

Situation Overview: Greater Nyal East, South Sudan

December 2015



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SUMMARY

In recent months, IDPs from Leer, Mayendit, and other counties have fled to islands in the swamps northeast of Nyal Town in Panyijar County. An estimated 2,500 to 3,500 Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are now living in this location. Most have not received any humanitarian assistance, and are surviving with the help of the local host community.

From October 28th to the 30th, REACH carried out an assessment of seven islands occupied by IDPs in the swamps northeast of Nyal Town. The mission was designed to fill critical information gaps on unvisited IDP sites in Northern Panyijar county. Seven new sites were added to the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM), including Nyoat, Majok, Ngop, Mer 1 & 2, Kai Rueh, and Jathlual.

CONTEXT

Beginning in May 2015, a renewed offensive by the Sudan's People's Liberation Army (SPLA) into southern Unity state displaced thousands of people living in Koch, Leer, Mayendit, and Panyijar counties.¹ While approximately 130,000 IDPs made their way north to UNMISS Bentiu Protection of Civilians (PoC) site, many others, particularly those living in Leer and Mayendit counties, fled south to the swamps in the Greater Nyal area of northern Panyijar, where they are now living

on islands, along with IDPs from elsewhere in Panyijar.²³ Few humanitarian actors in Nyal are currently present, and more efforts and resources are needed in the islands to meet the needs of all IDPs.

Based on the current assessment, there are now between 6,000 and 10,000 IDPs from other counties in Unity living in the Greater Nyal area, of which **between 2,500 and 3,500 are living on islands in the swamps north of Nyal town.**⁴

The IDPs living there are currently supported by the islands' host communities, many of whom have been displaced from other parts of Panyijar themselves, and remain in need of humanitarian support.

This situation overview describes the displacement trends of IDPs currently located in the islands of Greater Nyal; the current humanitarian situation of IDPs and host communities; and humanitarian assistance received.

DISPLACEMENT

The majority of IDPs on the seven islands surveyed come from Leer County, particularly Pilling, Thonyor, Leer, Adok, Yang and Bou payams. These payams are all located near or around the major towns in central Leer (Leer, Adok, Pilling, and Thonyor) or along the Leer-



Adok road, all of which are now under the control of the South Sudan Government.

All IDPs surveyed expressed satisfaction with their per-displacement lives, reporting functional markets, schools and health centres within easy access. Markets were vibrant, with goods coming through the main Adok-Leer road, which was functional year round, and connected Leer with the rest of Unity state.

Map 1: Location of assessed islands in Greater Nyal East.

¹ IOM displacement tracking matrix

² Human Security Baseline Assessment (HSBA) for Sudan and South Sudan: The Conflict in Unity State, 1 July 2015.

³ Mission to Nyal, Panyijar County, Southern Unit, 31 August -2 September 2015: Mission Report OCHA (2015).

⁴ Overall estimate of the REACH Team based on 32 FGDs conducted at 19 individual sites in the Greater Nyal area.

METHODOLOGY

The seven islands covered in this report form part of a rapid assessment of 26 individual sites. A total of 10 focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted on the islands over three days in order to understand the situation and humanitarian needs of those located there. On each island, focus group discussions (FGDs) were carried out with both IDPs and host community members. Where possible, IDPs and host community were separated for each interview, as were men and women for gender specific questions.

LIMITATIONS

In many cases, REACH was the first NGO to visit the island, so much of the population came to take part, making it difficult to separate IDPs into small, specialised groups. As such, groups often exceeded 20 people, which can affect the quality of the discussion, and should be considered when reading the report.

In addition, due to the rapid nature of the assessment, the number of FGDs that could be conducted on each island was limited in order to give the REACH team time to verify the information received from IDPs.

Due to the quantitative methodology used, findings are not statistically significant. Rather, information collected aims to provide an overview of the humanitarian situation in northeast Greater Nyal as a whole.

Many grew crops such as sorghum, maize, okra, and bean, and owned livestock, including cows, goats, and chickens. In the dry season, they grazed their cattle west to the Mayendit border. Relations with other communities were amicable.

