

# Situation Overview: Displacement and Intentions in Greater Equatoria

South Sudan, 2 September 2016

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## Introduction

On July 8th, the eve of South Sudan's Independence Day, fighting broke out in Juba between armed factions of the Government-led SPLA, and the former opposition SPLA-IO. Over the following weeks, fighting spread to other towns and villages throughout the Greater Equatoria region, leading to the displacement of thousands of people from their homes, many to neighbouring countries.

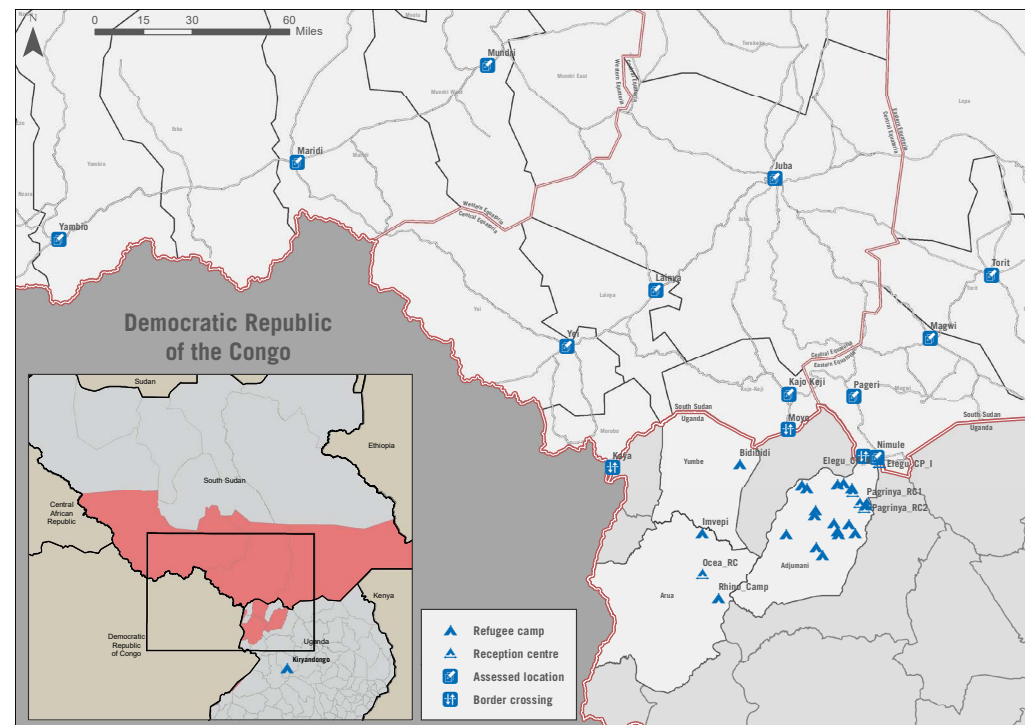
Since June 30th, 97,947 new arrivals have been registered in Uganda,<sup>1</sup> which is currently host to an estimated total of 327,123 South Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers. Most established refugee settlements in Uganda are already at capacity, leaving thousands of new arrivals waiting in Collection Points (CPs) and Reception Centres (RCs) in the north of the country. Most are hoping to be transferred to the new Bidibidi camp in Yumbe, which has a planned capacity of 100,000 refugees.<sup>2</sup> With Uganda's refugee settlements already stretched, any further influx is likely to exceed existing capacity.<sup>3</sup>

The full extent of displacement as a result of recent conflict across Greater Equatoria remains unclear. Access for humanitarians to most locations in the region is severely restricted, leaving a limited understanding of the current conditions in affected communities, and no clear view of the scale of potential further displacement into Uganda.

Between 27-31 August, REACH conducted a rapid assessment in Kiryandongo Settlement in northern Uganda to address this gap and provide baseline information to inform humanitarian planning. Using its "Area of Origin"<sup>4</sup> methodology to understand the situation in hard-to-reach or inaccessible areas, REACH spoke with recently arrived South Sudanese refugees to gather information about the triggers and patterns of displacement, and the intentions of IDPs and host communities. Such information informs our understanding of the likelihood of further displacement, both within South Sudan and into Uganda, and provides indicative data on the situation of people remaining in their areas of origin, including their access to basic services.

