

SITUATION BRIEFING:

DISPLACEMENT LEER COUNTY

Unity State, South Sudan, October 2016

Widespread, extreme violence triggered a new wave of displacement from Leer to Nyal and islands between the areas in early to mid-October. People fled their villages with virtually no means of support, and were able to secure little during their flight. In addition to traditional lifesaving interventions, the types of trauma experienced by many of the newly displaced requires rapid psychosocial support.

FINDINGS

The following document reports the findings of focus group discussions, held in Nyal on the 19th and 20th of October, with newly arrived IDPs specifically from Leer. Main findings include:

- **Participants indicating a significant rise in insecurity over the past month** including reported incidents of:
 - gang rape
 - killing
 - forced recruitment
 - looting
 - destruction of property
- Reports of **health concerns** such as numerous cases of malaria and incidents of cholera
- Food drops in Nyal is reported to be a **pull factor** for re-locating to Nyal
- **Lack of access to food** in Nyal has resulted in some families returning to islands to forage for food, leaving families members in Nyal to await anticipated food distribution

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

Nyal is home to a sizable and mobile population of IDPs from Mayendit, Leer and Koch counties. In response to the critical knowledge gaps in these areas, REACH established a presence in Nyal in June 2016 to provide regular and reliable information to humanitarian responders, decision makers and donors. The information gathered in Nyal is integrated into REACH Unity State information products, available on the [REACH Resource Centre](#).

Following the renewed conflict in and around Mayendit, Leer and Koch Counties in July 2016, a new wave of IDPs made their way through the swamps surrounding Nyal, to

this well-known place of refuge. To better understand the impacts of conflict on already vulnerable populations which were displaced as a result, REACH conducted three focus group discussions, with a total of 14 recent arrivals from Leer County. REACH focused on collecting information in regards to the situation in the villages they had fled and the routes they took to reach Nyal¹.

Community leaders assisted in the mobilization of recently arrived participants from numerous payams within Leer country. Despite attempts to ensure the groups were gender balanced they were predominately male-biased due to only three of the invited female participants attending on the day.

Table 1 Locations from where participants had fled

PAYAM	BOMA OR VILLAGE
Adok	Thoor
Daar	Geer
Gandor	Pader
Juongkang	Koam
Nyadiar	Giel
Pader	Pathjup
Piling	Nyadiar
Rubkona	Pader
Thonyor	Piling
Thorbbuok	Nhialdru

PUSH FACTORS FOR DISPLACEMENT

Nearly all respondents reported that their villages have either been completely destroyed or are frequently visited, or permanently occupied by armed forces. **All participants stated that the vast majority of people have abandoned their villages** and if not in transit to places they feel safer, sleep in the bush near their homes at night for safety.

All the participants indicated **indiscriminately killing of men, women and children by armed groups in and around their villages**. Widespread sexual gender based violence have been reported too, including several case of rape and gang rape. In addition, FGDs participants

¹ Available on request

reported of teenage girls being abducted to become 'wives' for armed groups.

Participants reported incidents of forced recruitments to armed groups. Several boys have reportedly disappeared, allegedly taken to be forcibly recruited by armed groups. Adult males are reportedly hiding in the bush to avoid recruitment.

Elderly persons are reportedly being left behind when family members flee to safety as they slow their escape. They reported that if these elderly and vulnerable individuals are found by armed groups they are at high risk of violence and killings.

All reported that canoe operators are taking advantage of the increased demand and are asking prices as high as 1,000 SSP per person for journeys to Nyal. Because of the high prices, some family members are either left behind or are attempting to make the journey on foot. There were also some reports of check points existing in water ways preventing the movement of IDPs and medical supplies.

PULL FACTORS FOR NYAL

All stated that they came to Nyal because it is safe and because they heard of the food drop in September. They also believe another may be imminent as Relief Organisation of South Sudan (ROSS) representatives are compiling lists of unregistered IDPs. However, on arrival, they found that the recent provisions have already been shared and consumed amongst Nyal's registered and unregistered population. Therefore some families are relocating to the surrounding islands to forage for food while typically leaving a male member of the family in Nyal to await news on the anticipated food distribution.

ACCESS TO FOOD AND LIVELIHOODS

In the respondents' areas of origin, **food supplies or crops have reportedly been stolen or destroyed** before they reached maturity. Due to the insecurity earlier in the year, and the inability to safely access their fields due to the presence of armed actors, many households were unable to cultivate large enough to support themselves. For the few remaining, desperation for food has forced them attempt to cultivate and harvest crops on the tracts of land less frequently patrolled by armed actors, potentially exposing them to systematic violence should they be discovered. **Cattle and livestock have reportedly been stolen**; however, incidents of armed forces killing herds without butchering them for food before moving on to other settlements were also reported.

ACCESS TO HEALTH SERVICES

All participants claimed that they or a family member have recently been affected by health issues, which are believed to be related to poor hygiene conditions and a lack of access to potable water. While some reported health concerns originated in the areas they have come from, most of the serious incidents were encountered predominately at transit points and on the islands they visited on their journey to Nyal. **Incidents of cholera were reported by IDPs:**

- 6 alleged deaths on Toiriak Island
- 8 alleged deaths on Paap Island
- 20 alleged deaths on Gap Island

This information has been passed on to the relevant health actors operating in the area to medically verify if these deaths were indeed as a result of cholera.

When asked about the current availability of health services in Leer they stated the **only reliable health facilities are in Kok, Toiriak and Kamrika**. Some had encountered mobile health facilities being provided by MSF via canoe and also mentioned that some access to potable water was available from the provision of buckets fitted with water filters from Medair.

Although mosquitoes in the swamp are present in high numbers, **few have any protection from mosquitoes either through using nets or medication**. Consequently, malaria is a major concern with the vast majority of IDPs reporting to have or have suffered from Malaria.

PROTECTION

Given reported incidents of severe protection concerns, including rape, indiscriminate killings and forced recruitment the population are in urgent need of psycho-social support to adequately deal with high levels of trauma amongst the recently displaced.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

REACH will continue to support the assessment of hard to reach areas in Unity State that is also occurring in Bentiu PoC and UN House by having a presence in Nyal until mid-2017. **REACH has also been assisting humanitarian actors in their understanding of the situation in Leer and Nyal by developing and conducting additional data collection exercises and assessments on their behalf.**

Please contact Eric Kramak, REACH Country Coordinator, via email on eric.kramak@reach-initiative.org for more details.