



# Tambura County Population Movement Assessment

Western Equatoria State, South Sudan, September 2021

## Context & Methodology

Since the 22nd of June, sub-national violence has resulted in widespread displacement in Tambura county, Western Equatoria State. Clashes and persistent insecurity have reportedly resulted in an estimated 80,000 people displacing either within Tambura County, or to nearby areas, particularly larger towns in Western Equatoria State, namely Ezo, Nzara and Yambio.<sup>1</sup> Most non-governmental organisations (NGOs) staff were evacuated from Tambura between June and August, and continued insecurity has likely limited the provision of, and access to, humanitarian services, and could continue to do so in the near to medium term.<sup>2</sup>

Following reports of displacement to Western Bahr el Ghazal, REACH conducted a joint assessment with ACTED in Wau between 22nd and 24th of September 2021 to understand displacement dynamics, barriers to movement, and expected movement in the near to medium term. The assessment team conducted six focus group discussions (FGDs) with internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the south and the north of Tambura County, analysing key themes using a data saturation matrix.

The assessment findings are indicative of the situation at the time of data collection, and are not statistically representative of the area's population.

## Population Movement and Displacement

Displacement patterns resulting from recent violence are seemingly determined by movement barriers. This has likely affected the movements of IDPs from communities in Tambura differently. Findings suggest that communities in the south of Tambura County are mainly displacing to Tambura Town and South Yubo (in the south of Tambura county), and to larger settlements in nearby counties, particularly Ezo, Nzara and Yambio. While some IDPs from the south of Tambura county have reportedly displaced to the north, this displacement journey has reportedly become very dangerous, particularly for men. Communities in the north of Tambura County are reportedly unable to make displacement journeys to the south of the county and into neighbouring areas due to insecurity. As a result, displaced populations from the north of Tambura County largely displace to Tambura Town and Namutina, within Tambura county, or to Nagero County and Wau town in the north.

- Findings suggest that recent sub-national violence and widespread insecurity has led to displacement of communities to areas where they have had a historically large presence.
- According to FGD participants, IDPs from communities from both the north and the south of Tambura County have congregated in Tambura town, which is perceived to be relatively safe. IDPs have reportedly settled in and around the United Nations Mission to South Sudan (UNMISS), the Tambura catholic church, women's center, and also close to the military barracks. FGD participants reported that there are

tensions between displaced communities from different areas within Tambura Town.

- In addition, communities in the south of Tambura County have largely displaced to Ezo, Nzara and Yambio. FGD participants reported that most IDPs travel to Ezo on foot, with the journey often taking around three days, while some better-off households have reportedly hired motorbikes.<sup>3</sup> According to FGD participants, women and children have generally been able to displace to Ezo and other locations south of Tambura, while particularly young, able-bodied men have been limited in their movement due to the risk of being turned back by armed groups (see Movement Barriers section). FGD participants reported that, if men refuse to go return to Tambura, they are often killed. This has reportedly deterred men from displacing to areas outside of Tambura County,
- Findings suggest that distance and financial barriers have limited the ability of the most vulnerable, notably older persons, persons with disabilities, and single female and male headed households, to displace out of Tambura County. Many of these groups have reportedly been unable to move, or have displaced to larger settlements inside Tambura County, such as Tambura town. Some vulnerable groups in the north of Tambura have reportedly displaced to Namutina, due to an inability to undertake longer displacement movements to Wau. Vulnerable groups displaced within Tambura County are likely to have limited access to humanitarian services, and will likely be exposed to a greater risk of violence, relative to the IDPs that have fled Tambura County.
- FGD participants reported that, while displacement by populations in the south of Tambura County to the north was still possible in June, continued fighting has since limited movement along this route. Women and girls from the south are reportedly still able to move relatively freely through the north, along with communities from the south that have settled permanently in the north.
- IDPs displacing to the north reportedly preferred to settle in Wau, rather than Nagero, due to a reported lack of humanitarian services in the latter location. However, IDPs in Wau reported that they have not been contacted by NGOs since their arrival (since July), and have not received any humanitarian assistance.
- Many IDPs in Wau were reportedly residing with relatives within the host community, the presence of which is reported to be an important pull factor. FGD participants reported that land was due to be allocated to the IDPs, however, at the time of data collection, this had reportedly not happened yet.

