

Situation Overview: Ulang and Nasir Counties, Upper Nile State, South Sudan

January – March 2018

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IMPACT Initiatives
ACTED and UNOSAT

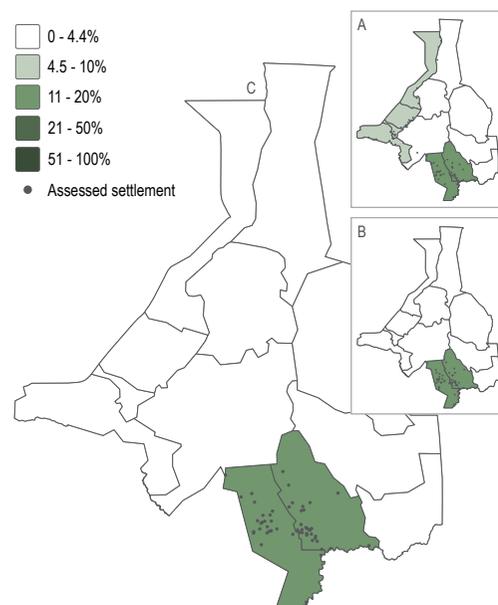
Introduction

The first quarter of 2018 was characterised by episodes of insecurity in Nasir County and Jonglei state that led to displacement into Ulang County.¹ Ahead of the lean season, which is expected to start in May, access to food remained stable and relatively high from January to March 2018. Furthermore, shelter and WASH conditions improved seasonally while protection concerns worsened in line with the reported insecurity.

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 Western Bahr el Ghazal region is collected on a monthly basis.

From January to March 2018, REACH interviewed 267 Key Informants (KIs) from 75 settlements in Nasir and Ulang Counties in Upper Nile State. All the KIs were interviewed in Akobo, Jonglei State. Findings have been triangulated using one Focus Group Discussion (FGDs) conducted in Akobo, Jonglei State with KIs that had been displaced from Ulang and Nasir Counties, as well as with interviews with humanitarian actors, secondary data, and

Map 1: Assessment coverage in Ulang and Nasir Counties in January (A), February (B) March 2018 (C)



previous REACH assessments of hard-to-reach areas of Upper Nile State.

This Situation Overview outlines displacement and access to basic services in Ulang and Nasir Counties from January to March 2018. The first section analyses displacement trends in these two counties, and the second section evaluates access to food and basic services for both displaced and non-displaced communities.

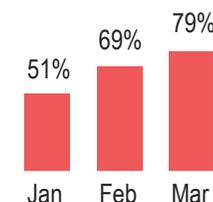
Ulang and Nasir Counties are both located in the northeastern maize and cattle livelihood zone.² Instead of providing individual analysis, figures throughout this situation overview are thus presented for an aggregate of the two counties.

Population Movement and Displacement

In the first quarter of 2018, two displacement movements towards Ulang County were reported, both of which created challenges for food security among the displaced population. Thousands of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) fleeing from conflict in Jonglei State reached Ulang County in two waves in February and March 2018.³ Most of the IDPs from Jonglei settled in areas near the state border. Many reportedly arrived without any assets, suffered from hunger and lacked adequate shelter.⁴

In Nasir County, sudden escalation of violence led to the displacement of thousands of people in February 2018.⁵ Many of these IDPs fled to neighbouring Ulang County.⁶ Signs of severe hunger were reported among the arriving IDPs.⁷ An unreported number of people also fled across the border to Ethiopia, as recorded by UNHCR refugee inflow data from January to March 2018.⁸ From late February onwards, the situation in Nasir County generally remained

Figure 1: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting IDP presence in Ulang and Nasir Counties



calm but perceptions of insecurity persisted across the area. The episodes of conflict in Jonglei State and Nasir County and the consequential influx of IDPs are underlined by the increase in the proportion of assessed settlements reporting presence of IDPs, from 51% in January, to 69% in February and 79% in March.

The displacement movements coincided with seasonal cattle migration in the areas of Ulang and Nasir Counties. During the dry season from January until April of each year, cattle keepers from parts of Jonglei State, such as Nyirol, move into Upper Nile State to let their cattle graze along the fertile grounds of the Sobat river. According to FGD participants, it is likely that the previously mentioned displacement of conflict-affected communities occurred in parallel with the seasonal cattle migration.⁹ As in previous years, associated with this seasonal migration, securing free movement for cattle

1. IRNA, Ulang County, February-March 2018.
2. FEWSNET, South Sudan Livelihood Zones, 2017.
3. IRNA, Ulang County, February-March 2018.
4. Ibid.

