



NYAL SITUATION UPDATE

SOUTH SUDAN

SITUATION UPDATE

AUGUST 2016

Photo Credit – REACH South Sudan

About REACH

REACH is a joint initiative of two international non-governmental organizations - ACTED and IMPACT Initiatives - and the UN Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT). REACH's mission is to strengthen evidence-based decision making by aid actors through efficient data collection, management and analysis before, during and after an emergency. By doing so, REACH contributes to ensuring that communities affected by emergencies receive the support they need. All REACH activities are conducted in support to and within the framework of inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information please visit our website: www.reach-initiative.org. You can contact us directly at: geneva@reach-initiative.org and follow us on Twitter @REACH_info.

Summary

The SPLA's offensive into southern Unity State in May 2015, displaced thousands of people from Koch, Leer, and Mayendit Counties. While the majority moved north to the PoC site in Bentiu, a significant proportion fled south to Nyal and the surrounding islands in Northern Panyijar. REACH conducted an assessment in the region in late October 2015 to fill critical knowledge gaps on IDP settlements. Twenty-six previously unassessed sites, inhabited by IDPs requiring humanitarian assistance,¹ were identified and the subsequent report became a key document for organizations to base their responses.

REACH returned to Nyal first in June and then in July 2016 to update understanding of the displacement via focus group discussions (FGDs) and assessments based upon its Area of Origin (AoO) methodology. Significant population movement, to and from hard-to-reach counties such as Koch, Leer and Mayendit, and a lack of coordinated Information Management (IM) and assessment capacity in the humanitarian response, writ large, were the primary observations. As Nyal continues to receive new arrivals, REACH intends to build on the findings of these missions and make Nyal a new base for its AoO programme whilst also assisting humanitarian actors with their information management needs. However, the collapse of the peace process and resumption of hostilities in early July resulted in the evacuation of REACH staff and the postponing of activities until the security situation improves which is currently expected to be September.

Assessment of Hard to Reach Areas

REACH's Assessment of hard-to-reach areas aims to gather information areas where humanitarian actors have limited or no access due to security or physical access constraints by establishing regular and reliable communication channels to communities through key informant (KI) networks. KIs are selected because they have regular contact with or recent knowledge of specifically identified areas of interest. For Nyal, communication to areas of specific interest are severely limited due to a lack of mobile phone coverage and a combination of challenging geography and climate, and the restriction of movement caused by the high cost of transport. However, from FGDs conducted in June, it was apparent that a different methodology could be adopted, in which the steady flow of new arrivals could be interviewed. The methodology and questionnaire were therefore adapted to gather information via one time interviews with IDPs rather than recurring interviews with key informants.

Information Management Gaps

As of July, there are eight organisations working in Nyal: DRC / DDG, Oxfam, IRC, Mercy Corps, UNIDO, WHH/GAA, Windle Trust International, and Sign of Hope. However since the onset of fighting in July, humanitarian access has been severely restricted in Leer by armed actors and it is expected more organisations will now relocate to Nyal. REACH met with those present to understand their assessment and information management needs. All expressed a need for assessment methodology training and training on how to use smartphone technology to improve data collection. In discussion with Nyal-based humanitarian partners, it was agreed that REACH will help coordinate information sharing and development of information products. At this meeting, REACH and Oxfam also led initial contingency planning for a potential influx of IDPs.

REACH set up a Nyal Coordination Skype group and a 4W matrix, providing effective communication tools for organisations operating in the area. REACH also coordinated the input and development of a common assessment form that could be used to assess the needs of new arrivals in the area. This shared form and database would allow for the capture and dissemination of key arrival information and help organisations with programming decisions and future projects. The tool form has been developed using the data collection and reporting software Kobo which allows the use of electronic forms on laptops and smartphones. Training of staff has begun and it is hoped the form can be rolled out to all organisations when REACH returns to Nyal in September.

¹ REACH Situation Overviews [Greater Nyal East](#) and [Greater Nyal West](#) December 2015

Displacement Trends

Methodology

IDP groups in Nyal are well organized with representatives from each displaced county interacting with local humanitarian organisations and local government authorities. Upon arrival in Nyal, new arrivals are encouraged to register with their county representative and Relief Organisation of South Sudan (ROSS) office. REACH met with ROSS and the county representatives to request their assistance in mobilising local community groups to discuss their experiences and intentions. **Four FGDs were held** over a period of two days first with the **IDP representatives** and then with **individuals from Koch, Leer and Mayendit**. The following is a summary of those findings.

Koch

Approximate 5,000 IDPs from the Koch region were living in Nyal or the islands before April. Approximately 2,000 returned back to their communities when they heard news of the resumption of the peace process in April. On arrival to their homelands, they found armed forces were still present and consequently around 600 returned back to Nyal. There is a steady trickle of people continuing to make the journey back to Nyal. Others are either staying in the bush close to their Payams or instead making the journey to Bentiu.