Reasons for leaving

All IDPs interviewed fled their homes due to the SPLA advance. **Many described cases of execution as well as abduction, physical harassment and abuse of the civilian population.**⁵ People fled quickly at the onset of violence, taking few supplies with them, and heading south in search of safety and food.

Reasons for settling in Greater Nyal

Most of the IDPs interviewed had not known anyone in Panyijiar prior to being displaced. They fled southwards because Panyijiar was perceived as being safe and out of government control. A minority, however, stated that they had relatives who had married into clans in Panyijiar, and were now living in the area.

Figure 1: Reported push and pull factors for displacement

Push Factors	Pull Factors
Lack of Security	Secure IO area
Lack of Food	Presence of family
Destruction of Livelihoods	Land/Opportunities for Livelihoods
Loss of Property	

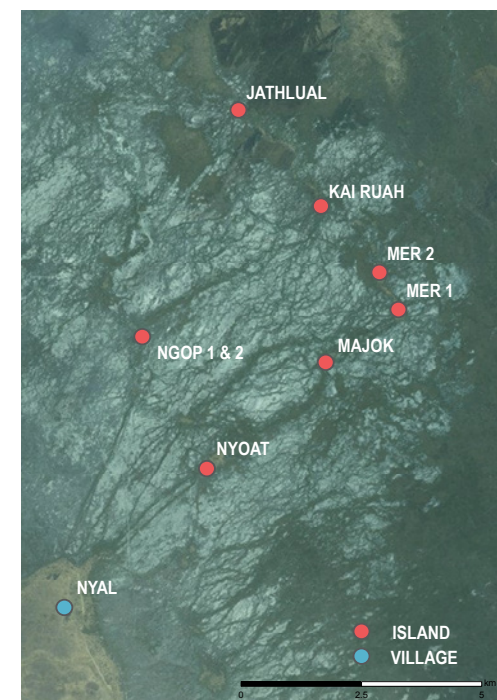
Displacement routes

Once the crisis began, all of the IDPs fled into the bush, making their way to the islands of Turia and Kok, located in southern Leer. From there, most waited on the islands, hoping that the situation would soon stabilize enough to be able to return home. A small number, however, who did not envisage being able to return quickly, instead made their way south to Nyal. Most travelled by canoe, either by constructing one themselves, or hiring canoe men who know the area (see inset). Those without any means of riverine transportation tied their belonging in plastic sheets and trudged on foot, pulling their remaining assets behind them.

A second wave began in August, when large numbers of IDPs began filtering out of Kok, Turia and other islands in Leer and headed south as a group. Almost all of this group of IDPs paid for canoes, seeking out others from the first group who had already settled on islands.

