



# Greater Akobo Rapid Displacement Brief

Jonglei State, South Sudan, January 2018

## Introduction

Following the outbreak of conflict in Pieri, Uror County, in mid-January, internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Uror and Akobo West fled to Akobo town and Bor Protection of Civilian (PoC) site, whilst others have moved towards Ethiopia to reach refugee camps in Gambella. Given the rapid onset of the population movement, a lack of information on the nature of the displacement posed a challenge to partners operating in the area. To address these gaps, REACH conducted sudden onset remote displacement tracking to provide an initial overview over population movement. This entailed six focus group discussions (FGDs) with 33 female and 16 male new arrivals from Uror County and Akobo West between 17 to 28 January in Akobo town and Bor PoC site, along with direct observation of IDP settlement sites in Akobo town and REACH port monitoring.

## Key Findings

- In mid-January 2018 conflict broke out between armed actors in the Pieri area, **triggering displacement along the Yuai-Pieri-Mwot Tot road (Uror) as well as in Akobo West in the Walgak area**. This came after conflict in February and April 2017 and incidences of insecurity in subsequent months in the Greater Akobo area (Akobo, Nyirol and Uror Counties), which displaced at least 100,000 individuals.<sup>1</sup>
- As IDPs were displaced from sites near Pieri in mid-January, they moved through settlements in Uror, Nyirol and Akobo West, taking different routes until reaching Walgak. Populations in the settlements through which they passed, fearing that conflict

would then spread from sites of the initial fighting, also reportedly fled to Akobo town. This included displacement from settlements in and around Walgak, where FGD participants reported that a large section of the population has fled.

- Around 15 January IDPs from Uror started to arrive in **Akobo town**. New arrivals were also noted in the **Bor PoC site, Lankien (Nyirol County)** and **refugee camps in Ethiopia**, while others reportedly fled to **remote locations in both Uror and Duk**.
- The IDPs arriving in Akobo town were predominantly women and children**. Temporary IDP shelters were at full capacity a few days after the first IDPs arrived in mid-January, resulting in the majority of new arrivals seeking shelter among the local community.
- According to FGD participants, **IDPs intend to stay in Akobo town**. However, if there is a lack of service provision, or an outbreak of violence, they may seek to cross the border to Ethiopia.

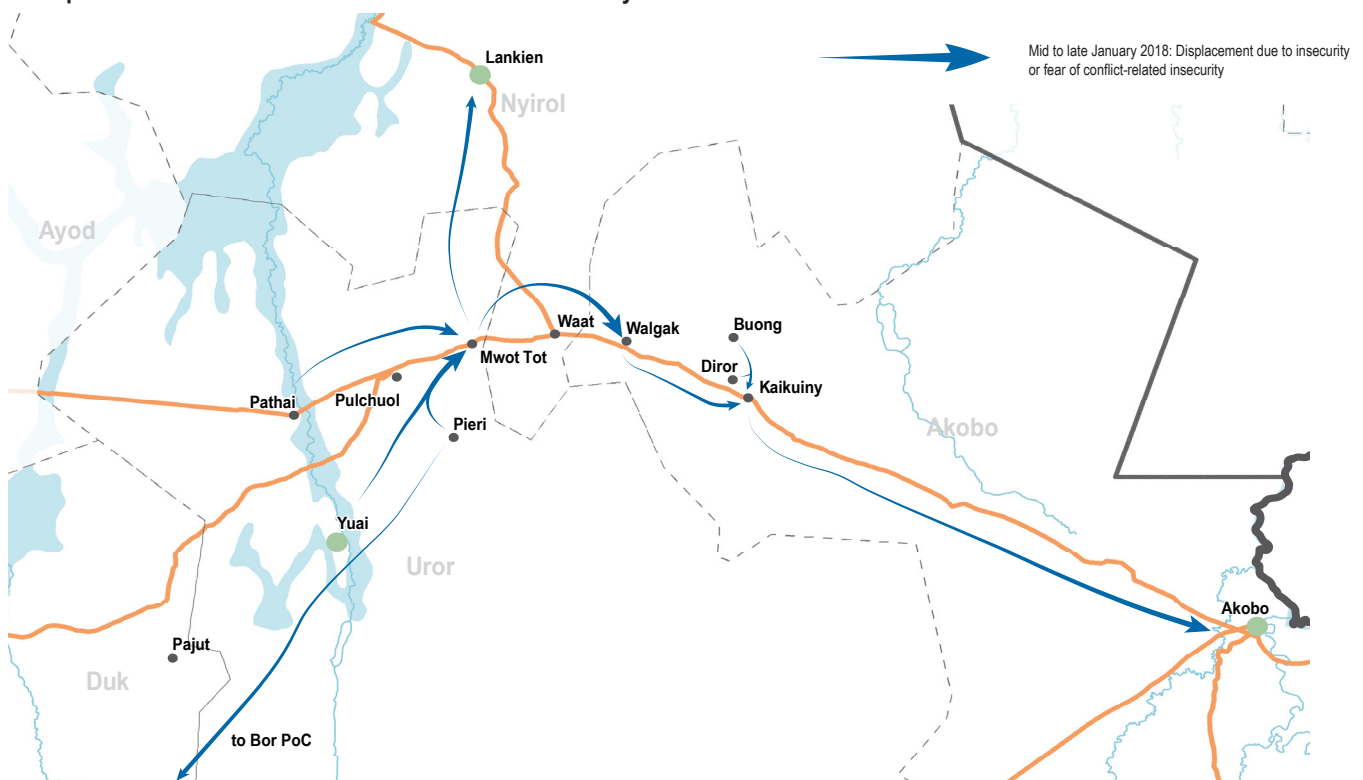
## Displacement within and from Greater Akobo

