

Situation Overview: Displacement Wanding and Kier, Ulang, Upper Nile State

South Sudan, January 2017

REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action

Introduction

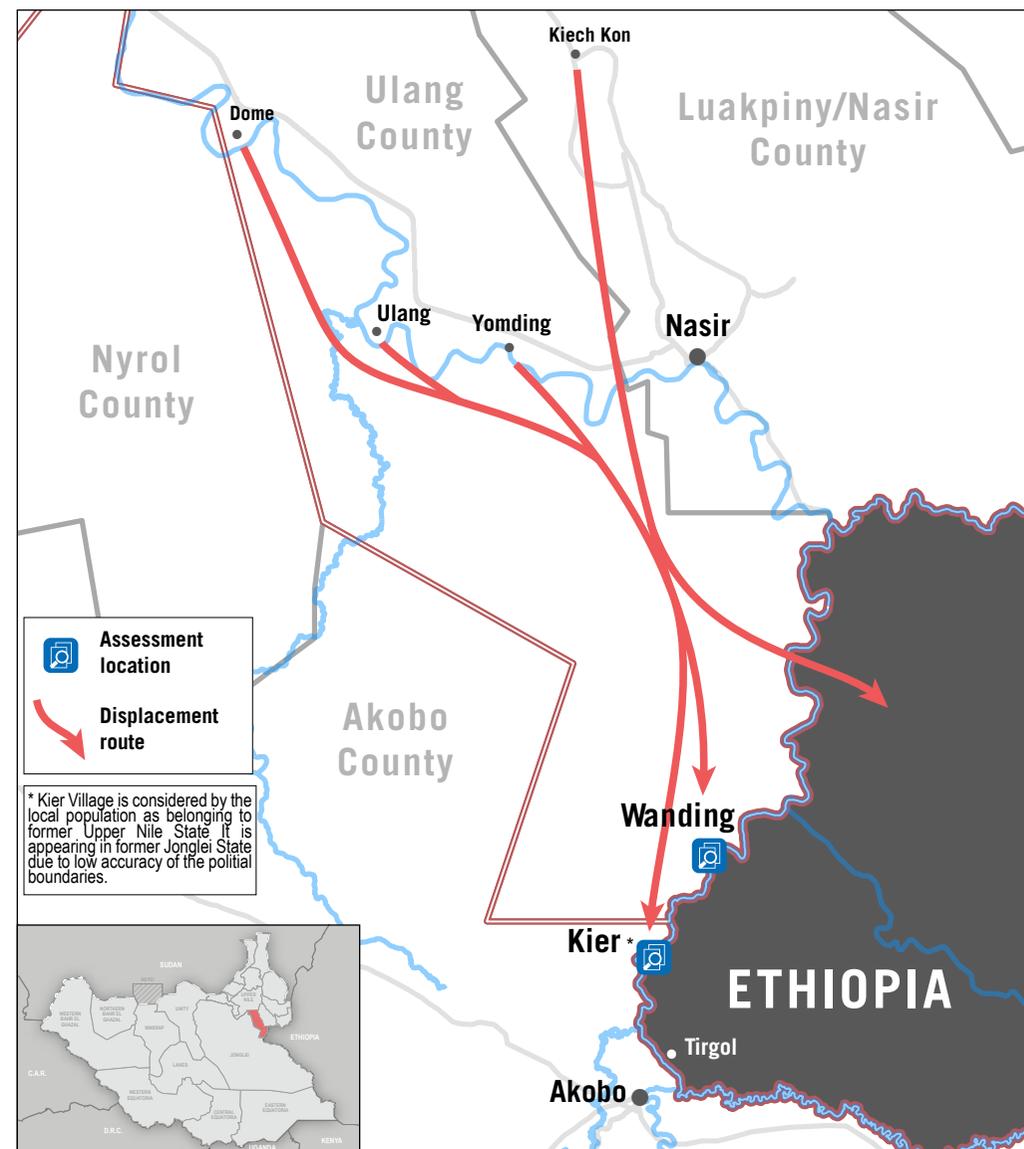
Wanding and Kier Bomas sit along the eastern bank of the Pibor River, bordering with Ethiopia. The remote location of both bomas has meant that they have been relatively unaffected by the conflict that has spread across South Sudan since the December 2013 crisis. However, insecurity in Ulang County between 2014 and 2015 has triggered a small wave of displacement into Kier and Wanding, and fighting south of Nasir Town in early January 2017 has resulted in further displacement into the area; as of mid-January, local authorities estimated that over 4,000 individuals had recently arrived into Wanding and Kier. This new influx has put increasing pressure on the resources of the local and pre-existing IDP communities, most notably food.

