

Situation Overview: Southern Jonglei Islands, South Sudan

December 2015



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Rapid Response

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SUMMARY

On December 12th and 13th, REACH carried out a rapid assessment of newly-arrived IDPs in the Southern Jonglei Islands region of the Sudd,¹ roughly 80km north of Bor. The mission was designed to fill critical information gaps around the situation and intentions of IDPs staying on islands in the swamp, situated north of Mingkaman Spontaneous Settlement, Awerial County, Lakes State. Locations assessed include: Jonglei Island, Wutnathel Island, Dheim Dheim Port and Kuei Island. At each site focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted with IDPs to understand the magnitude of the displacement in the area, patterns of displacement among IDPs, current living conditions and their intentions related to future movement.

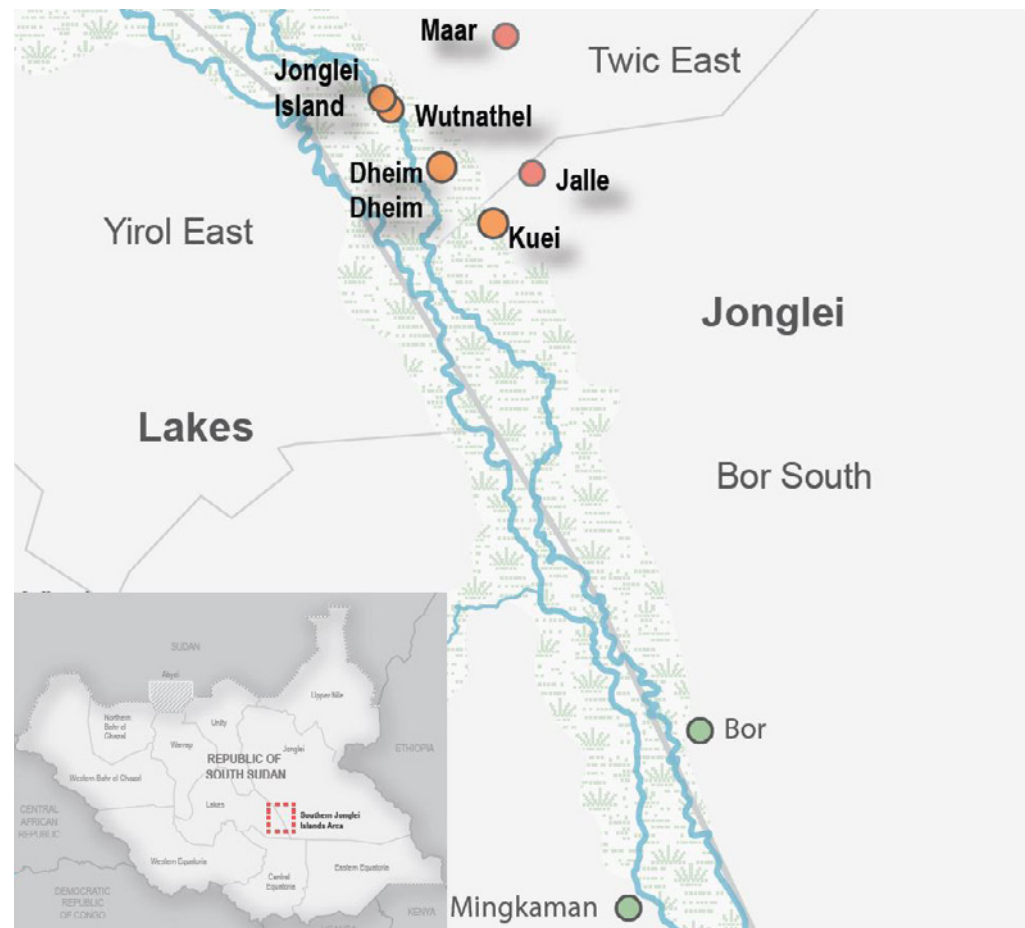
Based on the information collected through 8 FGDs and empirical observation, REACH estimates 3,000 to 5,000 IDPs are currently staying in the assessed area. The large majority of this group is believed to consist of women, children and the elderly. Responses given during FGDs indicate that nearly all IDPs intend to travel Mingkaman, as soon as they are able to gather the financial resources to do so. While onward migration is desired, it seems unlikely due to lack of income generating activities in the area. Nearly all IDPs left their belongings behind when they fled home and have limited means to support

or feed themselves or their family members. While obvious signs of malnutrition were not apparent, the lack of dietary diversity (fish and swamp vegetables are the current staples) and their dependence on host community members for sustenance, the situation is likely to worsen if displacement becomes protracted.

