



Central and Southern Unity Verification Mission Report

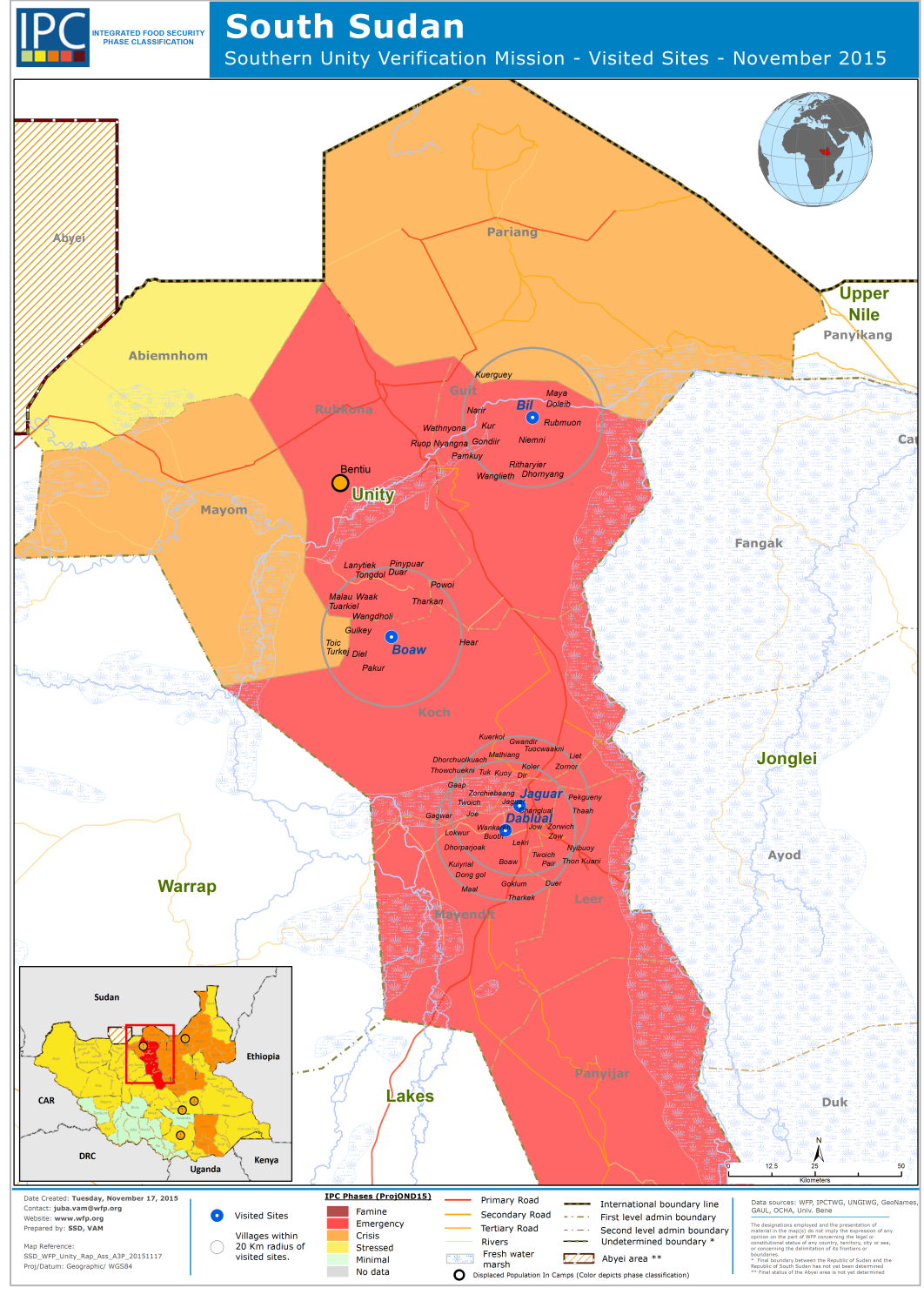
Final Report



20th November 2015

South Sudan IPC Technical Working Group in collaboration with ERC

Fig 1: Map of Southern Unity, October 2015



Acronyms

AWACO	Advocacy for Women and Children Organization
EFSA	Emergency Food Security Assessment
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FSL Cluster	Food Security and Livelihoods Cluster
FSNMS	Food Security and Nutrition Monitoring System
GAM	Global Acute Malnutrition
GRSS	Government of the Republic of South Sudan
JAM	Joint Aid Management NGO
KII	Key Informant Interview
MUAC	Mid Upper Arm Circumference
POC	Protection of Civilian
RRM	Rapid Response Mission
SP	Samaritans Pulse
SPEDP	Sudan Peace and Education Development Programme
SPLA/iO	Sudan People's Liberation Army in Opposition
SS IPC TWG	South Sudan Integrated Food Security Phase Classification Technical Working Group
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
WR	World Relief