In order to better understand the initial displacement into Kier and Wanding in 2014-15, as well as the needs of the local and IDP populations, REACH travelled to the area to conduct a rapid needs assessment from 7-8 January 2017. This assessment consisted of four gender, age and status disaggregated

focus group discussions (FGDs), with 17 local community members and 13 IDPs from Yomding (Ulang County), and three key informant interviews (KIIs) with government officials in Wanding Payam Headquarters. Three FGDs were also conducted in Kier Boma with a total of 38 local and IDP community members. The assessment was aimed at improving understanding of conditions in both bomas, as well as displacement dynamics into the area during 2014.

Following this assessment, large numbers of IDPs were reported to have arrived in Wanding and Kier, fleeing fighting in the east of Nasir County in early January 2017. In response, REACH coordinated an inter-agency assessment, comprised of REACH, ACTED, International Medical Corps (IMC) and Oxfam, to the area on 12-14 January to conduct a rapid assessment of the recently arrived IDP population in Wanding and Kier. While specialists in partner NGOs conducted sector-specific needs assessments, REACH used its “Area of Knowledge” methodology to assess the situation in the places the IDPs had fled, understand the triggers and patterns of their displacement, and the intentions of the IDP communities. REACH conducted 13 FGDs with 77 IDPs, as well as three KIIs with local government authorities and community chiefs in Wanding and Kier Payam Headquarters¹.

This situation overview presents the findings of both REACH rapid assessments, outlining



Map 1: Displacement into Wanding and Kier, 2014 - 2015

1. Under the 21 State system, which has been adopted in some IO-controlled areas, Wanding Payam was made a County, comprised of three payams; Wanding, Wat and Kier. However, given the contested nature of the new state system, this report uses the previous ten state system. Under this, Wanding, Wat and Kier are bomas in Kurmuot Payam, Ulang County, UNS.

displacement trends and highlighting the key humanitarian needs of both the IDP and local community populations in Kier and Wanding. Due to the purposive sampling of the KIIs and FGD participants, findings are not generalisable to the entire population but remain indicative of the situation assessed. The findings summarised in this Situation Overview are strengthened by an additional REACH assessment of displacement into Jikmir, conducted later in February 2017².

Conflict in Wanding and Kier

At the time of writing, no inter- or intra-communal violence had been reported in Wanding or Kier Bomas. However, from 1993 to 2010, Wanding was the epicentre of inter-communal violence and saw numerous conflicts of varying scale with a neighbouring community over access to fishing grounds. The root causes appear to have been addressed and tensions resolved through traditional peace-building activities and, to a lesser extent, NGO interventions.

On 20 December conflict reportedly arose between the local community and a group of soldiers stationed in Wanding. After two days of low intensity conflict, the soldiers retreated from the area. Since then, both Wanding and Kier Bomas have been isolated from the larger ongoing conflict, and generally unaffected by localized intra-communal revenge killings that affect adjacent communities.

Population Movement and Displacement

As illustrated by maps 1 and 2, displacement to Wanding and Kier has been in two main phases, broadly reflecting the conflict dynamics of south-eastern Upper Nile State since the December 2013 crisis.

Phase 1: Ulang to Wanding and Kier, 2014 - 2015

Prior to the recent influx of IDPs from Nasir, a number of IDPs from Ulang County settled in Wanding and Kier Bomas in 2014. Though Wanding itself has seen little lasting conflict since December 2013, fighting in Dome in April 2014 and Nasir in May 2014, and subsequent destabilisation of the Malakal – Nasir corridor, resulted in the arrival of 570 men, women and children in Wanding at the beginning of July 2014³.

The IDPs from Yomding Payam, Ulang, left their homes and their possessions behind and fled on foot. An interview with a member of local government, himself an IDP from Yomding, stated that IDP population have largely been integrated into the local community since then. IDPs in Kier indicated that the same incidents had triggered their flight. Respondents stated that their displaced community of approximately 1,300 came from Yomding, Kiech Kon, Nasir, Dome and Ulang, all on foot. Those from Dome indicated that a surprise attack in the night forced the entire payam population (estimated at 6,000) to flee with few belongings. While most crossed the

border into Ethiopia, a few hundred travelled in small groups to Kier.

Phase 2: Nasir to Wanding and Kier, January 2017

Fighting reportedly began in the areas south of Nasir Town on 2 January 2017. A rapid assessment done by Nile Hope, one of the few NGOs operating in Nasir County, indicated that fighting reached Ketbek and Torpuot on 4 January, causing widespread displacement from these areas⁴. Many IDPs initially went to Mandeng and Makak to escape the fighting.

