

Situation Overview: Awerial, Yirol East and Yirol West Counties, Lakes, South Sudan

June 2018

REACH An initiative of
IMPACT Initiatives
ACTED and UNOSAT

Introduction

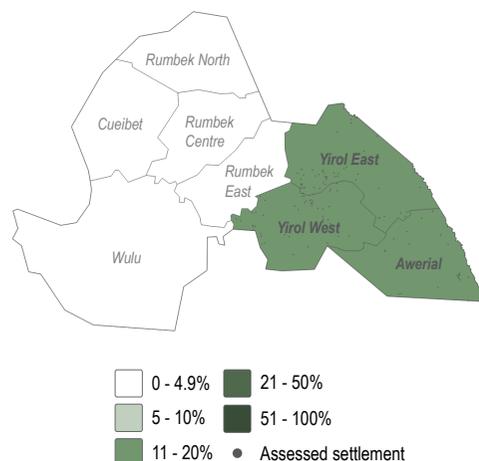
Eastern Lakes is a region affected by inter-communal violence and cattle raids, mostly in areas near county borders. The violence, in combination with high levels of food insecurity, has induced migration flows towards Mingkaman. A variety of indicators show a concerning humanitarian situation, particularly in Yirol East and West – areas commonly overlooked by humanitarian actors.

To inform the response of humanitarian actors working outside of formal displacement sites, REACH has been conducting an assessment of hard-to-reach areas in South Sudan since 2015, for which data on settlements across Greater Upper Nile, Greater Equatoria and Greater Bahr el Ghazal region is collected on a monthly basis. Data on Eastern Lakes has been collected since June 2018.

In June 2018, REACH interviewed 169 Key Informants (KIs) from 132 settlements in Awerial, Yirol East and Yirol West Counties in Lakes State. All the KIs were interviewed in Mingkaman. Findings have been triangulated

of key informant interviews conducted: 169
of assessed settlements: 132
of counties covered: 3 (of 8)
of focus group discussions conducted: 5

Map 1: Assessment coverage in Lakes State in June 2018



using 5 Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) conducted in Mingkaman, as well as with interviews with humanitarian actors, secondary data, and previous REACH assessments of hard-to-reach areas of Lakes State.

This Situation Overview is the first of its kind on Lakes state, a region where data on the humanitarian situation has been notoriously scarce. This baseline study outlines displacement and access to basic services in Eastern Lakes in June 2018. The first section analyses displacement trends while the second evaluates access to food and basic services for both displaced and non-displaced communities.

Population Movement and Displacement

Migration towards Mingkaman

In the past year, Eastern Lakes has increasingly been characterised by continuous migration towards Mingkaman, driven by inter-communal violence, cattle raids, abnormal weather patterns and the resulting shortage of food.

Eastern Lakes is hosting ten thousands of IDPs from Awerial, Yirol East and Yirol West, as well as Jonglei State.¹ Most of the IDPs settled in urban hubs due to the relatively higher availability of services and provision of humanitarian assistance.² Outside of Yirol Town and Mingkaman, there is a relatively low presence of IDPs; a mere 8% of assessed settlements in Eastern Lakes reported such in June, as opposed to the countrywide figure of 30%.

This movement towards urban areas has been driven largely by insecurity. While there are no active frontlines in Eastern Lakes, an area which is largely shielded off from the ongoing conflict on the national level, violence is nevertheless significantly shaping the region. Tensions among communities, an increasingly unstable political landscape and a deterioration of food security have tumbled the region into a vicious cycle of inter-communal fights and

cattle raids in areas near county and state borders, particularly in the past two years. The insecurity negatively affected food security and thus created migration movements.

Migration towards Mingkaman has reportedly been further amplified by abnormal weather patterns this year. The lack of rain has presented an additional challenge to food security by reducing crop yields and delaying harvest. When food is becoming increasingly scarce in rural settlements, some family members are sent away to temporarily stay with relatives in Mingkaman. According to FGD participants, this coping strategy was applied to a larger extent in June as well as earlier in the year.