CONTEXT

On November 13, 2015 an unidentified group attacked Maar in Parker Payam, Twic East County.² Immediately following the attacks, large numbers of women, children and the elderly from Parker Payam, and nearby Jalle Payam (Bor South County), mobilized and fled their homes. While adult men reportedly stayed behind to defend their cattle and their homes, thousands of vulnerable individuals travelled west into the Sudd, and have sought refuge in established fishing camps on small islands dispersed deep within the swamp. The displaced were forced to leave most of their belongings and food stores behind and take to the swamp with little more than the clothes on their backs.

Upon reaching the islands, many of which are small seasonal fishing camps raised only a few centimeters above the swamps, those who had the financial resources continued their journey to Mingkaman. These IDPs booked passage on barges and travelled down the



Map 1: Assessed islands in Southern Jonglei (shown in red)

Nile to this major displacement site, which is widely known among IDPs.

Although the attack on November 13th was reported to be particularly violent, it is one of many that have occurred, and continue to

¹ The Sudd is a vast area of swamp in the Nile basin, with an average size of 30,000 square kilometers.

² The Nation Mirror, 22 Civilians Killed In Jonglei Attack

³ Numerous articles discussing this topic are available through South Sudanese media, notably: *South Sudanese rebels refute Twic East attack claims*

METHODOLOGY

On each island, focus group discussions (FGDs) were carried out with IDPs in small groups (5-8) separated by gender, in order to understand the displacement experience of each group.

Lines of questioning sought to understand the following key questions:

- from where the IDPs originated
- how many were residing on the islands
- how long they had been living there
- the circumstances surrounding their displacement and their subsequent arrival at their location of displacement
- their intentions for onward movement

LIMITATIONS

Due to remote location of the area and limited time available for assessment, it was not possible to conduct multiple rounds of FGDs, or FGDs with the “host” community members. The purpose of this assessment was to gain an initial understanding of the situation of IDPs in the Jonglei Islands area.

However, further assessment will be required to understand the scope of the problems that exist in these remote displacement sites, and also the scale and nature of the humanitarian response that may be required both there and in areas of onward displacement.

