



# Regional Displacement of South Sudanese

## Kajo-Keji County, Central Equatoria, South Sudan and Moyo District, West Nile Sub-Region, Uganda

March 2018

### Background

Moyo District in the West-Nile Sub-Region of Uganda is a major hosting area for people displaced from Kajo-Keji County in Central Equatoria, South Sudan after fighting spread through the county in the second half of 2016. Due to ongoing insecurity, Kajo-Keji County has been mostly inaccessible to humanitarian actors since July 2016.

As part of an ongoing assessment of regional displacement from South Sudan,<sup>1</sup> REACH began primary data collection in Moyo District in September 2017. This consisted of focus group discussions (FGDs) with displaced South Sudanese living in host communities across Moyo District, and Key Informant (KI) interviews of South Sudanese living in Moyo District, humanitarian actors working in Kajo-Keji County and host community government officials of Moyo and Yumbe Districts. This was intended as an initial step to understanding factors influencing returns to South Sudan and to begin linking the humanitarian response across East Africa through the development of cross-border information streams.

In January 2018, REACH expanded data collection efforts in Moyo District in order to fill information gaps on humanitarian needs in Kajo-Keji County. As part of its Area of Knowledge (AoK) methodology, REACH began collecting data from a network of KIs who have sector-specific knowledge about hard-to-reach settlements through regular direct or indirect contact, or recent displacement. These interviews were primarily conducted by phone with people living in Kajo-Keji County; some were conducted in-person in Moyo District with people recently arrived from Kajo-Keji County or in close contact with people still residing there.

Metuli town and surrounding areas of northwestern Moyo District were not assessed due to persistent insecurity. Although current AoK coverage is still limited and its findings are not generalizable, it provides an indicative understanding of the needs and current humanitarian situation in assessed areas of Kajo-Keji County.

### Demographics and Livelihoods

Kajo-Keji County historically had one of the highest population densities in South Sudan;<sup>2</sup> population projections based on 2008 Sudanese census numbers estimated that by 2018 the population of Kajo-Keji county would be 290,656.<sup>3</sup> This number is not representative of the current population, but is an indicator of the potential population in the area if conflict had not displaced so many people. Like most of Greater Equatoria, farming is reported to be the primary livelihood activity; however, semi-pastoral cattlekeeping is widely utilized as well.

Moyo District, across the border immediately to the south, has reportedly hosted people from Kajo-Keji County for generations. Many FGD participants described establishing businesses, purchasing land and building homes in Moyo District in the past, particularly during previous times of conflict in South Sudan in the 1970s, 1990s and in 2013. Some even reported intermarrying with the Ugandan host community. Population projections based on 2014 Ugandan census numbers estimated the 2017 population of the district to be 147,600.<sup>4,5</sup>

### Population movement and displacement

As conflict spread through Greater Equatoria in July 2016, most of the population of Kajo-Keji County was displaced from their homes. Those living close to the Ugandan border, or with access to money or vehicles crossed immediately, while others hid in the bush and crossed using informal border crossings.<sup>6</sup> Ongoing armed conflict touched most of the county in 2017, eventually driving people to remote areas of the bush or to Uganda. Though most people were fleeing violence by armed groups, those in the areas of Kansuk and Kayaya in northern Kajo-Keji County, were driven out primarily by cattle raiding.<sup>7</sup>

### Populations remaining in Kajo-Keji County

Most FGD respondents reported that few people have remained behind in Kajo-Keji County; those who did were predominantly elderly people who did not want to make the journey, cattlekeepers who stayed with their herds deep in the bush and people in IDP settlements in the west of the county. This was supported by AoK data, which found that half of assessed settlements had 50% or less of their host community remaining. FGD and displaced South Sudanese KI respondents reported that those who remained in remote areas of the bush primarily did so in the north, west and southwest of the county.