Information was collected through eight focus group discussions (FGDs) involving a total of 92 participants living in Kiryandongo Settlement who had fled from the following cities and towns: Juba, Maridi, Magwi, Mundri, Yambio, Paderi, Nimule, Yei, Torit, Lainya, and Kajo-Keji. Participants came from locations across Greater Equatoria, from both urban settlements (shown on map 1) and surrounding rural communities.

Separate discussions were held for males and females and included participants with a variety of professional backgrounds, among them health workers, businessmen, farmers, and civil servants.



Map 1: Assessed communities in Greater Equatoria and refugee settlements in Uganda

Key findings are presented in this report under two main sections:

- Displacement dynamics following the escalation of conflict
- Intentions, conditions and access to services for remaining populations in Greater Equatoria

1. UNHCR, Uganda – South Sudan Refugee Situation 29 of August 2016
2. UNHCR, Uganda – Emergency Update on the South Sudan Situation,
3. UNHCR, Uganda: Emergency Update on the South Sudan Situation, Inter-Agency Daily #9, July 2016
4. For further details please see: REACH, [Assessment of Hard to Reach Areas in the Greater Upper Nile Region of South Sudan, Project Overview](#), May 2016.

**Table 1: Uganda Settlements by Population<sup>4</sup>**

Settlement Name	Population
Bidibidi (Yumbe)	31,902
Adjumani	140,502
Kampala (City)	8,334
Kiryandongo	67,166
Rhino Camp	36,163

*Note: As of 25 August, the Reception Centre in Kiyrandongo is no longer receiving new arrivals. All of those remaining in the reception centre have been transferred to Bidibidi Settlement in Yumbe.*

## Displacement

All of populations remaining in their areas of origin have experienced significant displacement since the re-ignition of the conflict on July 8th. Participants reported that following the outbreak of conflict in most of the towns the following day, people took shelter in their homes or fled to nearby villages for safety (See Map 2: Phase 1). A few had some advanced warnings, and were able to leave before the conflict got to them, but the vast majority were caught unawares.

When the initial violence subsided, some people began leave their homes and head either to Juba or Uganda for safety (Phase 2). People living in Western Equatoria and northern Central Equatoria first came to Juba before taking the Juba-Nimule highway south to the Elegu collection points in Uganda. Those coming from Yei travelled south to the Kaya

crossing, and then to Ocea reception centre near Arua or directly to Kiryondongo. Only those from Kajo-Keji took the Moyo crossing, before going to Elegu.

Those who lived close to the border or were able to procure a means of motorized transport were able to get out quickly and make it to Uganda before the roads were closed. Those who did not leave soon enough were turned back by armed groups before they could reach the border (Phase 3). People living in towns near the Juba-Nimule highway joined the Ugandan military convoy that had entered South Sudan to evacuate its citizens, allowing them to bypass checkpoints.

Those who did not come with the convoy often had to pay armed groups to allow them to pass on to Uganda. From there, they came to Kiryandongo as soon as they could find the public or private means to do so (Phase 4). Most took only a day or two to find transport to Kiryondongo. A few attempted to stay in Elegu, or Rhino Camp before changing their minds and coming to Kiryondongo.

**The majority of people, however, did not come to Uganda, and instead sought shelter in nearby villages, where they hoped they would be safe until things calmed down.**

As of 31 August, insecurity continues across most of Greater Equatoria. Most primary routes towards Juba and the Ugandan border have been blocked by armed groups, largely preventing remaining populations from leaving their current locations.

## Method of Transportation

Most respondents appeared to be of some means; many were educated, and had access to a motor vehicle that could transport them quickly to the border. Because of the high number of motor vehicles used and lack of local knowledge of the border regions among participants, nearly all people travelled along roads, unless evading armed groups.