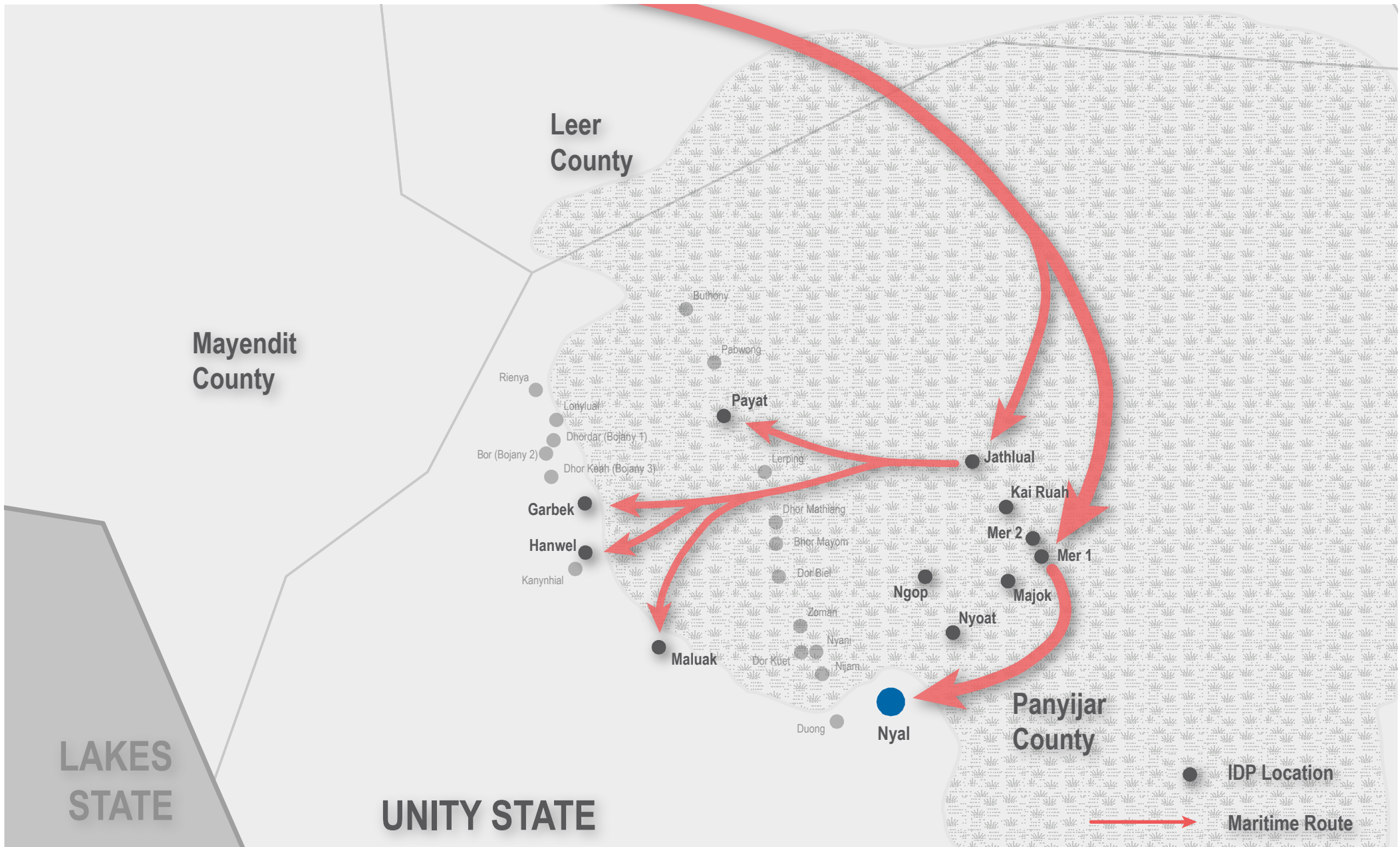
Intentions

All IDPs stated that they felt safe in the Greater Nyal area. They do not intend to return to their homelands until there is a lasting peace, and intend to restart their lives on the islands. All mentioned that everything that once existed in their homelands has now been destroyed, and that there is nothing to go back to.



Map 2: Leer Displacement Routes

⁵ More comprehensive documentation of the current conflict of Unity can be found in, "Flash Human Rights Report on the Escalation of Fighting in Great Upper Nile, UNMISS, 29 June 2015."



Map 3: Displacement Routes of IDPs from Leer⁶

⁶ For information on the humanitarian situation on the eastern islands and mainland villages, please see, REACH, Situation Overview: Greater Nyal Wesat, December 2015.

SWAMP TRANSPORTATION

To come to Nyal, IDPs must navigate a labyrinth of islands, sand bars, and knee-deep swamp water obscured by thick, three-meter high grass. Most rely on the canoe men from Panyijiar, who charge IDPs 300 SSP per man, 400 SSP per woman, and 150 SSP per child to take the two-day journey from Kok to Mer or Jathlual islands.

Most IDPs trade the few remaining assets they have in order to afford the journey. This requires them to take dangerous trips back to their homelands to recover hidden assets, leaving late at night and returning early in the morning to avoid SPLA patrols. Acquiring the necessary money to pay for a canoe can take a long time; some IDPs waited as long as three months on Kok until they could afford a ride for them and their families.