### Displacement from Uror County to Akobo town and Lankien

FGD participants from Pieri interviewed in Akobo town reported insecurity and low access to food and services as key push factors for their movement. At the time of the assessment, respondents reported that some of the community from Pieri was reportedly still missing and that due to the sudden onset of displacement families had been separated.

Those interviewed in Akobo town reported first travelling to Mwot Tot following the outbreak of violence. In addition to those **displaced**

Map 1: Displacement within Greater Akobo and from Uror County to Bor PoC site



from Pieri, much of the population in Mwot Tot and Yuai was reported to have fled as well, fearing that insecurity in nearby Pieri may soon spread to their areas. FGD respondents from Uror then proceeded from Mwot Tot to Walgak by travelling north of Waat, rather than along the main road, to avoid armed actors. From Walgak, IDPs travelled along the main road to Akobo town, moving together with the seasonal cattle migration via Kaikuiny, as it was perceived that moving in such groups would provide greater protection from armed actors that may attack them on the route. On average, FGD respondents reported they had covered the distance from Uror to Akobo town in five days by foot.

FGD participants also reported that a small group of IDPs from Mwot Tot, Pieri and Pathai chose to move towards **Lankien**, settling in **Nyambor Tutrial and Nyambor Yien**. Humanitarian partners present in Lankien also confirmed the arrival of a small number of IDPs following the conflict in Pieri.

## Displacement from Akobo West to Akobo town

Expecting the violence in Uror to spread in light of dry season road conditions facilitating easier movement of armed actors, populations living in settlements in Akobo West, through which the IDPs from Uror passed en route to Akobo town, also decided to flee. FGD respondents from Akobo West reported that these were populations from **Walgak, Buong and Diror**. These IDPs typically followed the same route to Akobo town via Kaikuiny as those from Uror. Overall, both respondents from Uror and Akobo West reported that **some of the population that fled with them had been IDPs** from the clashes in 2017, indicative of secondary displacement.

According to local authorities about 2,000 IDPs had arrived in Akobo town by 25 January. Whilst at this point no verification exercise had been conducted by humanitarian partners and REACH does not track new IDP arrival figures, this estimate was consistent with field observations of REACH teams in Akobo town.