Nearly all respondents reported being stopped at checkpoints by armed groups. These were described as tense situations, in which people were at risk of being robbed, killed, or their children being kidnapped and press-ganged into service. Fines of several thousand SSP would need to be paid to release their children, which many families were unable to do. **The vast majority of respondents reported about community members physically harmed or killed.**

## Push and Pull Factors

All of the participants came to Kiyrandango because of insecurity in their location of origin, travelling to Uganda which they perceived to be safer.

The escalation of conflict caught most by surprise, causing many people to be separated from their families before fleeing to Uganda alone. Male focus group discussion participants had commonly been working in different cities to their families. Most reported trying to return home upon the escalation of violence, but quickly realised the risk of doing so and fled to Uganda instead. Female focus

group discussion participants had commonly fled with their children, leaving their husbands behind to look after their homes and land.

While some reported they had lost contact with their families, others remained in contact until as recently as last week, although access to the last functional network in the area, Vivacell, has subsequently been lost in several cities.

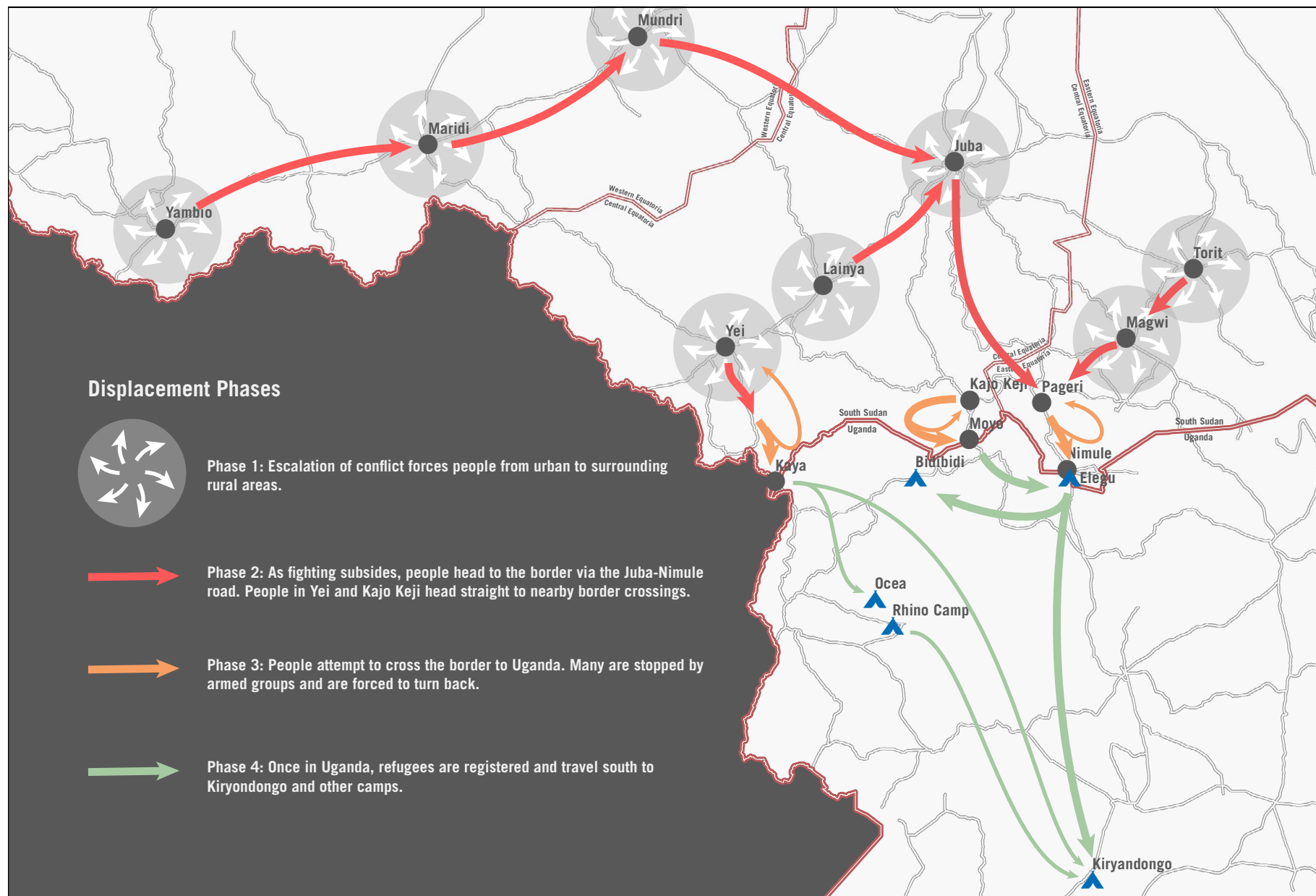
## Choice of current location

Upon arrival in Uganda, most focus group participants travelled directly to Kiyrandango, either leaving other settlements as soon as they could procure adequate transport or bypassing them entirely. All had prior knowledge of Kiryandongo, either from a friend or family member, or because they had lived there in the past after being displaced during the 2013 displacement crisis or during the 2nd Sudanese Civil War (1983-2006). Kiryondongo was considered a safe place, where refugees would be able to access a plot of land for cultivation, and essential services such as healthcare, clean water, and education.

Following the closure of the reception centre at Kiryandongo on 25 August, all new arrivals are now being sent to Bidibidi Camp in Yumbe. Opened on 2 August, Bidibidi was designed to hold 100,000 people and intended to de-congest existing reception centres and settlements, which are now reaching capacity. However, the camp is perceived much less positively by refugees, who described it in FGDs as unsafe and lacking in essential services. Tensions with the host community are perceived to be particularly challenging

4. Data from OPM and UNHCR. All figures current as of 28 August.

Map 2: Displacement from areas of origin in Greater Equatoria to Kiryondongo Settlement





with a few participants stating that they would rather return to South Sudan than be relocated there.

As Bidibidi remains the only settlement currently open to receive new refugees, it remains unclear whether new refugees will continue to go there or start to head to other locations in Uganda.

