



Southern Torit County Displacement and Service Access Brief

Torit County, Eastern Equatoria State, South Sudan, November 2017

Background

In response to reports of persistent needs and a growing population of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the mountain and valley areas of southern Torit County, REACH joined a Rapid Response Mission team constituted by the World Food Program (WFP) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) in Gunyoro village, Ifwotu Payam. A concurrent screening and distribution took place in Iholong village, also in Ifwotu Payam, but was cut short due to nearby fighting.

The assessment was conducted from 17-20 November and consisted of 4 KI interviews with community leaders, 2 gender-disaggregated Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with a total of 28 participants, continuous interaction with community members during aid provision, and general observation of the area by foot and helicopter. Findings should be considered as indicative only, and further verification via site visits should occur where possible.

Population Movement and Displacement

Torit and the foothills of the Imatong Mountains to its south have seen fighting for decades. In the last few years, the population in the area has been in flux, with frequent displacement inflows and outflows, and nearly continuous internal movements.

Displacement into southern Torit County

Displacement to southern Torit County has been occurring continuously since 2013, with two large waves following conflict in the last few years. The first, in June and July 2016, occurred in response to outbreaks of violence in most population centres across South Sudan. In total, 1,720 IDPs fled to Gunyoro and the surrounding area from a wide variety of locations, especially Torit, Magwi, Juba and Malakal. In March through June 2017, fighting resumed in and around Torit, displacing people into other areas of Eastern Equatoria, Uganda and Kenya; this brought another wave of IDPs, of indeterminate size, to Gunyoro and across southern Torit County. In addition to these two large displacements, community leaders reported a continuous trickle of IDPs arriving from Torit and Magwi, as people search for wild food and land for cultivation.

IDPs in Gunyoro indicated that they chose to move to the area because they were unable to afford transport to Uganda but could walk to Gunyoro, which they perceived to be a relatively safe and fertile area. Most travelled only with what they could carry. IDPs are reportedly well integrated into the local community; they share shelter areas, land for cultivation and the limited food that is available.

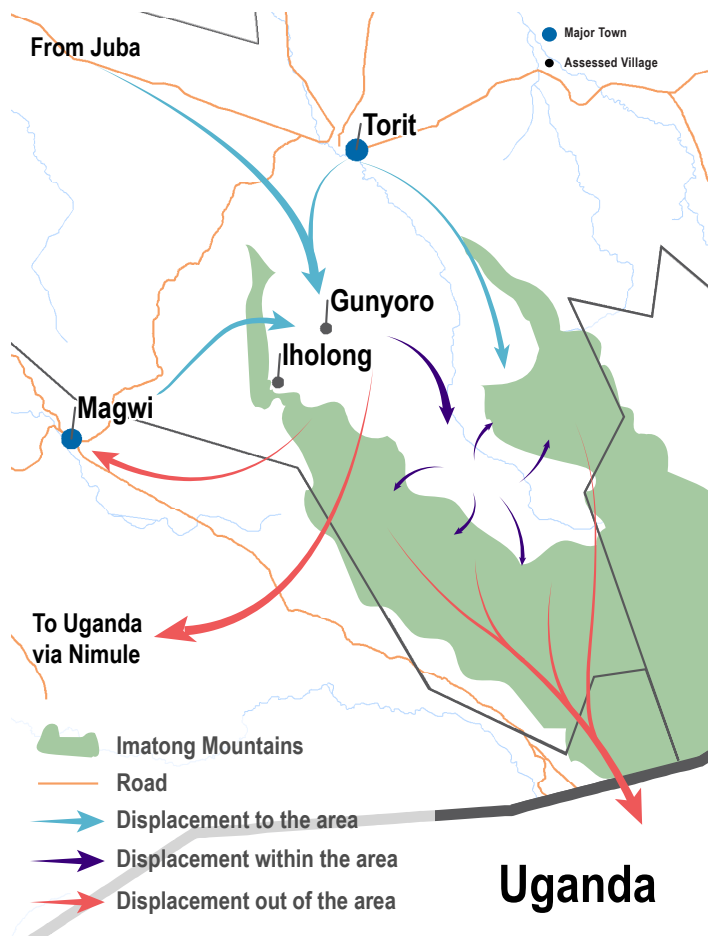
Displacement within southern Torit County

Approximately every month or two for the last year, fighting has extended into the valley, with reports of killing, sexual violence, robbery and the burning of tukuls of civilians. In response, much of the

Table 1: Estimated IDP count by payam

| | | | |
|--------|-------|-------|-------|
| Ifwotu | 1,800 | Iyire | 3,114 |
| Imurok | 1,976 | | |

Map 1: Displacement in southern Torit County



community has fled to temporary shelters in the surrounding Imatong Mountains, often returning to the valley only for a few days at a time to cultivate or harvest.

Displacement out of southern Torit County

Community leaders stated that approximately one third of the area's population fled to Uganda in the last few years. Most were said to have travelled through Nimule to Ugandan refugee camps. A small number were reported to have gone through Ikwotos and/or Chikudum to camps in Kenya.