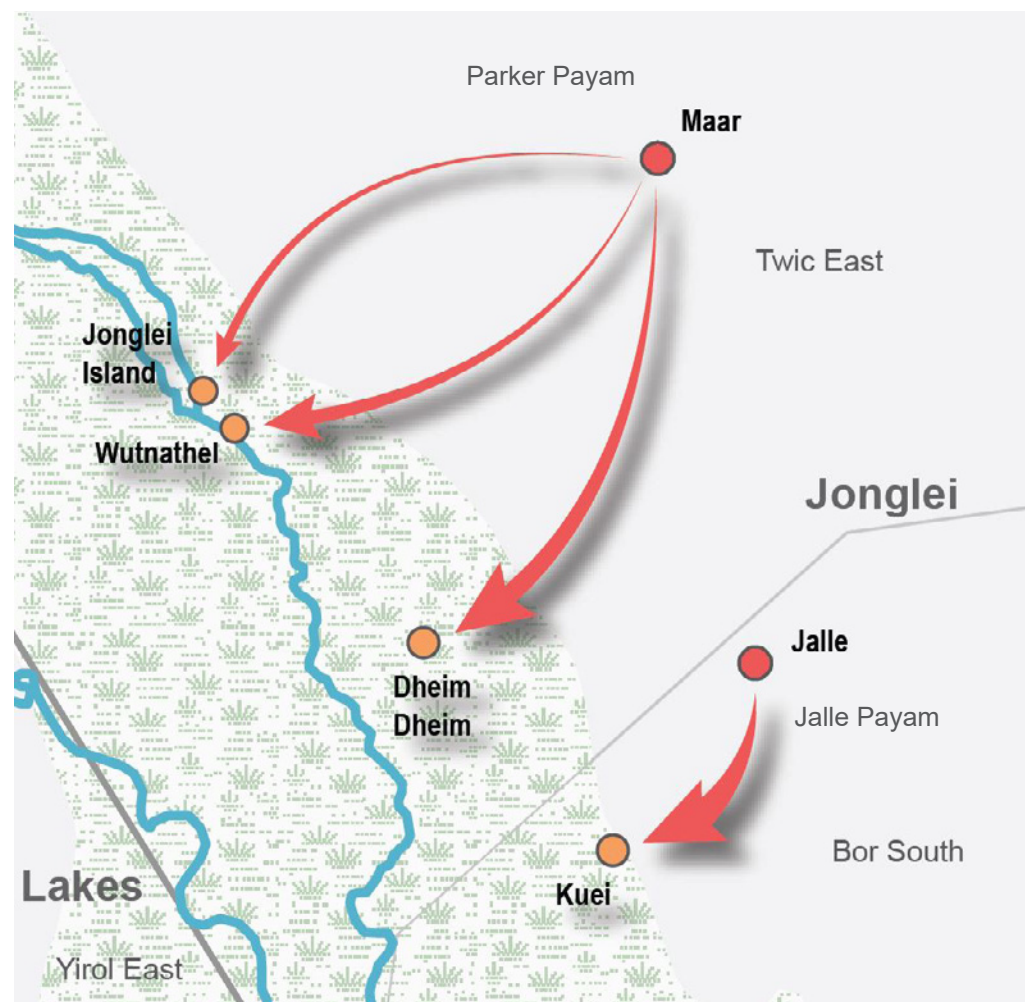
occur, in Bor South and Twic East counties this year.³ Unsubstantiated reports suggest this particular attack was carried out by cattle raiders in military uniforms who also abducted children (no number given) and burnt houses across Parker Payam. In addition to those IDPs who had arrived as a result of the November 13th attacks, ongoing instability since December 2013 had caused earlier displacement from the same communities in Twic East and Bor South. Some of these individuals had reportedly fled directly to Mingkaman, while smaller numbers of IDPs were already living on islands in the Sudd, since December 2013, particularly Kuei.

DISPLACEMENT

IDPs from Parker Payam

IDPs from Parker Payam were identified on **Jonglei Island**, **Wutnathel Island** and in the **Dheim Dheim Port** area. All participants in focus group discussions indicated that they fled their homes on the evening of 13 November, fleeing in groups to locations between three and five days from their points of origin. According to those interviewed, every IDP that they knew of in the area had travelled to their current location by foot. Able-bodied adults carried the elderly, children and essential belongings using plastic sheets.

The Dheim Dheim area is a well known and often used place of refuge for people from communities in Twic East and Bor south. The area has a considerable amount of high,



Map 2: Displacement Routes from Parker Payam, Twic East, and Jalle Payams, Bor South

dry land, is much more open than Jonglei or Wutnathel, and affords easier access to the main channel of the Nile. Many of the older people interviewed in this area reported that

they had retreated here for shelter following instability in Maar, Parker Payam on multiple occasions in the past.

IDPs from Jalle Payam

Between 300 and 500 recently displaced persons from Jalle Payam were identified on Kuei Island, which is situated in the northwest corner of Bor South County. A second group, consisting of as many as 300 IDPs, are also residing in Kuei, having arrived as early as December 2013.

All of the IDPs interviewed for this assessment claimed to have left their homes on or around the 16th of November as a result of instability allegedly resulting from cattle-raiding. Women interviewed claimed to have traveled for one to two days to reach Kuei, while the men interviewed claimed it took five. Both groups reported the same mode of travel as those interviewed in other locations - by foot and carrying the very young, very old, and a few positions on plastic sheeting.