### Future Intentions

Participants reported that Uganda was the preferred destination for people in their community, with other neighbouring countries such as Ethiopia and Kenya considered too far away, and Congo considered to be insecure and undesirable because of the language barrier. The mostly English and Arabic speaking Equatorians explained that they were unable to communicate with French-speaking Congolese.

**Should restrictions on movement in Greater Equatoria lessen, a large influx of refugees into Uganda from Central, Western, and nearby parts of Eastern Equatoria is likely to follow.** The large majority of refugees reported that missing family members would travel to join them as soon as possible. They believed that others would try to come quickly, and that the only thing preventing them was a lack of access, due to ongoing security concerns, the presence of military, and the cost of transportation.

## Situation in Areas of Origin

According to focus group discussion participants from urban areas, the majority of people in their areas of origin (between 70-80% of the pre-crisis population) have fled to neighbouring villages and the bush. These people reportedly abandoned their homes following harassment and random killings by armed groups and headed for neighbouring areas perceived as safer. **Villages located near main roads, including Pageri and its surrounding villages, have reportedly been entirely abandoned due to harassment and attacks by armed groups.**

Exceptions to this include the town of Torit, where most of the pre-crisis population reportedly remains in town, and Nimule, where the majority of the population has safely emigrated to Uganda. These towns saw limited fighting compared to other areas, and most of the danger in these areas is reportedly in the villages, rather than the towns. As a result, both have seen influxes of IDPs from other parts of the region.

Here, markets are open, and services remain available, although the economic crisis in the country has made them increasingly unaffordable. The lack of people in Nimule has also limited the availability of services for those who remain. For those remaining in Torit and Nimule, leaving town is considered highly dangerous as a result of armed groups. Participants reported that men had been killed as they attempted to return to Pageri from Nimule to collect food and possessions,

Figure 1: UNHCR buses transport refugees from Kiryondongo to Bidibidi Settlement in Yumbe



although women and the elderly are reportedly able to leave.

In remote villages, people are currently reported to be relatively safe, and some food is available, though in restricted amounts. Access to other essential services, such as healthcare, safe water, and education, is very limited, as most small communities lack such basic infrastructure. Very few participants reported that people were living in the bush without support. More recent arrivals to the camp suggest that violence in villages is increasing, raising concerns that rural communities may become less safe in the near future, possibly resulting in further displacement.