5. IRNA, Bitutgok Camp, March 2018.
6. MEDAIR, Ulang County WASH Assessment report, March-April 2018.
7. IRNA, Bitutgok Camp, March 2018.
8. UNHCR, Ethiopia Factsheet January-March 2018.

METHODOLOGY

To provide an overview of the situation in largely inaccessible areas of Upper Nile 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 Akobo, Jonglei 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 4.5% of the settlements of a county were assessed each month. In January, February and March 2018, this threshold was attained for both Ulang and Nasir Counties.

Due to access constraints, which may impact coverage each month, some changes over time reported in this situation overview might be due to variations in coverage

Please note that REACH is in the process of establishing sustained data collection in Upper Nile State. As a result, the current coverage is limited. The conclusions drawn are therefore indicative of likely trends in Ulang and Nasir Counties and do possibly not capture the humanitarian situation in some of the settlements worst affected by episodes of violence.

and access to pastures and water also poses the risk for future conflict with other pastoralist communities.

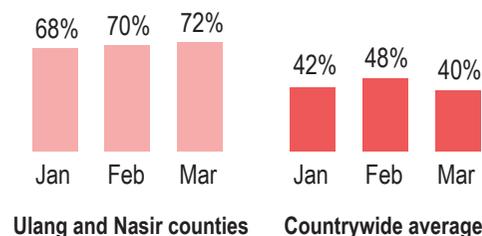
Situation in Assessed Settlements

Food security and livelihoods

Trends, particularly for food security and livelihoods, were generally similar across Ulang and Nasir Counties as both are located in the northeastern maize and cattle livelihood zone.¹⁰ The proportion of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food remained consistently high across Ulang and Nasir Counties with 68%, 70% and 72% of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food in January, February and March, respectively. These proportions are on the same level as in October to December 2017, and high if compared to the countrywide average of 42%, 48% and 40% in January, February and March respectively.

These relatively high levels of reported adequate access to food among the settlements assessed in Ulang and Nasir Counties are potentially

Figure 2: Proportion of assessed settlements reporting adequate access to food from January to March 2018



attributable to food distributions by humanitarian actors. In March, 47% of assessed settlements reported that the main source of food was humanitarian food distributions, similar to 39% in February and a slight increase compared to the 34% in January. This is also reflected in the 49% of assessed settlements in March reporting having received food assistance within the previous three months. The second most often reported source of food was fishing and hunting, reported by 22% of assessed settlements in January and 18% in February, but only 4% in March. Many settlements in Ulang and Nasir Counties are situated along the Sobat river and traditionally, fishing has been an important source of food for people in the area. In March, the second most often reported food source was cultivation, reported by 21% of assessed settlements across Nasir and Ulang Counties. This is likely a reflection of the vegetable harvest season, which traditionally takes place in the first quarter of the year.

Trends in most commonly reported food sources are also mirrored in the most commonly cited livelihood activities. Fishing and hunting remained a common livelihood source in 90%, 70% and 47% of assessed settlements in January, February and March, respectively. These proportions indicate that there has been a decrease in assessed settlements in which members of the community were fishing and/or hunting. This is also reflected in the above described reduction between January and March in the proportion of assessed settlements reporting fishing as the most common food source. Since fishing in Ulang

and Nasir Counties is seasonal it is possible that the amount of fish has decreased with the progression of the dry season, when less fish is seasonally available.

From January to March, between 97%-100% of assessed settlements in Ulang and Nasir Counties reported that people in their communities possessed cattle, either near the settlement or at pasture. Between 52%-61% of assessed settlements were furthermore reporting currently engaging in keeping livestock as a livelihood activity. As between 97% and 100% of assessed settlements had physical access to their cattle, most communities had access to livestock providing an important additional food source and products such as milk.