IDP DEMOGRAPHICS

IDPs from Parker Payam

Dheim Dheim, both a port and permanent fishing camp, contained the largest displaced population of the areas assessed. IDPs were found to have settled both in the port area, and on numerous small islands in the immediate surroundings. Respondents estimated that 850 IDPs had moved into the immediate area in the past 15 to 17 days. It was also reported that there are five stations in the greater Dheim Dheim area which may hold a combined population of up to 2,000 IDPs. The displaced population in Dheim Dheim consists

of mostly women and children including a reported 30 unaccompanied minors, 30-40 children under six months of age, five disabled people, many elderly people, and more than 15 people suffering from what they consider to be severe illnesses.

FGD participants on **Wutnathel Island** estimated that as many as 250 IDPs were seeking refuge here, most of these women and children. While there were also small numbers of men, the majority had reportedly stayed behind to protect their property, or had been injured or killed in the attacks. IDPs estimated that there were 15 elderly people, 15 unaccompanied children, one child-headed household, and three infants under three months of age. Wutnathel is a seasonal fishing camp with a small number of semi-permanent inhabitants (4 host families totaling 14 individuals and including women and children). The host community claims that there are 32 fishing stations in the area with IDP populations of between 50 and 250 individuals each.

Of the areas assessed, **Jonglei Island** contained the smallest number of IDPs. As found elsewhere, the population consisted almost exclusively of young women and children. One infant and three very elderly women who did not appear able to care for themselves were also noted. According to those interviewed, most men had stayed in Parker Payam to defend their homes and cattle, while some had travelled onward to Mingkaman. At the time of assessment, they