### Shelter

The majority of people remaining in their areas of origin are reportedly still living under some sort of shelter. Most of those living in villages are reportedly not directly affected by the conflict, and remaining populations in rural areas are reportedly living in their own homes, although some are sharing shelters with displaced people. IDPs from urban areas commonly sleep under trees or in makeshift shelters until they can construct their own rakoobas or tukuls.

In urban areas, most homes are reported to remain standing, though they have been abandoned by their owners who have fled to villages. In Nimule and Torit, where much of the town's population is still there, people are living in permanent brick and mortar

structures, in addition to more traditional structures like tukuls.

Exceptions to this are the towns of Kajo-Keji, Mundri, and Maridi, where so many houses have reportedly been burned down that the majority of the population are now living in collective centres such as churches or open air in the bush. While most homes in Pageri are still standing, the entire population is reported to have relocated to Nimule, where many are sleeping in Rakoobas.

Most communities are reportedly using mosquito nets, and describe them as a necessity for survival during the wet season. Most people are sleeping 1-2 people per net, except for Yambio, where 4-5 people are sharing. However, in some communities, such as Lainya, Kajo-Keji, and Maridi, it has been a long time since they have received any new nets, and the ones that exist have begun to fall into disrepair. Very few NFI distributions have been carried out in the Equatorias, and many in Western Equatoria have not yet met their NFI loose items goals.<sup>5</sup> Most displaced people in rural villages lost their nets when they abandoned their homes.

### Access to Food

Participants reported that some supplies of food were available in their areas of origin, particularly in villages, where populations are less dependent on markets than those residing in towns or cities. However, many reported needing to resort to a number of

coping strategies in order to make food last longer. **Participants indicated that most people were now eating one meal a day, and in many cases, skipping days entirely in order to stretch available food.** Many also reported eating the leaves of different plants, such as cassava, after they had finished the roots. Possessions are sold or traded for other food like beans.

Problems with the general lack of food have been compounded by climate change and the conflict. Rising temperatures have led to a shorter growing season, and many crops did not grow as well as in previous years. The most recent IPC report notes that, while not as bad as parts of Greater Upper Nile region, most of The Greater Equatoria region worsened from “stressed” to “crisis” between April and July.<sup>6</sup> **Other reports show Lainya to currently be in emergency, and the rest of the assessed communities in Central Equatorial to be in crisis.**<sup>7</sup> The same reports expect these conditions to persist through the end of the year. In addition, the presence of armed groups has prevented many from accessing their fields, where crops have grown. Crops have been taken by armed groups or eaten by animals. Some participants lamented that many of their crops are maturing right now, and they have no way of safely harvesting them because of insecurity. Those still remaining in town must spend increasing amounts of money in order to contend with soaring prices. **In July, prices of maize, and sorghum in Juba markets were reported to be 1000% higher than the**

**five year average.<sup>8</sup> Prices in Torit for the same goods were over 800% higher.<sup>9</sup>** Some participants from Yei noted that a few hotels owned by rich people had remained open, and that these people were living off of their food stores. Public food stores that were reported to exist in Yei, Yambio, and Mundri were raided.

### Livelihoods

Access to productive livelihoods for populations remaining in their areas of origin is severely restricted, if not outright denied. Markets are now inaccessible; blocked roads prevent people from reaching the markets safely, and in many places, such as Pageri, Yei, and Lainya, people risk being killed if they open their shops. Many major business men were reportedly arrested and imprisoned in

**Table 2: Reported living conditions of people remaining in areas of origin**

	Beginning of conflict	Location where <b>most</b> people are living	Remaining infrastructure	Level of Access
Juba	9 July	In homes in town	Intact	Restricted
Kajo-Keji	9 July	Remote villages	Damaged	Minimal
Lainya	9 July	Remote villages	Destroyed	Minimal
Magwi	9 July	Abandoned	Destroyed	Minimal
Maridi	Before 8 July	Remote villages	Damaged	Restricted
Mundri	Before 8 July	Remote villages	Damaged	Minimal
Nimule	18 July	Left country	Intact	High
Pageri	Unknown	Abandoned	Intact	Minimal
Torit	15 July	In homes in town	Intact	Restricted
Yambio	Before 8 July	Remote villages	Damaged	Restricted
Yei	9 July	Remote villages	Intact	Minimal