Many FGD participants reported that they would prefer to continue on to Uganda, or at least send their families to the refugee camps there, primarily for education and health access. Money is reportedly the only barrier keeping them from travelling there.

Access to Food and Humanitarian Services

Food Security and Livelihoods

Access to food and services in the area is limited, reportedly affecting the IDPs and host community alike. Typically two cultivation periods are possible in the area, in March through June and June through September, but repeated conflict limited planting and destroyed harvests throughout 2017. Cultivation was further disrupted by heavy rains this year. Some planting is possible in the hillside refuges, but of very small scale. Wild plants, especially wild yams, provide additional

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nutrition, but these become less available in the dry season.

Southern Torit County has no markets, and access to the nearest market in Torit town is reportedly limited. Men cannot safely cross the checkpoints into town. Women and children are able to go, but to travel there and back takes most of the day from Gunyoro. These women often gather grass, firewood and wild greens along the way to sell. In the market they purchase only small amounts of grain, salt, soap and oil, because if they try to purchase larger amounts, much of it will reportedly be taken at the checkpoints as they leave. Due to this, the women have to make the journey frequently, as often as every other week, in order to restock on these basic goods; this is not possible for those living further away.

Community leaders reported that staple goods can also be purchased from travelling salespeople. Women from Torit town will occasionally walk into southern Torit County with salt, soap and oil, selling it along the way. Then they continue south over the Imatong Mountains into southeast Magwi County where they purchase fruits and vegetables from Uganda, which they carry back to Torit town for sale. These sales provide some relief from the need to walk into Torit town, but do not supply enough food to reduce hunger in the area.

Assessed Malnutrition

The World Health Organization defines population-level malnutrition of children aged 6 to 59 months of age as the combined percentage of Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) and Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM) cases; this is called the Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) rate. If measured using Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC), a GAM value of more than 10% indicates a critical phase of malnutrition, and over 17% indicates an extremely critical phase¹. As the screenings in Gunyoro and Iholong were non-representative of the entire population in the area, rates are considered “proxy”.













Levels of malnutrition of screened children in southern Torit County are close to or beyond the extremely critical phase. In Gunyoro, 491 children were screened by UNICEF using MUAC, finding a proxy GAM prevalence of 14.3% and a proxy SAM prevalence of 2.2%. Assessment in Iholong was cut short due to insecurity, but in the time before evacuation, the UNICEF team was able to screen 109 children using MUAC, finding a proxy GAM prevalence of 25.7% and a proxy SAM prevalence of 9.2%. After the UNICEF/WFP team was evacuated from Iholong, trained community volunteers continued with the screening; their findings, though unverified, suggest even higher malnutrition prevalence.




Seasonality and change over time should both also be considered. As these assessments were performed just after what is typically the harvest period, severity should be expected to worsen in the coming months.

Table 2: Proxy malnutrition rates of screened children²

| Location | Proxy SAM | Proxy GAM |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| Gunyoro | 2.2% | 14.3% |
| Iholong | 9.2% | 25.7% |

Table 2: Service access by population centre

| | Access to FSL | Access to WASH | Access to Health | Access to Education |
|-----------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Gunyoro |  |  |  |  |
| Iholong |  |  |  |  |
| Surrounding hillsides |  |  |  |  |

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

Communities further in the hills, including Iholong, appear to be most affected by food insecurity. Though more wild food is available, opportunities for cultivation are limited by the terrain, and travel to the market in Torit town is even more arduous. This is reflected in their higher rates of malnutrition.

Health, Education and Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)

There are no active services in southern Torit County. Medicines are available for purchase in Torit town, but FGD respondents reported that these are confiscated when crossing the checkpoint. A dispensary and a primary school in Gunyoro have not been functioning since their roofs were destroyed by fighting in 1983.

Community leaders reported that there are no functioning boreholes in the area. A few broken ones remain, although none were observed during the assessment so it is unclear if they can be rehabilitated. There are no latrines in the area, except for those at Gunyoro's abandoned school building; however, no trace of open defecation was observed. A perennial stream flows through the valley, but when people are in hiding in the hills, they can only access water through seasonal streams that are easily contaminated by effluent.

Conclusion

The people living in Southern Torit County were found to be in a precarious situation, given the risks of continued conflict and repeated displacement. Food insecurity is expected to increase, because a growing population is relying on limited resources. This already severe situation has been seriously exacerbated by the disruption of cultivation throughout 2017. With minimal market access and no services, this population has very limited options for food access.

There is a severe lack of information about communities living further south, deeper in the Imatong Mountains. If the malnutrition rates in Iholong are any indication of the conditions in these more remote villages, the situation may be dire. Unhindered access for additional assessment is critically needed.

Endnotes

1 IPC Global Partners. 2016. *Addendum to IPC Technical Manual Version 2.0: IPC Tools and Procedures for Classification of Acute Malnutrition*. Rome.

2 Nutrition prevalence based on MUAC screening of children aged 6-59 months by UNICEF and WFP teams and their trained volunteers on 18-19 November 2017 during vulnerability screenings. These are not definitive rates for the areas, but comparative indicators.