## Cross-Border Movement

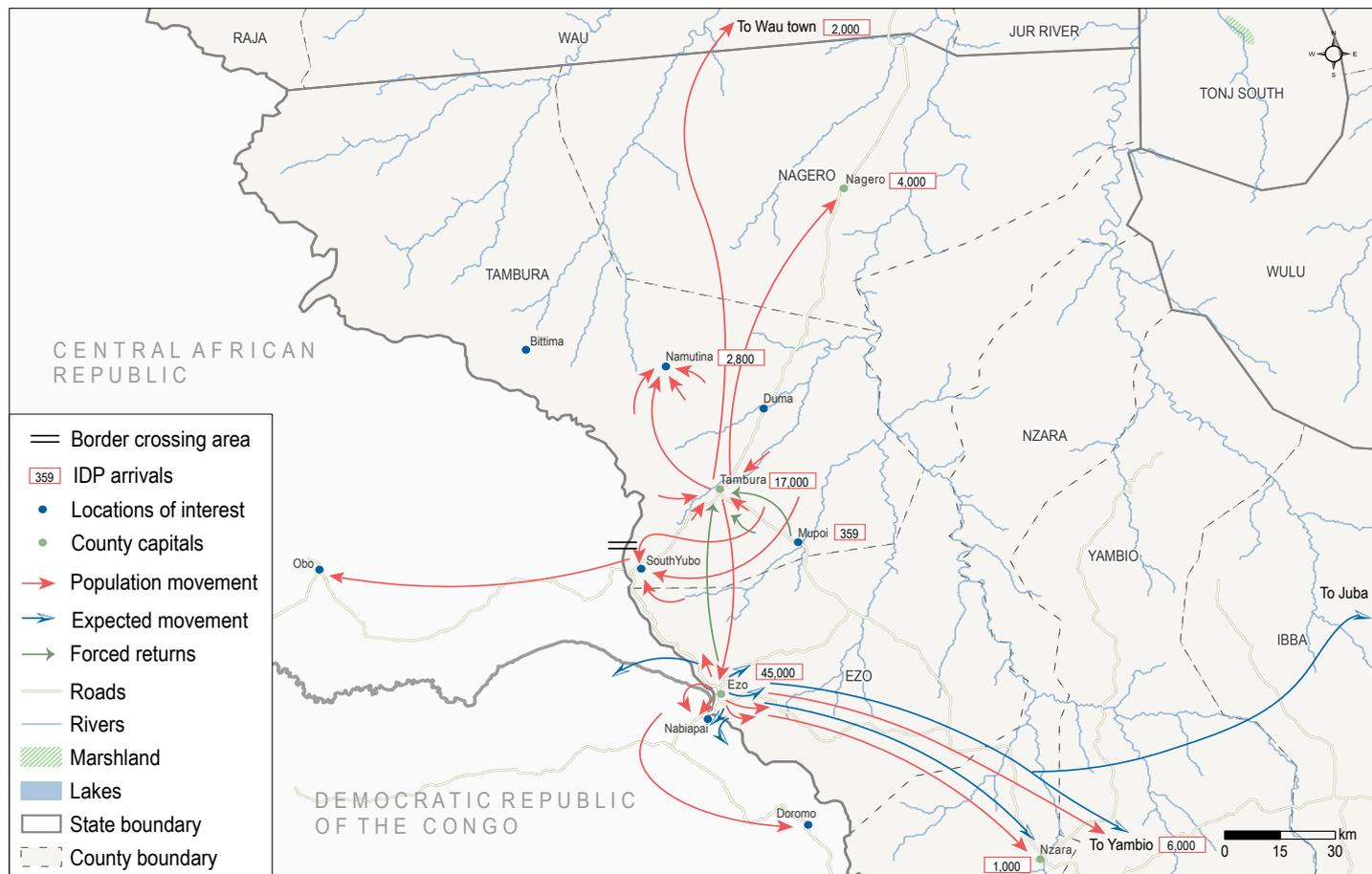
Cross border movement options are reportedly very limited for communities in the north of Tambura County. Communities in the



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**Map 1: Population movement as reported by IDPs displaced from Tambura County to Western Bahr el Ghazal**



south reportedly have more cross border displacement options available, with some people reportedly crossing from South Yubo into Central African Republic (CAR), however, most refugees are reportedly crossing into the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) via Ezo. Cross border movement is likely to increase in the near term as the perceived threat of men being sent back from Ezo to Tambura has reportedly caused these groups to flee to other locations.

## Movements into DRC

- Most refugees displaced due to the clashes in Tambura County are reportedly fleeing to DRC. In the near term, cross border movement to DRC is likely to increase (see Expected Movement section).
- People displaced to Ezo have been moving over the border into DRC and settling at a market town called Nabiapa, located approximately one hour from the border. Some people have reportedly moved onwards to a town called Doromo, far to the south of Nabiapa. FGD participants reported that DRC is perceived to be relatively safe.
- Most of the cross border movement between South Sudan and DRC has reportedly taken place at formal crossing points, particularly the Ezo-Nabiapai crossing.