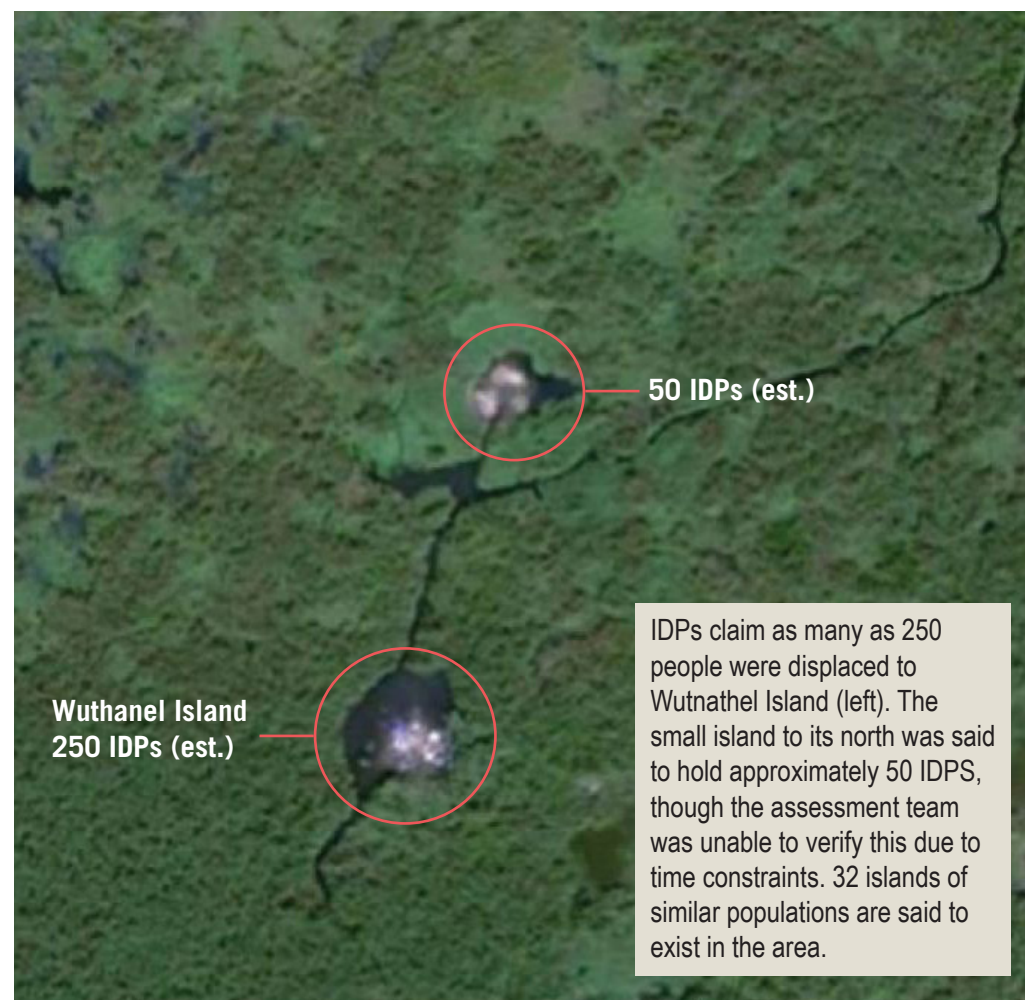


Figure 1: Wutnathel Island (image from Google Earth)

had received no contact from those that continued to Mingkaman. As in Wutnathel, a small "host" community of 15-20 seasonal fisherman exists, all of these young men.

IDPs from Jalle Payam

Kuei Island is considerably larger than other assessed islands, at over 1km long. Kuei houses a considerably larger population of

IDPs and host community population than any of the other locations visited. While this location is also primarily composed of women, children and the elderly, a larger number of young men was also present among IDPs. Due to the proximity to dry land, the men were able to drive cattle and goats to the island, where there is sufficient grazing land to support them, at least for a short period of time.

IDP INTENTIONS

IDPs from Parker Payam

All IDPs interviewed on **Jonglei Island**, **Wutnathel Island** and in the **Dheim Dheim Port** area, hoped to eventually travel to Mingkaman to ensure their safety, join family members, or access the services and food distributions. Many of the individuals interviewed had previously fled to Mingkaman for safety following the outbreak of violence in December 2013, but had since returned to their homes. Some IDPs reported that they remain in contact with family members that have either recently traveled to Mingkaman or have been resident there for some time. Most stated that they would not consider returning to their pre-crisis locations until meaningful peace is restored.

IDPs from Jalle Payam

IDPs interviewed on **Kuei** explained that they could not return home because due to a lack of safety. They reported maintaining regular communication with people still in Jalle by phone (Zain Network) regularly to assess

the security situation. Some suggested that when their contacts report that the situation has established, they would return home. Others, reflecting the understanding gained from residents of Parker Payam, indicated that they would not consider returning until peace is restored.

Many people intend to travel onward to Mingkaman as soon as they are able to gather the money to leave. Some are in contact with relatives who were displaced to Mingkaman since 2013 and understand that they could share the food rations available to those registered in Mingkaman. It is widely understood among IDPs that Mingkaman is a safe place where people have access to food and healthcare.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

Jonglei Island, Wutnathel & Dheim Dheim

Conditions across the three assessed locations hosting IDPs from Parker Payam are very similar, with very limited services and resources available on the small islands.

Food Security

Due to the circumstances of their flight, those displaced from Parker Payam were unable to transport sufficient quantities of food, NFIs or shelter materials. Most are currently sharing limited fishing equipment amongst themselves or with the host community, with which they are able to catch enough fish for sustenance.

Most diets also include water lily bulbs, which are dried and ground and made into a paste, similar to ground maize porridge. When IDPs are unable to catch or forage enough to eat, donations of dried or smoked fish from host community fishermen are used to supplement their diets. Given the small area of dry land available, there are very limited opportunities for cultivation.

WASH

Both food and drinking water are sourced directly from the swampy areas surrounding the low lying islands, with the same water used for washing and defecation. While the water is fast-flowing, the possibility for contamination of drinking water is very high, especially with the recent increase in the islands' population. Due to high water tables, there is no possibility of constructing pit latrines on Jonglei or Wutnathel Islands. In contrast, two pit latrines exists at Dheim Dheim port which IDPs share with the host community. While there appears to be enough space to construct more, the high IDP caseload in Dheim Dheim means that it will be challenging to construct enough latrines to adequately serve the entire IDP population.

Health

FGD participants complained of numerous illnesses such as malaria and acute diarrhea, though large numbers of obviously sick individuals were not observed. However, the assessment team heard frequent coughing during the night on Jonglei Island, a possible indication of respiratory infections in this location.