Pakam displacement to Yirol East

Yirol East has been witnessing a large influx of thousands of IDPs from Rumbek North since early May 2018.³ Tensions among communities, land disputes and a disarmament campaign led to the displacement of the Pakam community.⁴ The IDPs have mostly been settling among the host community in the areas of Pagarau, Mamer and Nyang in Yirol East. KIs reported presence of IDP in areas of Yirol West and Awerial by late June, suggesting that some of the IDPs had further spread out beyond their initial destination.

The IDPs arrived from Rumbek North to Yirol

1. IOM DTM, Mobility Tracking Round 1, April 2018; FGDs in Mingkaman with participants from Eastern Lakes

2. FGDs in Mingkaman with participants from Eastern Lakes

3. IRNA, Needs Assessment of displaced Pakam community, June 2018

4. Danish Refugee Council, Yirol East - Rapid Protection Assessment Factsheet, August 2018

METHODOLOGY

To provide an overview of the situation in hard-to-reach areas of Lakes State, REACH uses primary data provided by key informants who have recently arrived, or receive regular information, from their pre-displacement location or “Area of Knowledge”. Information for this overview was collected from key informants in Mingkaman, Lakes State.

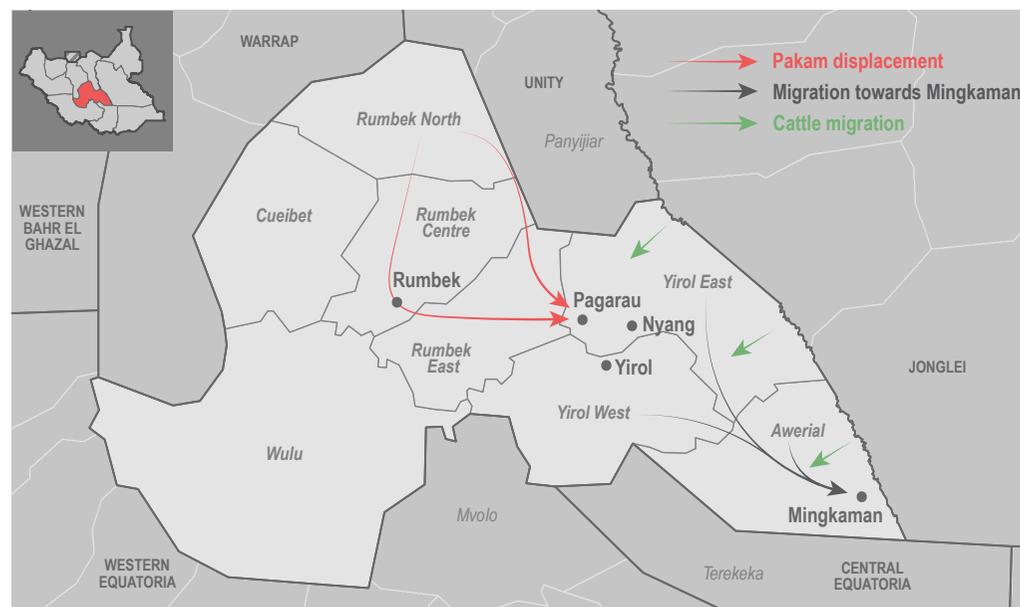
After data collection was completed, all data was examined at the settlement level, and settlements were assigned the modal response. When no consensus could be found for a settlement, that settlement was not included in reporting. Descriptive statistics and geospatial analysis were then used to analyse the data.

The data analysis was disaggregated at the county level when at least 5.0% of the settlements of a county were assessed. In June 2018, this threshold was attained for Awerial, Yirol East and Yirol West Counties.

The conclusions drawn are therefore indicative of likely trends in Awerial, Yirol East and Yirol West Counties and may not capture the humanitarian situation in some of the settlements worst affected by episodes of violence.

Please note that REACH is in the process of establishing sustained data collection in Lakes State. As a result, the current coverage is limited to Eastern Lakes.

Map 2: Migration and cattle movements in Eastern Lakes State



East via two routes: (1) by foot, some as part of cattle camps, through the swamps along the border with Panyijiar and (2) following the road via Rumbek Town.⁵ Many reportedly arrived in poor physical condition and with only a few personal belongings.⁶

Given that the local authorities and humanitarian community are working towards establishing humanitarian services in Yirol East, which could be a pull factor for populations in surrounding areas, further population movements may take place in the coming months.