- According to FGD participants, men have been sent back to Tambura while displacing to Ezo, or have been sent back after having arrived in Ezo town. Assessment findings suggest that, many men displaced from Tambura to Ezo have been displaced again, this time to remote locations away from the main town, inside South Sudan, and also into DRC. Fragmentation of households may have a negative impact on IDPs' ability to access to food, particularly for female headed households with a large number of dependents.
- According to FGD participants, South Sudanese refugees in the DRC are subject to monthly taxation; those refugees that are not able to pay reportedly often move away from larger towns. Consequently, the most vulnerable refugees are likely to be the most geographically isolated, with limited access to humanitarian services and markets.

## Movements into CAR

FGD participants reported that communities in South Yubo face substantial barriers to cross into CAR. In previous years, the main road between South Yubo and CAR was used to transport goods to nearby marketplaces on each side of the border. According to FGD participants, there is a history of traders being attacked and looted in this area, and criminality has reportedly remained high along the main road, deterring movement. Moving forward, displacement into



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CAR is likely going to be limited and a future increase in movement could be reflective of a further deterioration in the food security/protection situation within Tambura County.

- FGD participants reported that clashes have taken place along the border between armed groups from South Yubo and CAR, limiting movement.
- In addition, findings suggest that financial barriers are also deterring formal movement into CAR; FGD participants reported that refugees from South Sudan moving into CAR using formal border crossings (South Yubo to Bambuti), have to pay to enter the country.
- Once in CAR, many of the South Sudanese refugees with sufficient resources reportedly travel onwards to Obo, which is a one-day motorbike ride from the border. As such, most of the vulnerable refugees are likely to remain close to the border areas.
- There is reportedly very little movement of communities in the north of Tambura County into CAR, due to distance, a lack of roads, and relative proximity to Nagero and onwards to Wau, where access to humanitarian services is deemed to be better.

## Movement Barriers

Movement of armed groups in the south of Tambura County has reportedly limited movement options, particularly for men, who are reportedly being sent back to their settlements. Women and children are reportedly able to make displacement journeys out of Tambura county, however, forced recruitment in Ezo town has reportedly resulted in men and boys being escorted back to Tambura.

- Women and girls are reportedly allowed to move from Tambura to Ezo, however, FGD participants consistently reported that men and boys ('over the age of 10'), are being turned around and sent back to Tambura to fight.
- FGD participants reported that humanitarian compounds in Tambura Town have been raided, and that NGO motorbikes are being used by armed groups to patrol the main roads, and to monitor who is moving, often intercepting men and forcing them to return to their settlements. As a consequence of this, people have reportedly begun to displace to Ezo through insecure rural areas. This journey can reportedly take between seven to ten days, compared to three days along the main road, increased distance may deter some people from making displacement journeys outside of Tambura County.
- Recruitment in Ezo reportedly began in early September, causing a spike in cross border movement to DRC, and cross border movement is expected to increase in the near term, particularly if recruitment efforts intensify (see Expected Movement section).
- Movement towards services inside Tambura county has also

decreased. Most NGO staff were evacuated between June and August following a spike in violence. Correspondingly, FGD participants reported that most humanitarian services were not functional at the time of data collection. Furthermore, prior to the clashes in June, people from Namutina used to travel to Tambura town to access services and medicines, however, insecurity has meant that vulnerable groups in this area are unable to travel to access services.

## Expected Movement

The recent forced recruitment in Ezo will likely result in men continuing to displace from Ezo town, possibly making dangerous displacement journeys through remote and insecure areas, and crossing informally into DRC.

- According to FGD participants, movement of people into DRC will likely increase in the near term, as the forced recruitment of able-bodied men and boys in Ezo town has caused continued insecurity. FGD participants reported that men in Ezo have begun to displace, with many crossing informally to DRC, and that, in the near to medium term, 'all men are expected to flee'. In the medium term, many families will likely displace from Ezo to Nzara and particularly to Yambio, which is considered to be safer, placing increased pressure on host community resources.

## Endnotes

1. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). Tambura Conflict Displacement. September 2021.
2. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Ezo Inter-Agency Humanitarian mission. September 2021.
3. DRC. Rapid Protection Assessment, Ezo Central Boma. August 2021.
4. OCHA. Ezo Inter-Agency Humanitarian mission. September 2021.

### About REACH Initiative

REACH Initiative 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. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).

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