Figure 2: A three day old IDP and her mother at Jurwach Port, Twic East County

MATERNAL HEALTH

All of the locations visited reported have relatively large numbers of expectant mothers (7 plus months pregnant). Kuei, and Dheim Dheim have roughly 20 each, Wutnathel has 7 (not verified), and Jonglei Island has 2 (verified).



Figure 3: IDPs and fishermen on Jonglei Island

Humanitarian Support

IMC appears to be the only humanitarian organization active in the area. IMC teams visited Wutnathel Island two days after the REACH team conducted this assessment.

Kuei Island

In contrast to the other islands assessed, Kuei has a large raised area of land measuring approximately 2000 x 300m, roughly a metre above the surrounding water. Goats and cattle were observed grazing here, and islanders previously engaged in formal cultivation elsewhere on the island before this land was flooded. Kuei also has tukuls made of mud, a church, a latrine, and solar panels for charging phones and radios. While Kuei Island, appears more permanent in nature compared to other islands assessed, conditions were found to differ relatively little.

Food Security

IDPs on Kuei Island reported that they were living primarily off fish and water lilies. One IDP had a case of Corn Soy Blend (CSB) fortified blended foods, which had been received from relatives in Mingkaman. Many IDPs indicated that they are running out of food and will soon attempt to travel to Mingkaman.

Proximity to Jalle has allowed some IDPs to return to their homes to gather some belongings and livestock, leaving them less vulnerable than IDPs on the smaller islands. However, many still do not have essential items such as fishing equipment, mosquito nets and bedding.

WASH

The single latrine available on Kuei is insufficient for the needs of the current population, although the amount of land and its elevation above water level would seem to indicate that there is adequate room for more. The lake and swamp waters continue to be used for drinking, bathing and washing up, leading to risks of contamination and subsequent illness.

Health

IDPs reported approximately 35 very sick individuals, with reported illnesses such as malaria and acute diarrhea, the latter likely caused by drinking contaminated swamp water.

Education

A team from John Garang University in Bor and the Bor South County Education Department were visiting Kuei at the same time as the REACH assessment team. In July of 2015, this group established a primary school and registered 150 IDP and host community children. On their most recent trip, this group registered a further 70 new arrivals, who will now be able to attend school.

Humanitarian Assistance

Communities in Need of Aid (CINA), a national NGO, has been active on the island since July 2015. They have established Child Friendly Spaces and have two permanent staff on Kuei. No other NGOs were reported by assessed IDPs to be operating here.

CONCLUSION

This assessment sought to understand the humanitarian situation in the South Jonglei Islands area of Twic East and Bor South Counties, to estimate the number of IDPs in the area and to understand their intentions for onward movement.

The population in the area consists of as many as 3,000 to 5,000 IDPs from Parker and Jalle Payams, most of whom were displaced following attacks in Maar on the 13th of November. Women, children and the elderly comprise approximately 75% of the assessed IDPs, with FGDs suggesting that the demographic composition of other islands that were not visited is also similar.

While living conditions are far from ideal, IDPs are currently coping, largely due to their ability to live off fish and water lilies. Despite the lack of dietary diversity, there were no obvious signs of acute malnutrition, although the situation may change with a more protracted displacement.

In the immediate term, primary humanitarian needs include the provision of clean water, mosquito nets, fishing equipment and anti-malarial and anti-diarrheal treatments. The lack of latrines in all but two locations, means that most IDPs are drinking water from the same place they use to defecate, leading to high risk of contamination. The lack of medical facilities means that illnesses are likely to receive no treatment.

Though there were no indications of tension between IDPs and the host community, the sheer scale of displacement to these small islands suggests that IDPs may eventually exhaust the host community's resources and generosity and be forced to move on.

With no intention to return to their homes until meaningful peace is established, the assessed population faces protracted displacement. At the same time, the current IDP population is unlikely to increase in the short term.

While all IDPs intend to leave for Mingkaman, the lack of income generating opportunities mean that there is limited potential for further migration from the assessed sites in the short term. However, further migration is likely in the medium term as opportunities to leave arise.

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.

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