I. Introduction

1.1 Context:

An estimated 3.9 million people (3.1 million in *Crisis* and 800,000 in *Emergency*) or 34% of the population are classified as severely food and nutrition insecure and are unable to meet their food needs in September. This is an 80% increase compared to the same period last year. Of extreme concern are the estimated 40,000 people in Unity State who were projected to be experiencing *Catastrophe* (according to IPC Classification Phase 5) and the situation is likely to deteriorate into famine in the absence of urgent and immediate humanitarian access. Although the August-September period typically marks the start of green harvests and reflects an improving situation from the peak lean season, the long-term effects of the conflict coupled with high food prices, erratic rainfall patterns, depleted livelihood options, and limited humanitarian access continue to put pressure on households' food security.

The Government of the Republic of South Sudan (GRSS) is also concerned that although there are minimal improvements from the lean season, a large proportion of the population will remain food insecure through December 2015 and if new shocks occur, their resilience into 2016 will be weakened even further.

Due to lack of sufficient evidence as the result of limited access to the affected areas, the SS IPC TWG was not able to verify the extent of the *Catastrophe* and possibly famine. It is against this background that an urgent verification mission is required in the following Counties/Payams; Mayendit (Dablual, Jaguar), Koch (Boaw), Leer (Kok) and Guit (Bil, Kedat).

1.2 Security Situation:

In May 2015, fighting erupted between the two main warring parties in Central and Southern Unity States counties of Guit, Koch, Leer, Mayendit and Panyijiar. It is estimated that this fighting displaced more than one hundred thousand civilians. Since the attacks started in May 2015, tens of thousands of cattle have been stolen while crops have been destroyed by the warring parties.

The conflict in central Unity remains very complex because of the involvement of some militias who are not under the regular command. While there is only limited information available about the locations of civilian populations, a majority of civilians are still believed to be sheltering in the bush and in some island villages

1.3 Mission Objectives

The objective of the mission was to conduct initial reconnaissance on the identified sites to understand the severity of the situation and to set the stage for the more in-depth assessment and surveillance in the field.

The specific objectives were:

Primary objectives

- To identify a number of enumerators to be trained at a later date
- To get clear estimated population numbers of the nearby settlements that will be used in determining the sampling strategy for periodic assessments
- To conduct an aerial observation of the areas being assessed

Secondary objectives:

- Conduct KII and/or FGD interviews to discuss basic issues of current foods consumed, food access, markets, etc.
- Conduct KII with at least three different people to identify recent deaths, and triangulate mortality information; determine best key informants and feasible methods for prospective mortality surveillance
- Administer ad hoc MUAC screening of convenience sample of children (30-40 max) ensuring different age groups and sex are represented in the sample measured. Record sex, age and MUAC measurement (not just category) for all children measured

1.4 Target Population

The following rural locations were selected using the following criteria; (a) they are areas assumed to be holding large populations that have been displaced, (b) there was no information about these areas in the last IPC and (c) they are the only sites which security clearance was granted. The four sites are located in the SPLM-IO controlled areas.

- Mayendit County, Jaguar and Dablual payams
- Guit County, Bil
- Koch County, Boaw payam

Two sites, Kok in Leer county and Kadet in Guit County were not assessed due to lack of security clearance and in Kok particularly, due to protection of civilians in the swamps.

1.5 Mission plan

Date	Location	Appx time
Tuesday November 10	Bil	5 hours
Wednesday November 11	Boaw/Panhial	4 hours
Thursday November 12	Dablual	4 hours
Friday, November 13	Jaguar/Thaker	4 hours

II. Methodology and design

2.1 Methodology

- Focus Group discussions
 - Key Informant interviews
 - Aerial surveillance
 - Observations
 - MUAC

2.2 Design

2.2.1 Activity 1: Reconnaissance

- No sampling was required:- Visited four sites in three counties where teams shared responsibilities and conducted KII/Focus Group discussion/ observations and ad hoc MUAC screening.