## Displacement from Uror County to Bor PoC site

Between 17 January and 28 January 36 new arrivals from Uror were recorded at the Bor PoC site, representing a notable increase in the number of new arrivals from Uror which over the entire month of December had only been 11 individuals.<sup>2,3</sup> The vast majority of

new arrivals from Uror that arrived in Bor PoC site between 17 to 28 January originated from conflict-affected Pieri.<sup>4</sup> FGD participants reported that they had travelled **from Pieri by foot to Poktap** in Duk County, before paying for vehicle transport to Bor PoC site at the cost of 15,000 South Sudanese Pound per person. Overall, FGD participants noted that the protection the PoC site offers served as a key pull factor for their movement.

*"We are coming here to be protected and get food assistance as others do in Bor PoC; we are tired of running every time in Uror."*

*Male FGD respondent, interviewed in Bor PoC site*

FGD participants also reported that in light of insecurity and low service access in Pieri, they **expected more IDPs from Uror to arrive at the PoC site in the near future**, including those who at the time of the assessment were still en route by foot as they could not afford the transport costs from Poktap to Bor PoC site.

New arrivals also reported that **in addition to moving towards Akobo town and Lankien, populations in Payai, Pieri, Mwot Tot, Pulchuol and Pathai fled into the bush or to nearby settlements in Uror and Duk**.

## Displacement from Greater Akobo to Ethiopia

In addition to displacement within Greater Akobo and to parts of Western Jonglei, FGD participants reported that some **IDPs from Uror County and Akobo West chose to move towards Ethiopia, using the Burbiey crossing point** bordering Upper Nile State. Through participatory mapping exercises, IDPs described this route as branching from the main route at Walgak, taken by IDPs from Uror County described earlier in this brief. From Walgak, IDPs reportedly moved to Ulang town, Mandeng, Jikmir and then crossed the border to Ethiopia through Burbiey. From there, they reportedly proceeded to Matar, a key refugee transit location where refugees await relocation to a suitable camp in western Ethiopia's Gambella region.

Similarly, there has also been **increased movement to refugee camps in Gambella via the Akobo-Tirgol crossing point**. REACH Port Monitoring in Akobo town, which tracks movement of South Sudanese heading to or returning from Ethiopian refugee camps in Gambella, noted a slight increase in the average number of people permanently leaving to Ethiopia: from an average of 25 individuals a day in the month of December to an average of 32 individuals a day across the 17-28 January period, with 71% of those departing originating from Uror and Akobo West.<sup>5</sup> Out of these, 71% cited a lack of security or ongoing conflict among the three main reasons for leaving, reflective of the fact that movement is largely conflict-driven.<sup>6</sup>

This latest displacement to Ethiopia through Burbiey and Akobo crossing points comes against a general backdrop of increased movement to Ethiopia, as refugee registration in Pamdong, across the Ethiopian border from Pagak, saw almost 3,000 South Sudanese refugees registered in the first few days of January alone.<sup>7</sup> This trend may continue if conflict in Greater Akobo persists and if increasingly strained resources in arrival destinations, such as Akobo town leave IDPs unable to meet their basic needs, thereby forcing IDPs to seek resources in refugee camps in Gambella.

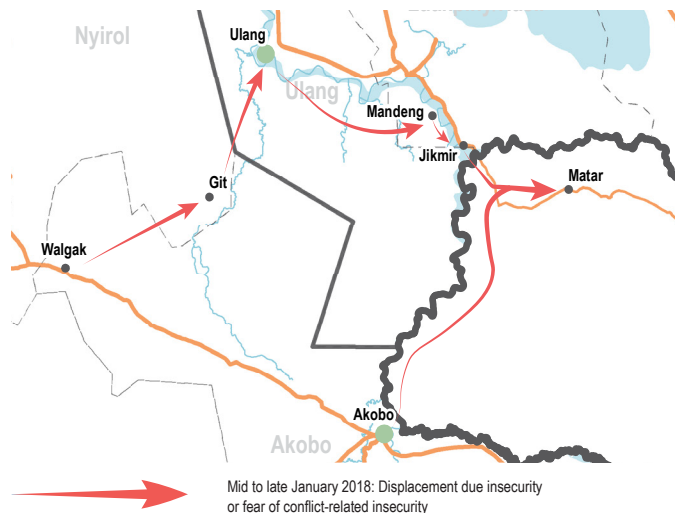
## Reported challenges along displacement routes