Those who could not afford to travel by boat, or came before the large influx of IDPs in August, were instead forced to travel without a boat. In this case a family would wrap all of its belongings in a plastic sheet, and tie it around their waists with rope. Children would sit on top, while adults (usually women) would trudge their way through the Sud all the way to Panyijiar (the waters are anywhere between half a meter and a metre and a half deep, depending on the location). While cheaper, this method is also much more dangerous, exposing IDPs to swamp dwelling poisonous snakes and crocodiles.

HUMANITARIAN SITUATION

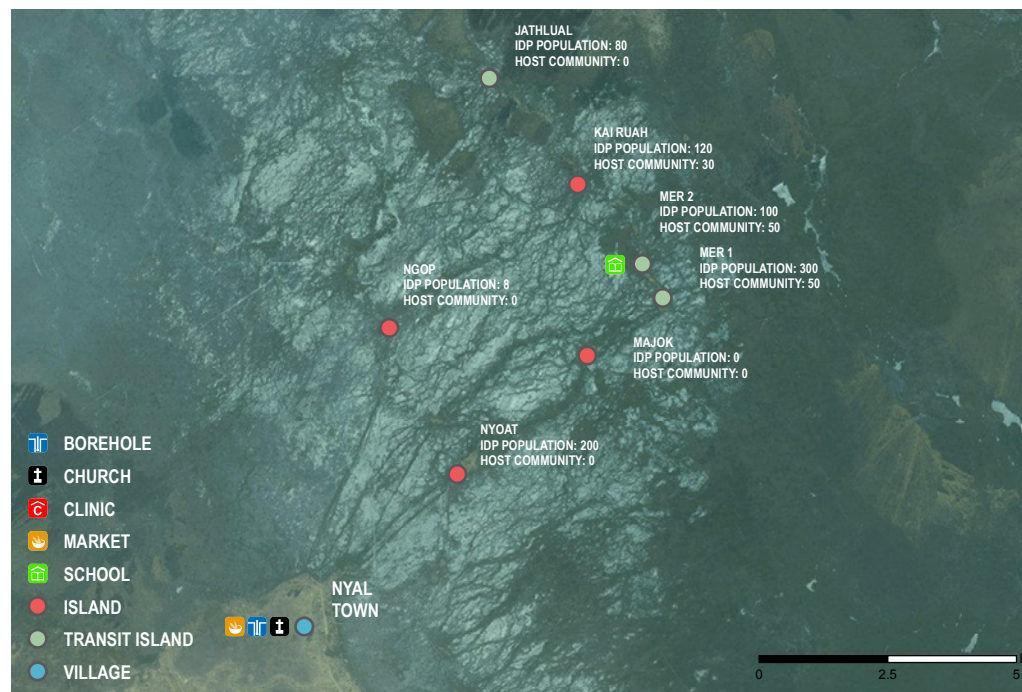
Demographics The situation faced by IDPs on each island varies slightly depending on the presence of a host community/IDPs from Panyijiar, the size of the IDP population and time at which the majority of them arrived. However, the situation on each of the islands is largely uniform across sectors. **The vast majority of the IDP population observed on all of the islands are young children**, the remainder being women of varying ages, along with a few old men. Very few young men were seen, and are presumably still in Leer.

Health

IDPs reported that Malaria, Diarrhea, Typhoid, and Bilharzia were all major health issues. A health centre, run by Sign of Hope, provides treatment for most of these diseases in Nyal town, but this is a day-long journey that many IDPs cannot afford. IDPs reported that up to 5 children had been born in the past month, while up to 10 individuals were reported to have died, most of these children under 5. For most IDPs, local herbal remedies are the only available treatment for disease, such as a concoction made from the Nim trees that grow on many of the islands.

Shelter

A majority of IDPs are living without shelter on the islands. Rakoobas and Tukuls built by those displaced from Panyijiar in May provide the only housing on the islands. These are shared by anywhere between three and five families at night, though **most sleep outside**



Map 4: Services and estimated IDP population by location

under mosquito nets provided by the host community. When it rains, as many as 30 people reportedly crowd inside a single shelter to keep dry—an unsustainable solution during the rainy season of four to five months.