2.2.2 Activity 2: Identification of Enumerators

- The enumerators were identified with the support of partners on ground. They are local people with experience in conducting assessments on the ground with other agencies such as FSNMS, EFSA, SMART surveys, etc., and are able to speak, read and write in English. The list of partners identified is as followed:
 - Depending on the security situation and the possibility of WFP/ UNICEF RRM Team carrying out response in Dablual, the next feasible plan is to organize training for participants from Dablual, Jaguar and Thorynor in Dablual before the end of November.
 - Another separate round of training will be conducted in Boaw for participants from Guitt County Koch and Kok (Leer) after the Dablual training.
 - The process of identification of Enumerators is still ongoing for some other locations where surveillance activities will be established.
 - World Relief in Boaw will send the finalized list of proposed Enumerators

County	Location	Name of participant	Category	Organization
Mayendit	Dablual	John Manyiel Gadtet	FSL	AWACO
		Bichok Drijok Kai	FSL	AWACO
		Peter Bidot Keat	Nutritionist	AWACO
	Jaguar	Maincourt Peter Puol	FSL	
		Gatchak Koak Mayian	FSL	
		John Taker Gatluak	FSL	
Guitt	Bil	Michael Thoare Gatpan	FSL	JAM
		James Gatluak Nen	FSL	JAM
		Clement Lieth Wictuor	Nutritionist	CARE
		David Lawal Wuor	Nutritionist	CARE
	Kedat	William Bol Koang	FSL	JAM
		Vacant		
		Vacant		

Rubkona	Thanyang	Vacant		
		Vacant		
		Vacant		
	Ngop	Vacant		
		Vacant		
Vacant				
Koch	Boaw	Peter Gatmai Yak		
		Simon Mapuok Dabuol		
	Koch	Gai Chuol Chath		
	Kourier	Vacant		
		Vacant		
Vacant				
Leer	Thorynor	Gatkan David Jal		
		Buom Juong		
		Gatluak Dak Jiek		
	Kok	Thir Simon Tekjiek		
		Vacant		
Vacant				

III. Limitations

- A major limitation of the mission relates to accessibility challenges: Mission unable to reach some sites due to security challenges—and even in areas reached, some segments of the population in hiding could not be assessed. The sites in Korier in Koch, Thornyor and Kok in Leer and Kedat in Guit were not assessed.
- Unreliable information with low confidence particularly for Population estimates. People interviewed and even in FGD were unsure of the population size of the surrounding villages.
- Maximum time to be spent at site was four hours restricting the extent of interviews and number of households reached.

IV. Key findings

4.1 Food security situation

- **Food sources and number of meals**

- The primary food source for all households in areas visited were entirely dependent on water lily and fish consumption collected from rivers and swamps within their localities. Since swamps and rivers normally recede during the dry season months of January to March, there is a real risk that these households will have no access to any food at all by early next year. Other available seasonal, food items being consumed are *Thow* or Lalop fruits, *Thok* or wild palm fruit, and *path* a locally available wild vegetable. The exception was in Bil where the team observed that gardens had been cultivated and a few household members were consuming some green harvests of maize and some had stored up some seeds for next planting season, suggesting that there has been some late crop production in 2015.
- Fish is the only available source of protein and is available locally. The fishing nets and hooks distributed by FSL cluster partners towards late August and also during the reconnaissance mission as part of the livelihoods humanitarian assistance package which has proved extremely useful for households that benefitted in this regard.
- WFP food distribution was conducted in Boaw payam by targeting 7.5 kilos per person for 15 days (half month ration of sorghum) in October 2015. Unfortunately, the day after the distribution the area was attacked and most of the food was looted.
- In all the locations visited, household members were consuming one to two meals of water lily porridge and fish on a daily basis. The assessment team observed that the diet was not diversified. While the nutritional content of water lily seeds and tubers is not known, it is likely that constant consumption has helped to prevent them from experiencing a catastrophic situation.
- Water lily harvesting is being controlled by local leaders in all the areas visited for a period six to seven days for fear of overharvesting. However, during the days of harvest, a household can harvest as much as they can.
- When asked to compare their feeding habits with the period before the conflict, households used to consume three to four meals which were composed of both animal and crop sources such as milk, meat, fish blood, sorghum, maize, sesame (*simsim*) and groundnuts.

- **Markets**

- Markets were virtually non-existent in all locations visited. Markets were destroyed during the recent fighting that started in May 2015. Households have no purchasing power due to limited income sources thus are unable to purchase food items. In addition, there are difficulties for traders to move merchandise to these locations due to insecurity and fear of looting.
- The reconnaissance mission heard from respondents that Informal and very much insignificant markets have been established between Nyal and Adok in Leer County where very few men are able to travel by canoes at night to secure very little food items from Nyal in Panyijiar for between two to four days; others located in Bil (Guit) and Boaw move to Bentiu POC to access market.