Leer

When asked how many IDPs from Leer were in Nyal and the surrounding areas, the participants estimated the figure to be around **6000 IDPs**. Around half left in April to go home but upon finding armed groups still there they returned to Nyal, mainly to the islands. Because of the coming of the wet season and the belief by many that their home communities will not be secure enough to return to in the near future, a slow but steady flow of families – roughly 5 to 10 per day – are arriving in Nyal, intent on setting up longer term habitation. To provide some measure of self-sufficiency while they wait for the security situation in their homes to stabilise, many of these new arrivals have begun cultivating land and planting crops.

Mayendit

The majority of the Mayendit IDP population returned from Nyal and the surrounding islands in April when news spread about the peace. **Participants estimated there were around 5,800 IDPs from Mayendit in Nyal** before April and the surrounding areas and of them, 4,000 had returned to their areas of origin. Upon finding that government forces were still present, people have started to move again with approximately five families a day returning to Nyal. During May, and the first half of June, the group reported that around 1,300 individuals had again sought shelter in Nyal, bringing with them stories of significant harassment and intimidation from armed actors. This return put the estimated population of IDPs from Mayendit in Nyal at roughly 3,100 as of the beginning of July. Of those that did not return, many traveled to UNMISS Bentiu PoC while others have set up temporary settlements areas not frequented by armed elements outside of Mayendit Town.

Situation in Area of Origin

Group from the three adjacent counties had very similar stories of the situation they found on their return:

- The **vast majority found their dwellings had been burnt down**, and their **possessions stolen**. Others stated their land had been occupied by armed groups who were now using it to cultivate their own crops and the few remaining structures being dismantled for firewood.
- In addition to the loss of livelihoods and assets, several IDPs mentioned that **occupying forces were constructing military bases**, often with heavy weapons, in either strategically located payams on major transit routes, or by remaining significant infrastructure.
- IDPs also reported that **those who were caught returning by armed groups were either killed or harassed**. Many of those in Leer and Mayendit noted that armed groups were operating outside of their lines of containment. IDPs who remain in these areas are hiding deep in the bush to avoid detection.

Communication with area of origin:

Regular communication is difficult as there is no mobile phone network coverage across Unity State, except in the Bentiu area. The groups from Leer claimed to have once made calls on a satellite phone provided by a visiting NGO to check on conditions in the homelands. All other respondents mentioned that they received new information from the steady stream of families who arrive in Nyal from their home areas each day.

Intentions to Return

Residence in Nyal

Lack of access to their land, insecurity, and the start of the wet season has seen many IDPs who had left during the dry season return to Nyal to cultivate and build homes on land provided by the accommodating Nyal community. Respondents from Mayendit plan to return to the islands when the wet season ends in order to catch fish in the swamp, but do not plan to leave the immediate area. Only one respondent from Leer stated that he might return to one of the slands in Southern Leer that he considered to be relatively safe.

Obstacles to return

The vast majority of respondents stated a desire to return to their homelands but would only do so if the security situation improved. The proposed 28 state plan was also noted as a barrier to return as they believe it may lead to additional insecurity. Most respondents noted that even if improvement of security allowed them to return to their homes, the vast majority no longer have any possessions and would require the supply of NFI items to allow them to rebuild their lives and livelihoods. An additional barrier to returning is the cost of transport. Canoe trips north through the swamps are expensive, averaging 300 SSP [10 USD] per person; a price few IDPs are able to pay.

Use of REACH data

In July, REACH tested the adapted methodology on IDPs that had very recently arrived in Nyal to establish a picture of events in hard-to-reach areas. Local enumerators were hired and trained and an information sharing hub established in the Oxfam compound for enumerators to interview IDPs mobilized from lists provided by ROSS and IDP representatives. Over four days, despite the distraction of the conflict in Juba and a local incident of clan revenge killing significantly restricting the movement of IDPs to the information sharing hub, 112 interviews were conducted by 6 enumerators. **This data has been incorporated into REACH's July Unity State Factsheet.**

Next Steps

Due to the resumption of widespread conflict on July 9th, REACH had to leave Nyal on July 15th. However normal operations are expected to resume in September. In the meantime, REACH has been able to work with organisations in the area via the Nyal Coordination Skype group. Currently REACH has enumerators monitoring arrivals and departures of IDPs at Nyal's major ports.

On return REACH will be conducting another round of AoO data collection using an adapted methodology with recent arrivals. Training sessions with all acting organisations are being scheduled to ensure they are able to use smart phone data collection tools and interpret the generated reports.

The development of a Nyal Information Portal has begun and will be completed by the end of August. This portal will give organisations access to all data and reports collected in the area; allow them to update their 4W and programme progress; and give access to common information products and datasets such as maps of the area, common lists of island names and other secondary data products.

For further information contact REACH South Sudan at south.sudan@reach-initiative.org