Dried palms constitute the only material to build new shelters on the islands, and have already started to become exhausted on all islands but Mer. Apart from Mer and Majok, all islands are relatively crowded, and will struggle to accommodate new arrivals, who are continuing to come to the islands on a daily basis.

Non-food items

NFI's brought by the displaced host community, including mosquito nets, cooking sets, fishing kits, and plastic sheets, constitute the only NFIs available to IDPs. UNIDO and Mercy Corps have participated in distributions prior to the influx in June, using local canoes as a means of delivery, but IDPs report no distributions since then. All resources are shared.

Water and Sanitation

All IDPs report getting water for both drinking and cooking directly from the swamp. The

water has a salty taste and strange odor and may IDPs believe it to be the cause of rampant illness on the islands. Because of these perceived health issues, and a lack of adequate jerry cans, IDPs reported consuming less than 10L per day.

There are no latrines on any of the islands and IDPs relieve themselves in the bush or straight into the swamp. In contrast to the eastern islands and mainland, most IDPs collect and burn their trash, leaving the islands relatively clean.

Food Security and Livelihoods

At the onset of the crisis, many IDPs reported hiding food near their homes before fleeing into the bush. Some have since made temporary returns in order to bring these supplies back to the islands with them.

Aside from fish they are able to catch, and food shared by the host community, they have no other means of survival. IDPs complain of a lack of nets and hooks to fish, and of dwindling food supplies. While some land is available for cultivation by IDPs, the growing season had finished prior to their arrival, leaving them unable to plant. In addition, the available land is relatively small, and would be inadequate to support the current number of new arrivals in the longer term.

Education

There is one primary school on Mer that IDP children may attend. Children from Majok, Mer, Kai Rueh, and Jathual attend this school,

though those on Nyoat report no access to education, likely due to the distance (over 2 hours) from Mer.

The school lacks adequate supplies, such as paper and pens, and **many children must travel hours in dugout canoes every day to get there, so the majority do not attend.** The school is staffed by volunteer teachers who are not compensated for their work, although parents reported that they pay to receive report cards.

Protection

All IDPs stated that they felt safe on the islands. However, they did express concerns at the lack of lighting and a fear of snakes or other wild animals that may harm them at night. Crime on the islands is low, though alcoholism is a problem.

Privately, women stated that they felt safer here than in their former homelands, as their husbands, “were not here, and could not beat them.” Any problems are handled through the local host community’s governance structures that are already in place.

The SSRRA provides a representative to manage affairs on each of the islands, and to whom all problems can be reported. All problems are reported to the representative, who reports to the Boma authorities on Mer, and then on to the Payam authorities in Nyal. No SGBV or gender specific services are available on the islands.⁴ All of the IDPs interviewed expressed a desire for greater tracing efforts to reunite with displaced family

members. **The SSRRA has attempted to set up a tracing program on Mer, but requires assistance.**

Communication

IDPs have no means of communication with their homelands in Leer other than through new arrivals and the rumors brought by the boat drivers who travel back and forth. Many desired more information on the security situation in the country and on the availability of humanitarian assistance in the region.

HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Current support to IDPs in the Greater Nyal Area, particularly those living on the islands, is limited.⁷ Sign of Hope runs the main clinic in Nyal Town, and PSUs in Duong, Nyondong and Pathiel, while IRC maintains a smaller clinic in Maluak, 6-8 hours east. UNIDO also has a mobile clinic, but only operates in the market area of Nyal Town. **Health services are still limited, and restricted to those on the mainland or close by.**

IRC is the lead WASH partner in Nyal, and is currently operating in four payams, rehabilitating boreholes and conducting hygiene promotion activities, as is UNIDO. However, IDPs report a lack of clean water and positive hygiene practices across the entire Greater Nyal area. Oxfam has plans to begin constructing wells on some of the islands.⁸

IRC is currently doing protection monitoring in 4 payams and two bomas in the area, and UNIDO is doing some mobile protection

monitoring on the mainland. IDPs and host community on the Island have requested assistance in tracing and counselling.