Cattle migration

Cattle significantly shape the economic and cultural dynamics of the region. In 86% of assessed settlements in Eastern Lakes, most

members of the community reportedly owned cattle in June.

The cows are kept at pasture and in large cattle camps all year around. From May to June, there has been a seasonal migration of cattle from swampy regions and riverbanks near the Nile in Awerial and Yirol East towards areas further inland and closer to communities' settlements.⁷ The movement is driven by annual rain falls, which flood Nile-near areas and provide water to dried up river beds. The movement furthermore allows communities to keep cattle closer to their settlements, while bringing in youths, who typically stay in the cattle camps, to support their families in the annual crop harvest.

The migration of cattle constitutes a movement of a significant number of people, due in part to

a lack of resources in the settlements. In June, 29% of assessed settlements in Eastern Lakes named *moving to cattle camps* a common strategy to cope with a lack of food.

Situation in Assessed Settlements

Protection

Inter-communal tensions, which manifest themselves in fighting, cattle raids and land disputes, have been giving rise to protection concerns in Eastern Lakes, particularly in the past year. The effects of such strife is mostly felt by the populations living near county borders, particularly in the areas near the borders between the Yirols and Rumbek East, as well as Yirol East and Panyijiar. Tensions are also high along the Yirol East and West/Awerial, Yirol West/Mvolo borders and to a lesser degree along the Awerial/Terekeka border.

The frequent reports of inter-communal violence from FGD participants were also highlighted in REACH Area of Knowledge data, with 38% of assessed settlements reporting incidents of violent conflict in June, and a further 46% reporting incidents of looting — levels well above the countrywide rate of 24% and 34% respectively, and regionally only exceeded in Unity State.

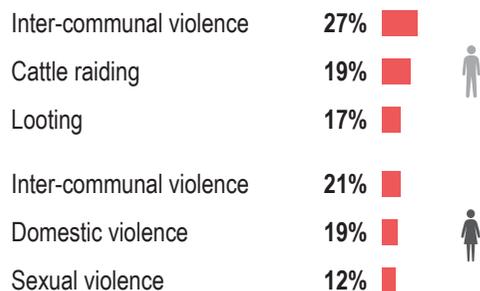
Indicative of the unrest in the border regions, being killed or injured by members from a different community was the most frequently cited protection concern for men (27%) and women (21%) in Eastern Lakes in June. Such high levels of conflict-related protection

5. MEDAIR, Assessment Summary Report - Yirol East County, August 2018

6. Phone interview with KI from Pagarau, May 2018

7. Key informant interview in Mingkaman, July 2018

Figure 1: Most cited protection concerns for men and women in assessed settlements, Eastern Lakes, June 2018



concerns for women were not observed in any other region in South Sudan. This may highlight the nature of the inter-communal conflict in the area, which is not fought along clearly defined frontlines but around and in settlements where communities reside. Sexual and gender-based violence related concerns for women were reported in 32% of assessed settlements to be the main protection concern.

In 19% of assessed settlements, cattle raids were named as the main protection concern for men, which is a sign of the high levels of cattle-related violence in Lakes. Cattle raids predominantly take place near county border areas and are reflective of the inter-communal violence in the region.

Eastern Lakes is the region with the highest proportion of assessed settlements reporting the occurrence of land disputes (36%). In Yirol East (43%), land disputes were even more frequently reported than in Awerial (29%) and Yirol West (32%), which may be linked to

tensions in the areas near the Rumbek East and Panyijjar border.

Due to the above-mentioned insecurity and resulting protection concerns, perceived safety of communities in Eastern Lakes tends to be relatively low. In 87% of assessed settlements, members of the communities never or only sometimes felt safe, which was above the countrywide percentage of 66%. IDPs in Mingkaman from Awerial, Yirol East and Yirol West consistently identified conflict-related protection concerns and lack of safety to be among the primary reasons for displacement.⁸

Food security and livelihoods

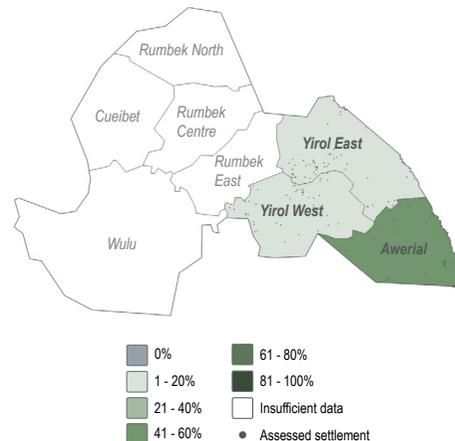
The above discussed insecurity and protection concerns, as well as weather patterns and the concentration of humanitarian services to a few urban hubs had critical ramifications on livelihoods and the level of food security in Eastern Lakes in June.