Comparatively fewer assessed settlements reported that members of the community were engaging in agriculture for sustenance. In January, this was reported in only 44% of assessed settlements. The proportion remained similarly low in February at 39%. By March, the share had increased to 53% reflecting the vegetable harvest as well as land preparation for crops, which traditionally happen around that time of the year.¹¹

Only 12% to 30% of assessed settlements reported casual labour as a livelihood activity among members of their community from January to March. This relatively low prevalence of assessed settlements in Ulang and Nasir Counties reporting casual labour is likely linked to the low market access in those two economically isolated counties, which limits

9. According to FGD participants from Upper Nile interviewed by REACH in Akobo, April 2018.

10. FEWSNET, South Sudan Livelihood Zones, 2017.

11. Ibid.

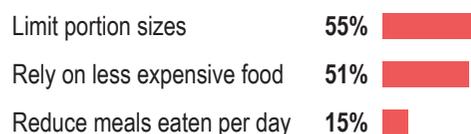
the scope for income generating activities: only 42% of assessed settlements had physical access to functional markets in March.

Generally, livelihoods sources seem to have been sustained in both Ulang and Nasir Counties, in spite of direct and indirect exposure to insecurity. However, humanitarian food distributions were described as a major source of food in the first quarter of 2018, potentially suggesting that traditional livelihoods generated less food than in a normal year, a likely reflection of the continued prolonged negative impact of conflict, displacement and other shocks on these two counties.

Coping strategies

The most often reported strategy was to limit the size of meals, reported by 54% of assessed settlements in January, compared to 75% in February and 55% in March. The spike of assessed settlements in February that reported that members of the community were limiting the size of meals is likely attributable to the influx of IDPs in the settlements, with whom the local community shared their food. Though more severe coping strategies were reported at equally high levels in January and February, there was a steep decline in March: while in January prioritising children was reported in 56% of assessed settlements, it was only registered in 11% in March. Skipping entire meals as a coping strategy fell from 41% of assessed settlements in January to 13% in March. The reported decline in these severe strategies may be a reflection of the vegetable harvest becoming available in March, providing

Figure 3: Most cited food coping strategies in assessed settlements in March 2018



an additional food source. At the same time, however, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting consumption of wild foods sometimes or all of the time remained high at 34% in March, indicating that wild food consumption remains an important alternative food source. At times, this is associated with serious health risks, with between 22% and 30% of assessed settlements reporting people falling sick from wild foods.

Protection

Reflective of continued insecurity, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting incidences of conflict remained high throughout the January (59%) to March (53%) period. Perceptions of security slightly decreased, which is likely linked to the uptick in violence in February.

Perceived safety slightly decreased from January to March. In January, 54% of assessed settlements in Ulang and Nasir Counties reported that people were feeling safe sometimes and in 15% of the assessed settlements it was reported that people felt safe at all times. In February, people reportedly felt safe sometimes in only 39% of assessed settlements, while they never felt safe in 23% of the assessed settlements. In March this

situation remained similar, with 21% of assessed settlements reporting that the population never felt safe and that 40% felt safe sometimes. This deterioration in perceived safety may be indicative of the episodes of violence that occurred in February and continued to affect the area in March.

Indicative of risks linked to cattle keeping, for men in the assessed settlements, cattle raiding was reported to be the main protection concern by between 14% and 21% of assessed settlements from January to March. Being killed or getting injured by members of a different community was reported to be the main protection concern in 11% to 20% of assessed settlements in January to March.

For women, the share of assessed settlements reporting no protection concerns fell from 46% in January to 26% in March. One of the most often reported main protection concerns was sexual violence (reported by 7%, 14% and 6% of assessed settlements in January, February and March, respectively). The slight peak

Figure 4: Most cited protection concerns for men and women in assessed settlements in March 2018



in February may be linked to the increase in violence around that time.

Protection concerns generally also rose for children. The share of assessed settlements reporting no protection concerns for boys (girls) fell from 51% (56%) in January to 30% (28%) in March. Increases in specific protection concerns, such as sexual violence against girls (from 5% in January to 15% in March), as well as abduction of girls (from 2% to 13%) were registered.

Shelter

Regardless of the reported insecurity, the share of assessed settlements with recorded shelter damage due to fighting remained relatively low and stable from January to March (around 5% to 7%).

Further reflective of conflict not having had a major impact on shelter structures in assessed settlements, there was a trend in the main shelter types in Ulang and Nasir Counties towards more advanced structures. In January, 49% of assessed settlements reported that the majority of the local population was residing in tukuls. In February and March, this proportion increased to 61% and 75%. In line with this, the proportion of assessed settlements where the local population was primarily staying in rakoobas decreased gradually from 32% in January to 20% and 15% in February and March respectively. While rakoobas are made of dried grass and can be constructed all year long, the construction of tukuls is normally seasonal, as the walls are made of mud, which

12. "No consensus" stands for settlements on which multiple key informants were surveyed but no consensus was found for the respective indicator.