Mercy Crops is running an emergency cash transfer programme with 1,718 beneficiaries, which is intended to support local traders, both on the mainland and on 16 islands. UNIDO and IRC also are both distributing seeds and tools to vulnerable host community members and IDPs on the mainland. IRC has a restocking scheme to replenish female goats and sheep to the host community. NFI and shelter distributions have been carried out by Mercy Corps, both on the mainland and the islands.

Concerning education, UNIDO assists with four schools on the mainland, but support has so far been limited to the rehabilitation of school houses and the training of 30 teachers.

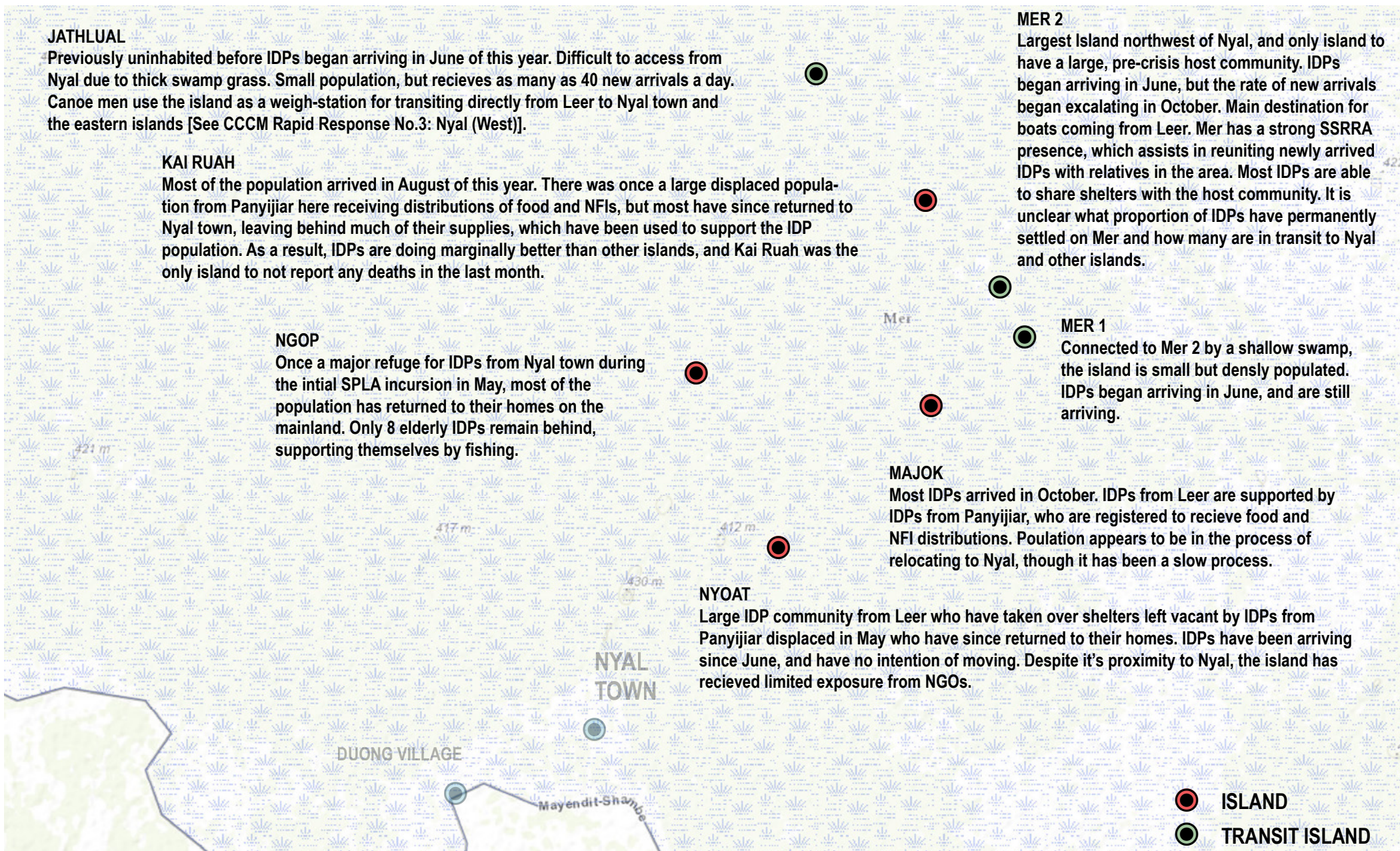
The vast majority of host community and IDPs, particularly those living on the islands, report not receiving any services. Those who are, have found themselves sharing overstretched resources with the steady influx of new IDPs. There is room for increased programme implementation and expansion across all sectors.