- Only women are allowed to cross from one location to another in the major town centres of Leer, Panyijiar, Mayendit and Koch. Despite this access, very few women are able to reach these markets as a result of insecurity.
- **Income sources**
 - In all the areas visited there was no sustainable income source. Households in Bil and Dablual payams reported selling some dry fish in Bentiu and Panyijiar respectively. This takes an average of three to four day travel in both locations.
 - Majority of households reported that they previously relied on income from sale of livestock which was lost during the recent conflict.
- **Cultivation/own production.**
 - Overall, in all visited locations, some crop cultivation occurred in 2015, but the owners of the gardens harvested little or nothing due to conflict. The impact of the conflict on cropping was mixed across these areas. In some sites (Boaw, Dablual, and Jaguar) destruction of crops happened during the recent June/July conflict. In other areas, crops were looted while at green harvest stage (In Jaguar). Very few households in Bil and Jaguar Payams indicated that they are consuming maize and okra.
- **Livestock**
 - In all the locations visited there was no observable presence of a large number of cattle or shoats. This observation is consistent with responses from the FGD and KI interviews that all animals were looted during the several attacks that have occurred since May 2015.

4.2 Nutrition

County Name	Location	Children Screened (6-59 months)	Number of SAM Cases	Number of MAM Cases	Proxy SAM	Proxy MAM	Proxy GAM
Guit	Bil ¹	4	0	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Koch	Boaw	104	0	5	0.0%	4.8%	4.8%
Mayendit	Dablual	85	2	6	2.4%	7.0%	9.4%
Mayendit	Jaguar/Thaker	231	5	18	2.2%	7.8%	10.0%

- Based on the *ad hoc* MUAC screening, Dablual and Jaguar/Thaker payams recorded the highest proxy GAM rate which was 9.4% and 10.0% respectively. As only four children were screened in Bil payam, this number was insufficient to draw any conclusion. However, in Boaw payam, out of the 184 children screened, 5 children were found to be moderately malnourished which represents a proxy GAM of 4.8%.

¹ No sufficient information was collected

- UNICEF RRM and WR were present on ground in Boaw during the visit doing follow up of children put on treatment for acute malnutrition in previous RRM mission, identifying and treating newly identified cases hence the small proxy GAM
- Noteworthy, GAM based on MUAC is much lower than that of weight for height for South Sudan. Experience shows that MUAC based GAM rates are about half those for W/H. This therefore strongly suggests that the actual GAM rates in Dablual and Jaguar/Thaker payams could be at critical level.
- No cases of Oedema were identified in all the locations.

4.3 Mortality

- In each location (except Bill Payam which relied on only one key Informant), three key informants were interviewed separately for verification of death in the community in the last one month. Triangulation of the information on deaths was done based on the responses from the three key Informants.
- Both the young and the old are buried in a similar way. No funeral rites conducted for these deaths and are buried at their homesteads.
- The number of deaths per 10,000 people per day is an indicator which is recommended in acute humanitarian emergencies when mortality is changing rapidly and mortality rates are calculated daily or weekly. Given a population in the settlement as informed by the authorities, then the crude death rates was calculated using the standard formula:

County Name	Payam Name	Population	No. of deaths	CDR	U5MR
Guit	Bil	1,720	3	0.58	1.01
Koch	Boaw	8,000	2	0.13	0.22
Mayendit	Dablual	3,000	3	0.33	0.58
Mayendit	Jaguar	3,000	4	0.44	0.58

Crude Death rate = ((Number of Deaths/ Populations) X 10,000)/ number of days.

4.4 Humanitarian assistance

- Minimal humanitarian assistance has been provided in all the locations due to the ongoing conflict. Between May and mid-August, there was no humanitarian assistance provided in these locations since all humanitarian actors had pulled out. However, a window of opportunity to deliver humanitarian assistance opened up from late August to date but remain limited.
- Fishing kits (hooks and nets) distributed in Bil, Dablual and Jaguar payams by FSL partners have proved an important livelihoods asset that ensure households have access to fish for food and sale in some cases.
- The mission observed that JAM through FAO provided fishing kits and vegetable seeds in September 2015 to about 5000 beneficiaries in Bil , IOM delivered survival kits in November

to about 500 beneficiaries, whilst SPEDP had just delivered additional 5000 fishing kits and vegetable kits for distribution in Bil at the time of the assessment mission.