Low levels of food security in Yirols; dependence on food assistance in Awerial

At the regional level, Eastern Lakes was only slightly behind in a variety of food security indicators. Adequate access to food was reported in 24% of assessed settlements in Eastern Lakes in June. At the county-level, substantial differences were apparent: 57% of assessed settlements in Awerial had sufficient access to food, but only 17% in Yirol East, and 14% in Yirol West (see Map 3).

The relatively low levels of food security in Yirol East and West were further underlined by a high

Map 3: Percentage of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food, Eastern Lakes, June 2018



proportion of assessed settlements reporting that most members of the community ate fewer than 2 meals per day (see Figure 2) – a practice more commonly found in Eastern Lakes than in South Sudan overall (45%). Likewise, self-reported levels of hunger were considerably higher in Yirol East (65%) and West (54%) than in Awerial (32%) (see Figure 3).

While for most food coping strategies there were no differences across counties, *skipping entire days* was far more commonly reported in Yirol East (in 50% of assessed settlements) and West (42%). In Awerial (25%) such extreme coping strategies were at levels near the countrywide proportion (27%). The low levels of food security and resulting coping strategies in Yirol East and West were likely impacting nutrition outcomes: A SMART survey from June conducted in Yirol East found that

Map 4: Percentage of assessed settlements reporting food assistance as main source of food, Eastern Lakes, June 2018

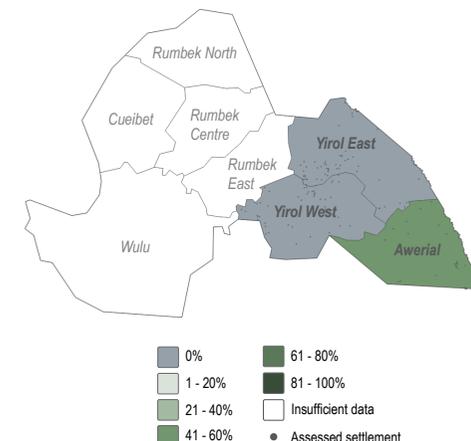


Figure 2: Percentage of assessed settlements reporting most people eating fewer than 2 meals per day, Eastern Lakes,

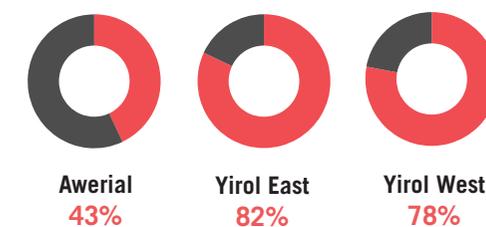
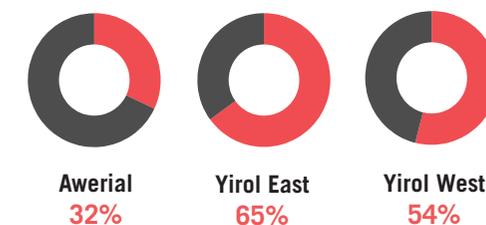
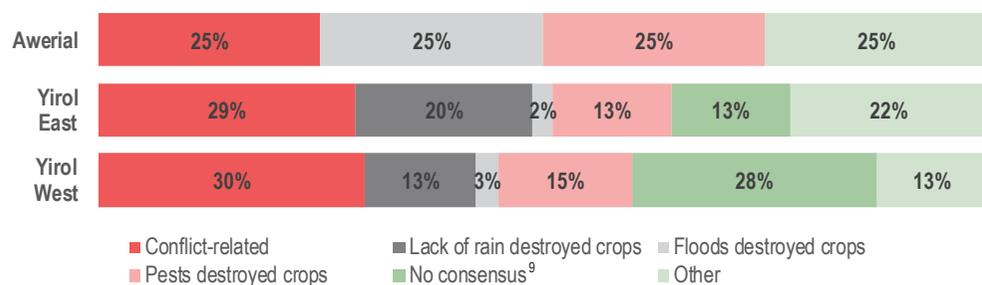