HOST COMMUNITY

Prior to the crisis, only Mer had a large permanent host community. The rest of the islands remained deserted until May of this year, when a government incursion into the Greater Nyal area displaced much of the population of Mayom and Nyal payams. The communities

⁷For more information on the humanitarian situation in Nyal, see, “Rapid Assessment Report - Nyal, Payijjar County (Unity State), Oxfam (11-17 September, 2015).”

⁸All WASH activities in Nyal can be found in, “ICWG Visit: Nyal, Unity State, WASH Cluster (09-11 September 2015).”



Map 5: Specific IDP Locations

fled to the islands for refuge, but most have since returned to the mainland. Several of the islands (Mer, Majok, and Kai Rueh) still have host communities or IDPs from Panyijjar living on them, while others (Nyoat, Ngop) had evidence of a former host community that have since left. Only on Jathual did the IDPs claim that they never encountered evidence of any host community presence. Displaced persons from Panyijjar identify as being part of the host community, so it can be difficult to separate the actual host community from IDPs who have been displaced from other parts of Panyijjar county. IDPs on the islands claim that the host community are currently the only people on the islands registered to receive aid from distributions in Nyal. The aid received by the displaced host community is used to support both new IDPs and host community themselves.

CONCLUSION

The assessment sought to understand the humanitarian situation on seven islands within eastern Greater Nyal. These islands host a large population of recently displaced individuals, the majority of these women and children.

The population consists of IDPs from Leer or Mayendit Counties, and a host community primarily displaced from elsewhere in Panyijjar. The islands, small, low lying and already becoming crowded, are dispersed throughout the swamp, largely isolated from the mainland and other permanent host communities.

While most IDPs appear to have assimilated comfortably into the recently-established island communities, the limited availability of space, access, resources and livelihoods points to an unsustainable situation in the longer term.

Of the island population, members of the host community—many of whom have been recently displaced from elsewhere in Panyijjar—enjoy relatively better access to shelter, services and food. This group can afford to make regular trips to the mainland to collect supplies and humanitarian assistance.

IDPs that arrived more recently from Leer and Mayendit are in a much more difficult situation, with the most recent arrivals lacking any shelter at all. These IDPs fled quickly from their homes as a result of conflict, taking little with them, and selling the few assets they had in order to make the journey. These IDPs are mainly reliant on the host community to share food and resources, and have insufficient money to leave the island, leaving them effectively trapped.

In addition, the displaced population consists primarily of children (60-70%), many of these unaccompanied, and with no means of tracing their families. These children represent the most vulnerable group, and are entirely reliant on assistance from other IDPs and the host community.

The large number of children and a small number of elderly males are supported by a population of primarily adult females, leading

to a very high dependency ratio and placing increased pressure on the women to find sufficient food for all those who need it.

With no intention to return until meaningful peace is established, these IDPs face protracted displacement, and require external assistance in order to make their situation more sustainable.

With limited means to provide for themselves, and placing increasing strain on the more established host community. IDPs require assistance to meet their basic needs, while registration will help to establish more detailed caseloads for planning.

Food, water, sanitation and health assistance should be considered as humanitarian priorities, with the lack of access to safe water having already resulted in instances of waterborne disease, primarily as IDPs defecate and drink from the same water source: the swamp.

IDPs also require basic shelter assistance and non-food items, such as shelter materials and mosquito nets. In addition, the host community stressed the need for protection services, particularly to provide counselling new arrivals and helping reunite them with other displaced family members.

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. For more information, you can write to our in-country office: iraq@reach-initiative.org or to our global office: geneva@reach-initiative.org.

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