Figure 5: Primary shelter type of local community in assessed settlements in January (left) and March 2018 (right)

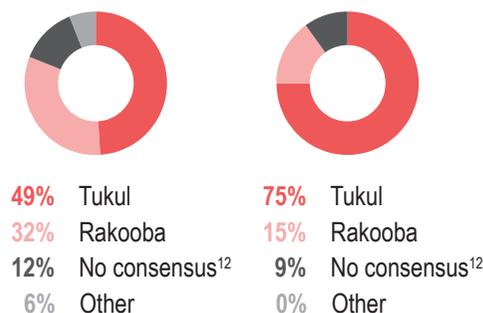
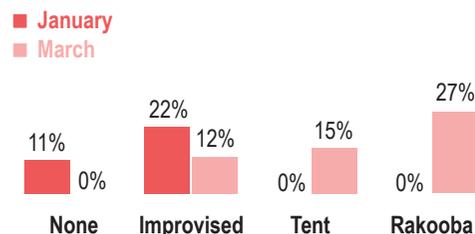


Figure 6: Selected shelter types of IDP community in assessed settlements in January and March 2018



more sophisticated structures, in spite of the displacement movements that were occurring in February.

NFI distributions were increasingly reported (37% in January; 68% in March) in assessed settlements. Furthermore, the share of settlements in which IDPs obtained NFIs from a humanitarian actor increased from 72% to 95% from January to March, thus underlining the reliance of IDPs in Ulang and Nasir Counties on aid. However, some NFI needs remain: jerry cans, mosquito nets, blankets and buckets were among the most needed NFIs in March.

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

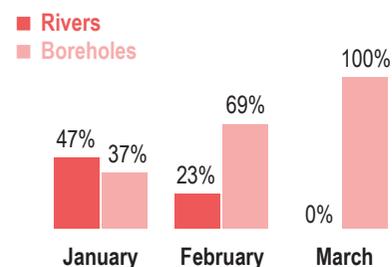
In the first quarter of 2018, the proportion of assessed settlements reporting the presence of boreholes remained similar, with 73%, 61% and 64% in January, February and March, respectively. Of those assessed settlements that reported the presence of boreholes, over 94% reported that boreholes were functional.

There was a shift towards improved sources of drinking water in the assessed settlements

from January to March. By March, all assessed settlements with functional boreholes reported that boreholes were used as the primary drinking water source. Even though the proportion of assessed settlements with functional boreholes was high in January, only 37% of these settlements reported that boreholes were used as the primary water source, while 47% reported rivers as the primary water source. In February and March the proportion of assessed settlements with functional boreholes and listing boreholes as the primary water source increased to 69% and 100% respectively. The proportion of assessed settlements with presence of a functional borehole reporting rivers as the primary source of water decreased to 23% in February and 0% in March.

This shift suggests that riverbeds were gradually drying out as the dry season progressed. It is likely that the wet season, which usually starts in April/May, will again increase the proportion of settlements resorting to rivers as their primary drinking water source. The Sobat river, one of the primary water sources for the populations in Ulang and Nasir Counties was reported to be

Figure 7: Primary water sources of assessed settlements with functional boreholes



dirty, used by livestock and often even polluted through the bodies of the deceased.¹³

Further exacerbating poor WASH conditions, open defecation continued to be widespread in Ulang and Nasir Counties, with 88%, 82% and 79% of assessed settlements in January, February and March reporting that less than half or none of the people in their community were using latrines. Since many people live along the river, which is often used as a primary source of drinking water, open defecation can contaminate water sources and represents a serious health risk, in particular ahead of the upcoming rainy season when the incidence of water-borne diseases is expected to increase.

Health

Reported access to healthcare in Ulang and Nasir counties remained relatively high and unchanged in the first quarter of 2018. In January, 76% of assessed settlements reported having access to healthcare services, similar to 64% in February and 72% in March. According to FGD participants, high levels of access to healthcare are mainly attributable to the presence of humanitarian actors in the area.

In the first quarter of 2018, one of the most often reported health issues was typhoid, reported as the primary health concern in 15% of assessed settlements in January and 9% in February and March. In February, wounds were the most often reported health concern, with 14% of assessed settlements reporting it to be the most common one. The increased proportion of assessed settlements reporting wounds as

requires the soil to be humid enough. The increase in the share of assessed settlements reporting tukuls to be the main type of shelter among the host community is therefore likely linked to the end of the dry season.

