for vulnerable populations in both WBeG and NBeG, as needs are expected to rise moving into the next quarter.

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).

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76. OCHA [Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021](#)

77. FGD, participants displaced from Jur River County to Wau Town, January 2021.

78. FGD, participants from Aweil North, West and East. January 2021.

79. OCHA [Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021](#)

80. Primary 8 and Senior 4 are the first year of primary school and the last year of secondary school respectively.

81. UNICEF, 10 February 2021. [Primary 8 National Exams, a Sign of Hope](#).

82. UNICEF, 21 April 2021. [Hope revived as schools reopen](#).

83. FGDs, participants from Raja and Jur River counties. March 2021.

84. FGDs, participants from Raja, Aweil North, West and East Counties. January-March 2021

85. [UNICEF and UNESCO](#). Schools reopen. September 2020.

86. OCHA [Humanitarian Needs Overview 2021](#)

87. FGDs. N/WBeG. January-March 2021

88. IPC AFI analysis. South Sudan October 2020.

89. Ibid.