On 7 January, the fighting spread to Mandeng, Wangbub and Torkech Bomas leading populations to flee further south towards Wanding and Jikmir. IDPs reported that a small number of people also crossed the river into Ethiopia at Jikmir, where they are remaining close to the border. Local authorities reported an estimated 831 households (4,155 individuals) had arrived into the area since 7 January, with 573 household arrivals in Wanding Boma, and 258 in Kier⁵. It took IDPs between three and five days to travel down into the area, moving on foot through the bush, as there is no formal road. Lack of food, fear of wild animals and fatigue from walking barefoot made the journey difficult, particularly for those traveling with small children and children who were unaccompanied. Some IDPs traveled along the river so that they could fish, whilst others travelled through the forest with wild fruit as the only source of food.

Push Factors

Recently arrived IDPs in Kier and Wanding, interviewed in January, reported fleeing heavy fighting in the areas south of Nasir Town which broke out in early January 2017, adding that this was the first time fighting had reached their villages. Respondents said that the majority (“everyone”) of people in their villages had fled into the forest once fighting started, and then moved either to the town of Jikmir, near the border with Ethiopia, or further south to Wanding and Kier.

Pull Factors

IDPs stated that they chose Wanding and Keir because they perceived it to be safe, both because of the remote location⁶, and the close proximity to Ethiopia. The apparent availability of wild food was an additional pull factor. However, it appears that the area was one of the only “safe” places for IDPs to move to, as much of the land to the north and west of Nasir is now occupied by armed groups.

All respondents said that more people were still travelling towards Wanding and Kier. A FGD with several village chiefs suggested that just over half of the total population from the affected bomas had been displaced to Wanding and Kier. It is therefore extremely likely that the number of arrivals will continue to rise over the next weeks. Additionally, some IDPs reported that Jikmir was no longer perceived as safe; although also on the border with Ethiopia, was reportedly on the front line of fighting at the time of writing, and

2. REACH SSD. Situation Overview: Displacement in Nasir County. January 2017. [not yet published].

3. As reported by respondents.

4. Nile Hope. Rapid Needs Assessment Report on Displacement from Nasir. January 2017.

5. As reported during KIIs with local government.

6. The lack of accessibility by road is perceived as a deterrent to attack by armed groups.

is consequently believed to be vulnerable to attack. It is therefore possible that the large number of IDPs who have currently fled to Jikmir (Nile Hope estimates the number to be around 12,000⁷) will also travel south towards Wanding and Kier.

IDP Intentions

At the time of the assessment, IDPs arriving into Wanding and Kier reported that only a small number of people had moved across the border into Ethiopia at Jikmir, the majority stating that they preferred to remain in South Sudan “with our [their] community”.

FGD respondents reported that they were extremely unlikely to return to their place of origin until they were certain that fighting had stopped, and that armed groups were no longer occupying not only their villages but the whole of Nasir County.

The majority of the IDPs interviewed commented that they would prefer to stay in “Wanding County” (in both Wanding and Kier Bomas), and in Upper Nile more broadly, rather than move further south to Akobo. Several IDPs said that they had relatives in the area, and that more broadly, the people of Wanding were part of their community. However, the pre-existing food shortages, which are being further stressed by the new arrivals, will likely result in IDPs moving further southwards in search of food. To this extent, displacement may be dictated by the provision of aid, particularly given that members of the local community are already travelling to Gakdong Payam in Akobo County to receive food during Oxfam general food distributions (GFD). Although respondents indicated that they were hopeful that aid would be provided in Wanding, it is likely that the IDPs will begin moving into Akobo County in large numbers if humanitarian actors do not reach them in Wanding and Kier. As one respondent expressed, if they chose to remain in these two bomas, the new arrivals will likely experience severe food insecurity without humanitarian assistance.

Situation in area of origin

IDPs arriving into Wanding and Kier in January 2017 predominantly fled from the settlements southeast of Nasir Town, including Ketbek, Torpot, Wangbub and Mandeng. Respondents reported that “no one remains” in their settlements of origin, as fighting had destroyed their crops and homes. A group of men had attempted to return to their area of origin to gather what remaining belongings and resources they could find. However, only an estimated 150 cows were retrieved from across all areas of origin, the rest having been reportedly killed or stolen.

Prior to 2 January fighting however, it appears that the area was relatively unaffected by conflict. IDPs described cultivating maize and vegetables in farms and small gardens, which reportedly provided enough food for the whole population. In previous years, an international NGO had provided some areas with agricultural tools, such as pangas; although IDPs expressed that these were left behind when they fled south to Wanding and Kier.