Figure 3: Percentage of assessed settlements reporting hunger is severe or the worst it can be, Eastern Lakes, June 2018



8. FGDs in Mingkaman with participants from Awerial, Yirol East and Yirol West, June 2018

Figure 4: Reported primary reason for inadequate access to food in assessed settlements without adequate access to food, Eastern Lakes, June 2018



the prevalence of GAM (WhZ) was above WHO thresholds at 22.6% (confidence interval: 19.3 - 26.3%).¹⁰

The relatively higher levels of food security reported in Awerial as opposed to Yirol East and West were linked to the substantial food assistance provided to communities in Mingkaman. In Awerial, 57% of assessed settlements reported that the community had received food assistance in the last 3 months; 43% reported (and 0% in Yirol East and West) that humanitarian assistance was the main source of food, which suggests a substantial dependence of Awerial's population on the General Food Distribution (GFD) in Mingkaman.

Violence drives food insecurity

In 21% of assessed settlements where access to food was inadequate in Eastern Lakes, insecurity was reported as the main reason, making it the most frequently named barrier to food security in Eastern Lakes.

The differences among counties were not substantial, though the impact of fighting on

food security is likely stronger in the tense border areas where inter-communal violence is prevalent. Key informants from these areas identified fighting and the resulting limited access to lands for cultivation as a major driver of food insecurity. Protection concerns in those areas were particularly high, and movements for cultivation are thus kept at a minimum.

Reflective of tensions in border areas, FGD participants furthermore stated that violence in some border areas led to destruction of farming land and agricultural inputs, while cattle raids reduced herd size of cattle owned by the communities.

Weather patterns delay harvest and reduce crop yields

Abnormal weather patterns and a disproportionate distribution of rainfalls have created challenges to crop production throughout the region.¹¹ Reductions in crop yields put the communities at risk as a substantial portion of food traditionally comes from own production. In June, communities

in 74% of assessed settlements reportedly engaged in cultivation, which was the second most frequently reported livelihood activity after keeping livestock (see Figure 5).

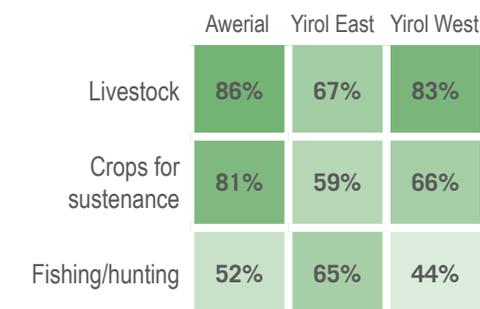
While in some areas in Awerial, too much rain led to flooded fields, other regions, especially in the Yirols, have witnessed limited rainfalls. WFP VAM data shows a rapid decline in rainfall levels in Eastern Lakes since June.¹²

According to FGD participants, the limited rainfall earlier in the year caused some communities to delay planting of the seeds, which will subsequently delay the harvest of the crops and possibly extend the lean season. Throughout June, the lack of rain caused the destruction of crops in some areas, which will reduce the output of the harvest and may put communities in a more vulnerable position when next year's lean season arrives. Indicative of the limited rainfall, 20% and 13% of assessed settlements in Yirol East and West reported that the lack of rain was the main reason for inadequate access to food in June.

Key informants reported a lack of rain to be a challenge to crop production in some parts of Awerial too. At the county-level, however, localised heavy rainstorms earlier this year led to crop destruction by floods: In 25% of assessed settlements, floods were named the main reason for a lack of food. In 25% of assessed settlements in Awerial, the inadequate food levels were mainly attributed to pests (such as fall armyworm).

The above mentioned challenges to food

Figure 5: Most commonly cited livelihood activities, Eastern Lakes, June 2018



security, namely inter-communal violence, a lack of safety, and abnormal weather patterns are critical push factors creating migration flows. Given the substantial provision of food assistance in Mingkaman, which has been a critical pull factor, food insecurity induced migration towards Awerial will likely persist.