- In Boaw, WFP provided a half ration of food in October 2015 but unfortunately most of the food was looted immediately after. Boaw received emergency fishing kits support from FAO in August to 200 people and in September 5000 fishing kits were provided again. About 880 survival kits were distributed also distributed in Boaw.
- In Boaw, UNICEF/WFP and WR treated 350 and 68 moderately and severely malnourished children respectively through two RRM missions on 22nd September and 10th November 2015. This is believed to contribute to the low proxy GAM rate experienced in Boaw and averted possibility of death in children due to malnutrition.
- In Dablual and Jaguar/Thaker fishing kits and vegetable seeds have been the only livelihoods assistance that has been provided in September, 2015.
- In October 2015, WFP distributed half-ration food aid however, the area was attacked following the distribution and most of the food was looted. Humanitarian responses that attract large masses of populations such as food aid distributions have often been targeted in most of Southern Unity, as they are a pull factor of population masses to the distribution site. This has raised a lot of protection issues and was the primary reason for cancellation of Kok assessment.

4.5 Security/protection

- WFP security recommends all areas to be opened for humanitarian interventions as at the time of the assessment security was considered to be generally satisfactory.
- Need to have conversation with Leer/Mayendit Commissioner to confirm if indeed there is on-going conversation bordering on security guarantees for humanitarian assistance provision. It was noted that IOM was in Bil and UNICEF was in Buaw suggesting these areas could be opened up to humanitarian assistance. So far, it seemed that everyone within the local leadership expressed desire to receive assistance.
- Leer County remains a highly insecure area and with highly restricted civilians movement.
- Seasonally, we are going into a fragile period in terms of the peace agreement and formation of the government of national unity and seasonal dryness in most of the areas. The fact that we are going into dry season could result in increase in insecurity/violence.
- While it is very likely that any assistance delivery could draw a looting attack, the local community members are generally optimistic.
- The signed national compromise peace agreement is not a panacea for stability in itself. The conflict in Unity State appears to be fragmented and is driven by local level political interests.

V. Conclusion

- The assessment confirms that an emergency food security situation still exists in central and southern Unity. The mission was unable to confirm existence or absence of households in catastrophic conditions, till the wider assessment context is completed. The findings from the mission indicates that there is currently no famine -at least in the locations visited based on mortality, GAM rates, and the fact that people still have something to eat. The daily diets are based on water lily and fish, the only available food items, which are likely to become scarce as the rivers and swamps start drying up in the first quarter of 2016.
- Though findings did not reveal catastrophic conditions for now, there was a clear indication of a possible risk of further deterioration from January 2016 when the onset of dry period is expected, and fish harvest reduced.
- As the rainfall season comes to an end, it is likely that the current situation will further deteriorate. A combination of worsening insecurity (as a result of the dry season) and unavailability of water lily and fish (due to of drying swamps and rivers) will likely result in more households falling into catastrophe during the lean season if humanitarian assistance cannot be delivered in these locations.
- In most of visited areas, there was little or no food from own production. It was evident that community members planted their crops, but haven't been able to harvest any crops due to the conflict. Fighting that coincided with crop production time in May to July affected cultivation as communities could not engage in meaningful farming. In Dablual and Jaguar payams, fighting occurred at the start of the green harvest and crops were abandoned and looted by the attackers. All livestock were also looted from these communities.
- Absence of a comprehensive humanitarian assistance and essential social services is a major challenge in all the areas that were assessed.
- The reconnaissance mission team concluded that without any urgent food, nutrition, health and livelihoods assistance, chances are high that the situation will degenerate significantly into widespread catastrophe in the first quarter of 2016.
- Very limited kinship support still exists but is eroded by lack of food availability and restricted movements due to insecurity Markets were not functional in any of the areas visited during the mission.
- The improvement in the food security and nutrition situation depends to a larger extent upon the level of security and humanitarian access in central and southern Unity state.

VI. Recommendations

- There is an urgent need to utilize the prevailing slim window of opportunity to scale up humanitarian interventions in the central and southern Unity State. A comprehensive humanitarian response is required. In addition; there is also a need for essential social services interventions in order to meet the needs of the population in those locations.
- The planned food security and nutrition surveillance mechanism needs to be rolled out immediately in order to monitor households that are likely to fall into catastrophe situation. The food security situation is already very fragile and on the verge of a catastrophe. The two key factors that could tip the situation into a catastrophe are seasonal water recession and worsening security situation.
- Continuous monitoring of the security situation because of the complex and fragile context in central and southern Unity is an absolute necessity.
- There is need for further negotiation of access to these inaccessible location for both monitoring of situation and humanitarian response.