Although respondents reported the presence of a small number of boreholes⁸, the majority of communities had to rely on the Sobat river for drinking water. Mandeng Town did have a functioning market, despite reportedly being cut off from all external trade routes, and IDPs reported that the only critical items that were not available were salt and shoes. However, some respondents stated that this market was looted and burned on 7 January.



Map 2: Displacement from Nasir settlements to Wanding and Kier, January 2017

7. Nile Hope. Rapid Needs Assessment Report on Displacement from Nasir. January 2017.

8. Respondents did not know the exact number

Healthcare facilities were reportedly available in Mandeng, with care provided by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and Nile Hope, although the hospital in Nasir Town had long since closed due to fighting.

Situation in Wanding and Kier

Wanding and Kier's remoteness have proved to be a mixed blessing – they have largely been isolated from the direct consequences of war, but have also been equally isolated from market activity, development assistance and humanitarian relief. Following the onset of the conflict, the once functioning market, school and health care center have closed, making Akobo the nearest source of these critical services.

Prior to the crisis, an NGO partner had begun implementing agricultural programming in Wanding, but fled following the outbreak of fighting and has not returned. Since then small-scale livelihoods and nutrition programming have been delivered in Wanding Boma, but the scale of the activities reportedly do not match the scale of the needs, limiting the impact of the intervention. Similarly, a general food distribution (GFD) took place in Wanding in July 2016 but no additional distribution has taken place since then. Kier has seen even less aid – residents reported that only one NGO had been active in the area prior to the December 2013 crisis.

Food Security and Livelihoods

FGD participants indicated that, prior to December 2013, residents of Wanding and neighbouring bomas had enough food to eat. There was reportedly access to seeds, tools and fishing nets, and community members were able to largely support themselves by fishing and cultivating a variety of crops, including maize, dura (sorghum), pumpkin and beans. This diet was supplemented with GFDs, which were delivered throughout the area during the lean season.

Local community respondents indicated that the food security situation in both bomas had dramatically changed over the past three years. At the time of the assessment, their diet consisted primarily of fish, wild fruit (laloup) and Gum Arabic. Occasionally, local community members are able to travel to Akobo or Tirog, in Ethiopia, to sell dried fish and purchase sorghum. However, as this is a 12 hour journey on foot, and there is limited and irregular potential for boat passage, this is a rare occurrence. Members of the local community also reported traveling across the border into Gakdong, Jonglei State, in order to receive food from the regular GFDs.

The local community in both assessed payams indicated attempting to cultivate in 2016, but crops were reportedly destroyed by pests (locusts, grasshopper), which was confirmed through REACH observations. All FGD respondents cited the lack of agricultural inputs – specifically seeds and tools – as the primary reason for their lack of food. They

further indicated that though fish were plentiful in the area, they did not have the means to fish on a large enough scale to meet the food needs of the population. Although the local community was able to share fishing nets with the IDPs who arrived into the area in 2014, these resources have been exhausted, meaning that the newly arrived IDPs in 2017 may need to borrow fishing equipment or ask for food to be shared with them.

Given that there is already a food shortage in Wanding and Kier, with the local community employing coping strategies such as foraging for wild food and eating Gum Arabic, the recent influx of IDPs has likely increased pressure on the limited resources in the area.

Markets

Prior to the December 2013 conflict, there was a small but functional market in Wanding "County" Headquarters selling essential items such as oil, salt, sugar, tea and soap, which were regularly supplied by boat. As no such market existed in Kier Payam, local community members would travel to Wanding or Akobo to trade. As conflict intensified in Nasir in May 2014, supply lines were severed and the market in Wanding was closed. Consequently, inhabitants of Wanding and Kier Bomas were reportedly dependent on the Akobo and Tigrol markets.

WASH

There are two boreholes in Wanding Boma, both drilled prior to December 2013. One of these boreholes was reported to be broken,

and the other appears to pump ferric iron water (clear water turns reddish and buckets turn rust red after being exposed to oxygen). Conditions of both pumps were verified by the assessment team. Many local community members and IDPs reported that they do not trust the water from the borehole and instead use the river as the primary source of drinking water. In Kier, the community relies entirely on water from the river. There are no latrines in the community; both local community and IDPs defecate in the open.

Shelter/NFI

In both bomas, the shelters observed were in good condition with the majority of people living in tukuls. Respondents indicated a surplus of natural construction materials in the area, with both grass and small timber being moved down the river to the market in Akobo. However, despite this, few shelters were built when IDPs arrived in 2014 due to a reported lack of tools – specifically axes for cutting trees. Consequently, the majority of this IDP population moved into shelters with the local community.