Shelter & NFIs

The reported violence in county border areas was reflected in the number of reported shelter damages. While no destruction was reported in assessed settlements in Awerial, 18% (12%) indicated at least partial shelter destruction within the previous month in Yirol East (Yirol West). The reported shelter damage may be

Figure 6: Tukuls as main shelter type of host communities in assessed settlements, Eastern Lakes, June 2018



9. "No consensus" stands for settlements on which multiple key informants were surveyed but there is no modal answer for the respective indicator.

10. Help e.V., Pre-harvest SMART survey report, June 2018

11. Limited rainfalls had already affected Yirol East and West in the previous year.

12. WFP-VAM, CHIRPS/UCSB

linked to inter-communal fighting in the border areas towards Rumbek East and Panyijjar.

The residents of Eastern Lakes generally resided in permanent structures: Tukul were the main shelter type of host communities in virtually all assessed settlements in Eastern Lakes (see Figure 6), which was significantly above the countrywide average of 72%.

Due to the relatively low number of settlements hosting IDPs outside of the traditional catchment areas of Mingkaman and Yirol Town, the collected data on IDPs' shelter and NFI needs was insufficient to be analysed. Furthermore, no distribution of NFIs reportedly took place in any of the assessed settlements in Eastern Lakes.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

WASH conditions in Eastern Lakes are poor. Limited access to improved water sources and the widespread practice of open defecation create an elevated risk of water-borne diseases.

Access to improved water sources (e.g. borehole, water yard, tap stand) was low in

Figure 7: Main source of drinking water in assessed settlements, Eastern Lakes, June 2018

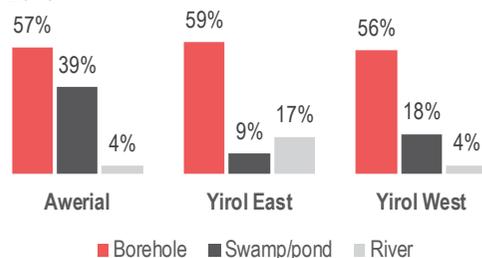
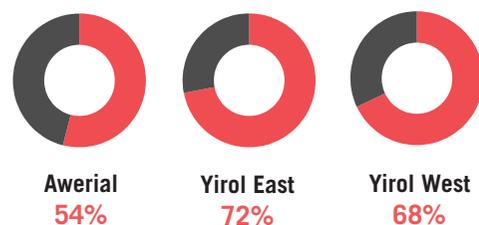


Figure 8: Percentage of assessed settlements without latrine usage, Eastern Lakes, June 2018



settlements assessed across Eastern Lakes, only 59% of assessed settlements reported access to improved water sources in June, which is near the 53% country-average. The main sources of drinking water besides boreholes were swamps, ponds and rivers.

In Aerial, 39% of assessed settlements reported that swamps and ponds were the main sources of drinking water in June, which is due to the large proportion of settlements located in swampy areas along the Gel River. Gathering water from swamps and ponds is less common in Yirol East, where rivers (such as the Yei River) were in turn more frequently used as water sources.

Posing a risk for those settlements with no access to improved water sources, open defecation was widespread in Eastern Lakes in June. With 72% and 68% of assessed settlements reporting that none of the people in their community were using latrines, Yirol East and Yirol West were above the countrywide average of 58%. The primary reason given for not using latrines was the lack of latrines in their settlements.

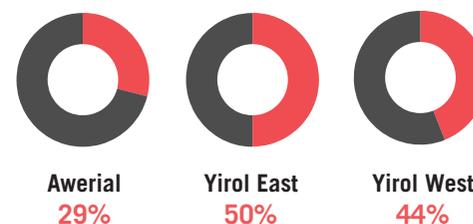
Since many people live along rivers or near swamps, which are frequently used as primary sources of drinking water, open defecation can contaminate water sources and represent a serious health risk, especially in the rainy season when incidences of waterborne diseases are usually on the rise.