In contrast, none of the assessed settlements with IDP presence reported tukuls to be the main shelter type of IDPs in March. This may suggest that local communities are unable to absorb IDPs' shelter needs adequately and build more permanent shelter structures. However, a notable change from January to March was found for rakoobas and tents: while in none of the assessed settlements these two were the main shelter types in January, the shares had increased to 27% for rakoobas and 15% for tents by March. In the same time period, assessed settlements with a majority of IDPs having no shelter at all fell from 11% to 0%, and for improvised shelters from 22% to 12%. These figures suggest a shift away from the most basic shelter types towards

13. IRNA, Bitutgok Camp, March 2018.
14. Ibid.

Figure 8: Access to health services in assessed settlements in March 2018



72% of assessed settlements reported having access to health services

Figure 9: Access to education in assessed settlements in March 2018



57% of assessed settlements reported having access to education

the primary health concern is likely linked to episodes of violence in February.¹⁴ Malaria, which countrywide is one of the most common reported health issues, was only reported to be the most common health problem in 8% of the assessed settlements in March. However, the rainy season that usually starts in April/May, will potentially increase the concern for water-borne diseases and malaria, due to the increasing mosquito population. Flooding will furthermore worsen hygiene conditions and increase associated health risks.

Education

Access to education remained similar over the months of the first quarter of 2018. In January, 49% of assessed settlements reported that education possibilities were accessible to the people in the settlement, a similar proportion to the 45% in February and 57% in March.

Even when there was access to education, it was reported that not all children, particularly girls, were attending school. However, from January to March, children's school attendance slightly improved. Relatively less assessed settlements reported low school attendance of girls, with a decrease of 28 percentage points (pp) in settlements reporting less than

half of girls attending, and an increase of 25pp in settlements with half of girls in school. For boys, which generally have higher rates, the share of assessed settlements with more than half attending rose from 30% to 50% during the same time.

Reasons for not attending schooling varied. In 20% of assessed settlements where education was accessible in January, the main reason for boys not attending school was the lack of school supplies. By March this share had increased to 37%. The need to work, either in the home or outside, was the main reason in 17% of assessed settlements for girls in March, and 20% for boys. These shares had not changed much since January. In the cultivation season, from April onwards, however, it is possible that attendance of schooling, for both boys and girls, will decrease due to the increased need for children to assist their families in agricultural activities.

Conclusion

Although mainly Nasir County was directly affected by episodes of violence in the first quarter of 2018, most indicators suggested the humanitarian situation in both Ulang and Nasir Counties to be similar. The reported insecurity

manifested itself in decreasing perceived safety and rising protection concerns in both counties.

Access to food remained stable from January to March and relatively high compared to other areas in South Sudan, with humanitarian aid continuing to play a major role in communities' abilities to feed themselves. Traditional livelihood activities and food sources, however, shifted in relevance in the first quarter of 2018 due to seasonal factors. A gradual decrease in seasonal fishing activities was reported. Increasingly, people engaged in agricultural activities, such as vegetable harvesting and preparation of the land for crops. The reduction in fish was offset by foods from the annual vegetable harvest. Over the next few months, food security in the Ulang and Nasir Counties is likely to worsen with the progression of the lean season.

Shelter conditions generally improved. The end of dry season favors the construction of tukuls as the soil becomes more humid. Host communities thus increasingly used tukuls as main shelter type. For IDPs there was a shift from improvised or no shelter at all towards less basic shelter types, such as tents and rakoobas, despite the reported insecurity and displacement movements.

With some of the riverbeds of the Sobat river drying out in the dry season, people increasingly relied on boreholes - an improved source of drinking water, especially since the Sobat river is known to be polluted. With the wet season approaching, it is likely that there will be a shift back to the river being the main

source of drinking water, which will increase the risk of water-borne diseases, particularly as the practice of open defecation continues to be widely reported.

While access to education services remained stable across assessed settlements in Ulang and Nasir Counties, school attendance slightly improved and remains higher for boys than for girls. As there will be an increasing seasonal need for boys and girls to help their families in agricultural activities, school attendance rates may drop again over the coming months.

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.

For more information, you can write to our in-country office: southsudan@reach-initiative.org or to our global office: geneva@reach-initiative.org.

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