5. Shelter & NFI Cluster, South Sudan Response Crisis – NFI Distribution Coverage, July 2016

6. IPC, IPC Alert Issue 5, June 2016.

7. FEWSNET, Below average harvests expected as insecurity restricts agricultural activity, August 2016

8. WFP, South Sudan market price monitoring bulletin, August 2016

9. Ibid.

Kajo-Keji town.

In Nimule, Maridi, and Torit, where markets still exist, prices have exploded. Recent reports note that trade throughout the entire Greater Equatoria region has been significantly disrupted or all trade activity had ceased.<sup>10</sup> Respondents reported prices as much as 750% higher than before the current outbreak of conflict. Several respondents reported having to pay 80 SSP for a cup of flour. The inability to transport goods to Juba to sell at higher prices or import them from Uganda has caused most markets to atrophy.

In villages, most people report being able to cultivate. Though in Pageri and Magwi, it has reportedly stopped due to the evacuation of most of the population to Nimule and villages

**Figure 2: Church in Morobo, near Yei, October 2015. Churches like this have become refuges for many displaced persons seeking shelter throughout Greater Equatoria. Photo Credit: Estelle Levoyer**



further from the main road. In others, farming must be practiced with care, as smoke can alert armed groups to their presence. These armed groups have been known to steal all of the food in the community.

### Water and Sanitation

Functioning WASH infrastructure is reportedly present in all locations, but has been made inaccessible by the conflict. Most towns had sufficient functioning boreholes, with the exception of Lainya and Magwi, which were unable to provide for the entire population. In Yei, a water treatment system provided water to most of the town though a motorized tap stand system. In places with very few boreholes, like Torit, chlorine tablets were regularly distributed to clean river water.

Now, most of these services are inaccessible, either due to insecurity, or a lack of resources, such as fuel or chlorine tablets. Villages lack the same water infrastructure as towns, and the few clean sources that exist are reportedly often over 30 minutes away, too far to be accessed safely or conveniently. Yei's water system has reportedly ceased operation due to a lack of fuel. WASH services are reportedly still functioning normally in Yambio, Mundri, Nimule and Torit.

Most people in towns, and many in villages, used latrines before the current crisis. Some towns reportedly even charged people for defecating outside. An exception to this was Torit, where cultural practices lead many people to refuse to use latrines. Those hiding in

the bush are reportedly still using them, though their usage has declined due to insecurity and a lack of materials. The poor WASH situation, coupled with the already undersized health infrastructure, is likely to compound disease as the wet season progresses.

### Health

Prior to the current conflict, most of the assessed towns had functioning health centres, though many lacked adequate drugs, and their staff often went unpaid for months. Many villages had smaller clinics or health centres in order to treat less serious cases, and many business people had opened their own clinics to supply drugs that hospitals lacked.<sup>11</sup>

Health infrastructure across the assessed locations has largely collapsed. **Most health centres have closed, and clinics have been looted by armed groups, denying any life-saving drugs for the community there, and most of the remaining staff have fled into the bush.** In Yei, armed groups have injured and killed the staff of health facilities. Hospitals in Kajo-Keji, Yambio, and Mundri remain open, but have only a few staff and limited capacity to treat illnesses. The only exceptions to this are Nimule and Torit, where most health centres are still functioning, albeit on reduced staff due to some having fled. Humanitarian support has allowed the clinic in Torit to stay stocked with necessary drugs.

The South Sudan Health Cluster notes that malaria remains the most commonly reported

illness in most of the region.<sup>12</sup> Cholera has also broken out in Nimule.<sup>13</sup> With no drugs to treat it, it is likely that mortality rates will rise significantly in the absence of humanitarian support; according to the same report, health partners were only present in 3 counties (Mundri East, Juba, and Torit) in June 2016.<sup>13</sup>

### Education

Access to education in most locations was reported to be limited to non-existent. In places where people were able to get advanced warning of what was happening in Juba, children were sent to the villages to live with relatives. With the displacement of most of the populations from towns, schools have been shuttered due to a lack of either children or staff. Education in rural villages was poor before the current crisis and access has only declined since then. Most rural schools have reportedly been abandoned due to a lack of staff.