Health

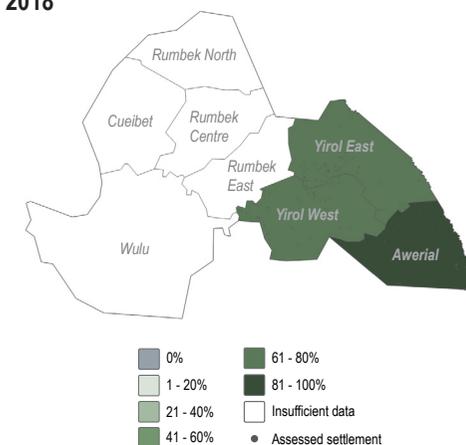
All assessed settlements in Aerial reported access to healthcare, but only around 70% in the Yirols. The settlements without access are likely in remote areas, making the public and INGO-supported hospital in Yirol Town too difficult to reach. Wherever health facilities were not accessible, it was mainly because there had previously never existed one in the area, likely due to remoteness.

AoK figures suggest relatively high rates of malaria, notably in Yirol East and West, where 50% and 44% of assessed settlements reported malaria to be the main health concern. The levels are likely elevated during the wet season. As rainfall intensifies, the prevalence of malaria may further increase in the coming months.

Figure 9: Percentage of assessed settlements with malaria as main health concern, Eastern Lakes, June 2018



Map 5: Physical access to healthcare in assessed settlements, Eastern Lakes, June 2018



In early 2018, WHO declared a rift valley fever (RVF) outbreak in Eastern Lakes.¹³ Though RVF primarily affects animals, it can also spread to humans. Despite effort from the humanitarian community to contain the disease, suspect cases continued to be reported in June.¹⁴ Accordingly, presence of livestock diseases was reported in 80% of assessed settlements in Eastern Lakes – levels not seen anywhere else in South Sudan. This high rate may in part be due to the RVF outbreak.

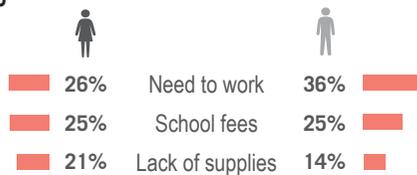
Education

The proportion of assessed settlements in Eastern Lakes reporting access to education was 58% in June, virtually the same as the countrywide average. The limited access to education services was mostly a result of a lack of facilities, as reported by 74% of assessed

13. WHO, Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response (IDSR) - Epidemiological Update, Week 12, March 2018

14. WHO, Integrated Disease Surveillance and Response (IDSR) - Epidemiological Update, Week 26, July 2018

Figure 10: Primary reason reported for lack of school attendance for girls and boys in assessed settlements, Eastern Lakes, June 2018



settlements without access.

While no differences to access to education existed across counties, there were considerable disparities in regard to gender. Reported school attendance was higher for boys than for girls, a phenomenon reported across assessed settlements in South Sudan. The extent of the gender disparity was even more pronounced in Eastern Lakes than in South Sudan at large. In 93% of assessed settlements, at least half of boys were attending school, while the same was reported for girls in only 32% of assessed settlements.

The primary reasons given for not attending school (see Figure 10), for both boys and girls, were the need to work, school fees and a lack of supplies.

Conclusion

Due to the absence of active frontlines, limited exposure to the ongoing conflict on the national level, and the perception that inter-communal fighting and cattle raids have historically been a *normal* occurrence in the region, Lakes state has often been overlooked by the humanitarian

community.

However, violence in county border areas, including fighting and cattle raids, have spiked in the last year. Coupled with worsening food security levels, this has created increased migration flows from Eastern Lakes towards Mingkaman.

Many indicators paint a concerning picture of the Yirols, while the severity of humanitarian needs in Awerial is more in line with South Sudan at large. Only a few humanitarian actors have been supporting communities in Yirol East and West as opposed to Awerial, where substantially more food assistance is provided. Besides low levels of food security, protection concerns due to inter-communal violence and a recent influx of a large number of IDPs, poor hygiene conditions, high reported rates of malaria as well as limited access to healthcare services create challenges to the population residing in the Yirols.

The grim food security situation in Eastern Lakes is further amplified by a lack of rain, especially since June. The abnormal weather conditions will likely have an impact on crop yields and potentially delay this year's harvest, thus extending the lean season, which in turn increases the need for humanitarian aid.

Data on the humanitarian situation throughout Lakes has been scarce. Future rounds of REACH data collection will provide further evidence on the above outlined dynamics and shed more light on the needs of the local population.

About REACH

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. All REACH activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms.

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