Similarly, in January 2017, the first IDPs to reach Wanding and Kier were hosted in local community compounds. However, as the new arrivals continued to increase, the capacity of the local community to provide shelter became saturated, resulting in IDPs having to stay under trees around the edges of the villages. One local government official estimated that at the time the assessment, there were an average of seven adults and seven children

occupying each tukul in Wanding. The numbers for Kier were not provided.

FGD participants indicated that very few local community members, as well as IDPs they're hosting, have access to mosquito nets. They also reported a lack of other standard NFIs, such as cooking and eating utensils. Similarly IDPs arriving in January 2017 were forced to leave their homes abruptly due to the rapid spread of fighting, and as a result did not carry shelter or NFI items, such as cooking pots, with them. Very few IDPs were observed to have brought luggage, beyond a small number of blankets and mosquito nets. The provision of NFIs, such as cooking utensils and fishing kits, should be considered a high priority for newly arrived IDPs, as this will enable them to support themselves and reduce reliance on the already-scarce resources of the local community.

Education

Primary education was reportedly available in Wanding Boma prior to the start of the conflict in 2013. Whilst the school building remained unfinished, the presence of sufficient teachers and materials (books, stationary) allowed the school to function. However, the intensification of conflict throughout 2014 prevented learning materials from being delivered, resulting in the school closing down. Despite teachers reportedly being present in the community, respondents indicated that no classes were being held at the time of the assessment. Only the few households that have sought asylum in Ethiopia have access to formal education.

Kier Boma also has no education facilities, and there were reportedly none available prior to the beginning of the crisis. At the time of writing, children from the boma who have relatives that are able to provide accommodation attend school in Tigrol and Akobo. No information was available on the number of children enrolled in either Tigrol or Akobo, or what level of education they were able to attain.

Health

At the time of the assessment, there was no functioning health centre and no medicine available in Wanding or Kier Bomas. Prior to December 2013, a small clinic was operational in the Wanding "County" Headquarters, which provided medicine and minor treatments, and Nile Hope ran a small clinic and nutrition centre in Kier. Similar to the school and markets, the intensification of fighting in Nasir in 2014 closed supply lines to the clinic. Consequently, respondents indicated that anyone requiring treatment have to travel to Akobo. Local community members and IDPs in both bomas reported the presence of malaria and diarrhea, the former a result of a lack of mosquito nets, the latter from drinking unclean river water. An NGO staff member who is native to Wanding, and works there on an outpatient therapeutic feeding programme, suggested there was widespread malnutrition across both payams.

Protection

Women walking into remote forest areas to collect Gum Arabic and laloup, two of the most important food sources for the community,

indicated they were potentially exposed to attacks by wild animals or neighbouring communities. Indeed whilst the team were in Wanding, a wild animal reportedly attacked a group of IDPs who had arrived in Wat Boma to the north of Wanding.

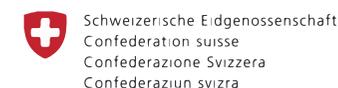
IDP respondents also reported incidents of rape and sexual abuse during the attacks on their villages in Nasir. At the time of the assessment, there were reportedly no services available to provide adequate support to these women. Additionally, there were a number of unaccompanied children reported amongst the newly arrived IDP groups.

Conclusion

Continued insecurity in Nasir County is likely to result in a situation of prolonged displacement, with IDPs predominantly moving south eastwards into Ulang County, and potentially on to Akobo County and/or Ethiopia. Wanding and Kier are resource-poor areas with limited capacity to absorb the approximately 4,155 individuals who have arrived since early January 2017.

Lack of food is the primary concern for both the local and IDP communities in Wanding and Kier Bomas, particularly if the numbers of newly arrived IDPs continue to rise. Both communities are currently adopting coping strategies, and are relying on a limited supply of wild fruit and fish. Wanding and Kier also lack sufficient WASH and healthcare facilities, as well as education and protection services. Whilst the displaced population is broadly

split between Jikmir Payam and Kurmuot Payam (where Wanding and Kier are located), focusing aid on one of these locations would likely encourage further IDP movement into that area. Given the threat of conflict in Jikmir, whether real or perceived, targeting Wanding and/or Kier may prove a more sustainable and secure option. Similarly, if aid does not reach Wanding and Kier, it is extremely likely that the displaced population will continue to move into Akobo County in search of food and other essential services.



Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

About REACH Initiative

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. 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.

Visit www.reach-initiative.org and follow us @REACH_info.