In a few places, schools have reopened. Education services are reportedly available in Kajo-Keji, Maridi, Torit, and Nimule, albeit with reduced staff and restricted hours; most children reportedly attend school for only three hours a day. School supplies are lacking, and children reportedly lack textbooks, pens, paper, and school lunches. Even before the current crisis, counties in Greater Equatoria had some of the lowest number of people receiving education services from NGOs.<sup>15</sup>

10. FEWSNET, South Sudan: Drastic food price increases further reduce household access, August 2016

11. Many noted that these clinics were often operated by the same health workers working at the hospitals that had referred them.

12. Health Cluster, South Sudan Health Cluster Bulletin #2, August 2016

13. UNMISS, South Sudan works towards containing recent cholera outbreak, August 2016

14. Health Cluster, South Sudan Health Cluster Bulletin #2, August 2016

15. South Sudan Education Cluster, Cumulative number of people reached up to June 2016



**Table 3: Reported access to services for people remaining in areas of origin**

	Safety / security	Access to shelter	Access to food	Access to livelihoods	Access to water	Access to health care	Access to education
Juba	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Kajo-Keji	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Lainya	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Magwi	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Miridi	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Mundri	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Nimule	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Pageri	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Torit	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Yambio	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Yei	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

- Minimal or no access
- Restricted or limited access
- Sufficient or minimally restricted access

all economic activity to collapse. Many people with skills and investment capital have fled. Should access improve, humanitarians should be prepared to provide the resources and expertise in order to help re-establish services until communities can recover. Healthcare remains a priority; with the wet season in full swing, **rates of disease such as cholera and malaria are rising, while at the same time, healthcare is being denied to most of the population.**

In the villages, most people are able to stay safe, but lack the important services available in towns. Few, if any rural health clinics are still open. In addition, while food is available in most places, stores have been severely strained due to the influx of people now sheltering in the countryside, and many families are now only eating one meal a day or less to stretch dwindling food stores.

The key problem for both civilians and humanitarians remains access; as of this writing, nearly all major roads to the Ugandan border remained blocked, and anyone travelling risks encountering armed groups. However, most of the participants in focus groups insist most people wish come to Uganda, and the only thing holding them back is their inability

to safely leave. **If road access to Uganda improves, large numbers of refugees are likely to come across the border.**

The crisis in the Equatorias is still beginning; people have only recently been displaced, and humanitarian infrastructure is still able to comfortably handle current caseloads. However, things may already be changing; between 26 and 28 of August, UNHCR registered 4,854 people entering Uganda from the Kaya crossing near Yei.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, only 20% of UNHCR's requested 608.8 million from donors has been funded.<sup>17</sup> Should the situation worsen, and more become desperate to leave South Sudan, donors need to be willing to fund humanitarian actors in re-establishing key services in South Sudan, and be prepared for a possible influx into the settlements in Uganda.

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## Conclusion

The outbreak of conflict across the Greater Equatoria region has led to wide-spread displacement, both inside and outside of South Sudan. Motivated by the ability to restart their livelihoods in a safe, secure environment, a substantial number of South Sudanese refugees, nearly 100,000 as of the end of August, have already crossed the border into Uganda. **However, the vast majority are still in South Sudan, hiding in the bush and**

**villages nearby their former homes without access to sufficient food or other services.**

In towns, most infrastructure for key services like health, WASH, and education remain. However, a lack of people and resources, including adequate drugs, fuel for water systems and generators, or school supplies has caused them to atrophy. The economic crisis has made even the most basic goods unaffordable, and the inability of people to travel to markets, even those in their own towns without fear of death has caused nearly

16. UNHCR, Emergency update on the South Sudan refugee situation, inter-agency daily #33, August 2016

17. UNHCR, South Sudan Situation: Regional Emergency Update, August 2016