Across FGDs in Akobo town and Bor PoC site, IDPs reported similar challenges whilst travelling to their arrival destination:

- Fears of attacks by armed actors and inter-community conflict, with one deadly cattle raiding incident en route between Akobo West and Akobo East reported.
- Inadequate access to food in transit locations.
- A lack of water containers along the road leading to dehydration. Those who were travelling together with the seasonal cattle migration reported sharing the same unprotected water source as the cattle, reportedly leading to cases of diarrhoea.
- A lack of appropriate clothing and footwear, with several IDPs reporting to have made the journey barefoot.

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Map 2: Displacement from Greater Akobo to Ethiopia



## Humanitarian Needs of IDP Populations from Uror and Akobo West in Akobo town

During FGDs with new arrivals in Akobo town, REACH recorded the reported humanitarian needs of these populations, the following section outlines these findings.

- FGD participants reported **access to food, through inclusion in the General Food Distributions (GFDs), as primary need** since their arrival in Akobo town.
- **Shelter and non-food items (NFIs) were cited as equally urgently needed.** With communal buildings at full capacity, the majority of new arrivals were seeking shelter amongst the local community. If displacement was to continue at this scale and without shelter assistance, the capacity of the local community to shelter IDPs may be exceeded. Further, in light of the sudden onset of the displacement, FGD participants were unable to carry NFIs along and cited **a lack of blankets, water containers and mosquito nets as their top NFI needs.**
- **New arrivals also reported experiencing health problems during their displacement,** such as diarrhoea and malaria, indicating a potential need for access to medical services
- Protection concerns cited in FGDs **suggest a need for a protection assessment,** which would also assist in identifying protection issues faced by IDPs in their arrival destination.

## IDP Intentions

According to FGD participants, **the majority of IDPs who arrived in Akobo town and Bor PoC site intend to stay there until stability and peace return to their respective areas.** However, some IDPs expressed a desire to travel from Akobo town to the refugee camps in Ethiopia, which they believed was not possible at the time of the assessment due to a lack of financial resources needed to make the boat journey. IDPs from Mwot Tot reported that unless a registration of new arrivals takes place in Akobo in the near future, they would move to Ethiopia by foot. Moreover, various FGD participants reported that

a key factor leading to movement to Ethiopia would be if insecurity spread to Akobo town.

## Conclusion

Renewed conflict in Uror County has given rise to **rapid displacement towards Akobo town, with smaller movement towards Bor PoC site, Duk, Lankien and Ethiopia reported.** In Akobo town, the majority of new arrivals have dispersed amongst the local community, potentially straining local resources, while making needs assessments more difficult for humanitarian actors. However, based on FGDs, humanitarian needs such as access to food, healthcare and shelter and NFIs are evident. Given ongoing insecurity in Greater Akobo, as well as the onset of the lean season, these humanitarian needs are likely to increase in coming months.

Equally of concern are **vulnerable populations having fled to or remaining in remote locations in Uror and Duk Counties,** as reported by new arrivals. Given overall visibility on the scale of displacement to remote locations remains low and that some populations are reportedly either physically unable or without the financial resources to make the long journey to arrival destinations such as Akobo town or Bor PoC site, there is a need for further tracking of populations seeking protection in remote locations. As the situation in Greater Akobo remains fluid and volatile, **REACH will continue to monitor displacement and the humanitarian situation** in the coming weeks to ensure that precise and timely information can be accessible and used by humanitarian actors.

### Endnotes

1. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, South Sudan Humanitarian Snapshot, April 2017.
2. Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM), Bor PoC site, Movement Trend Tracking (MTT), as of 28 January 2018.
3. Bor PoC site hosted 2,296 individuals as of December 2017, according to CCCM Cluster South Sudan.
4. CCCM, Bor PoC site, MTT, as of 28 January 2018.
5. REACH, South Sudan Displacement Crisis - Akobo Port Monitoring, January 2018 (forthcoming).
6. Ibid.
7. Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations, Ethiopia – Refugee influx from South Sudan, 10 January 2018.