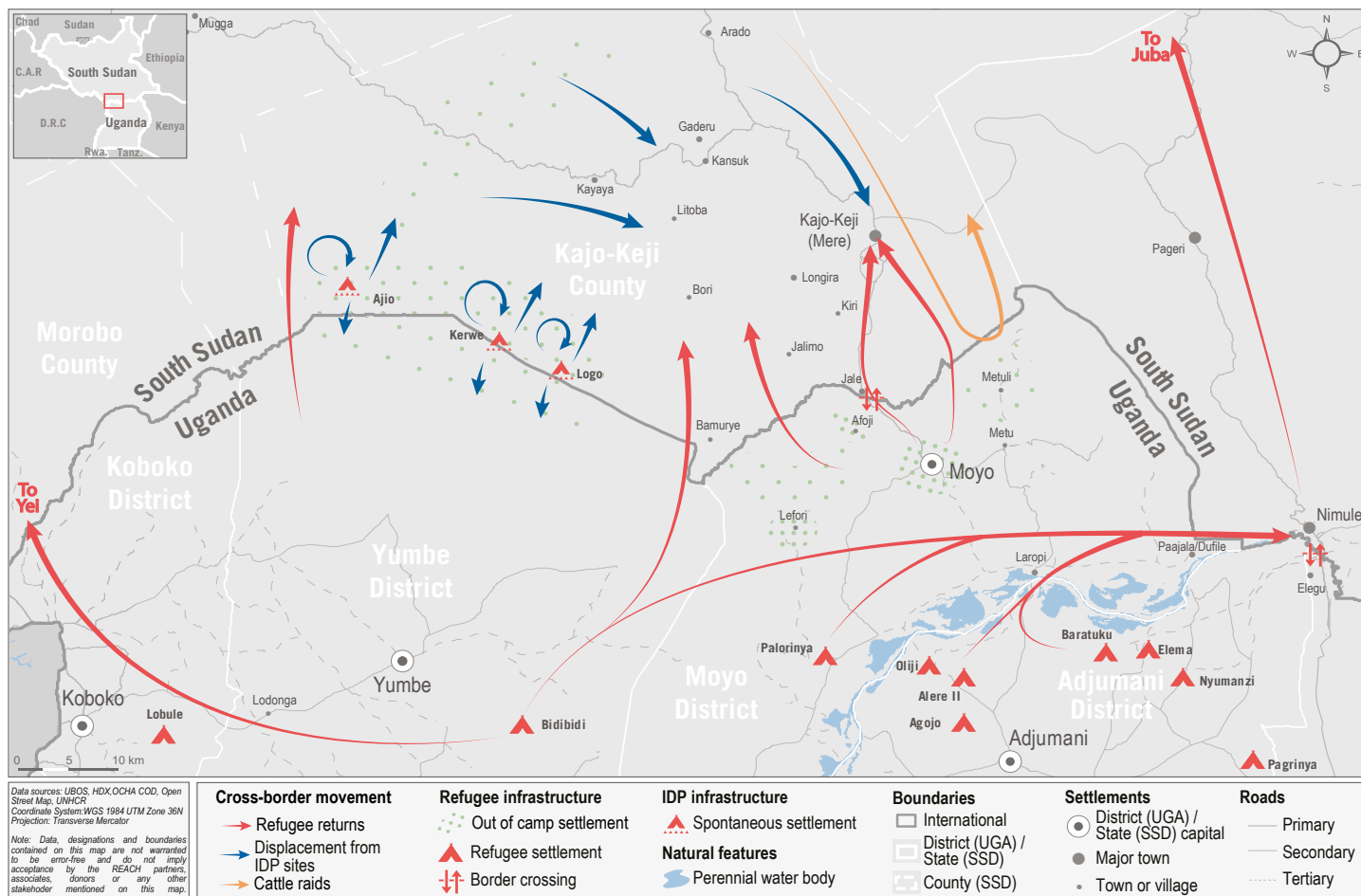
Ajio, Kerwe and Logo are spontaneous IDP settlements in southwestern Kajo-Keji County that were formed in late 2016 by people fleeing conflict and cattle raiding in Kajo-Keji, Lainya, Yei and Morobo Counties.<sup>8</sup> These sites have been repeatedly vacated due to attacks by armed actors, and their current estimated populations have dramatically decreased from their peak in mid-to-late 2017. Key Informants reported that the majority of those who have left these IDP settlements remain nearby, scattered in remote, difficult

Figure 1: Data collection methods

Date	Method	#
Sep 2017	KI interviews with humanitarian actors working in Kajo-Keji County	3
Sep 2017 - Feb 2018	FGDs with displaced South Sudanese living in Moyo District	21
Sep 2017 - Mar 2018	KI interviews with displaced South Sudanese living in Moyo District	4
Sep 2017 - Mar 2018	KI interviews with Ugandan host community government officials	8
Jan - Feb 2018	AoK KI interviews with South Sudanese about Kajo-Keji County	35

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**Map 1: Cross-border movement between Moyo District, Uganda and Kajo-Keji County, South Sudan, November 2017 - March 2018**



to access areas of the bush along the border with Uganda, slowly repopulating the settlements after attacks; smaller proportions have gone to the refugee settlements in Uganda or to government-controlled areas closer to Kajo-Keji town (known locally as Mere). Humanitarian actors estimated that 37,510 people live in or near these settlements, but displaced South Sudanese KIs reported these numbers to be inflated.

## Populations in refugee settlements in Uganda

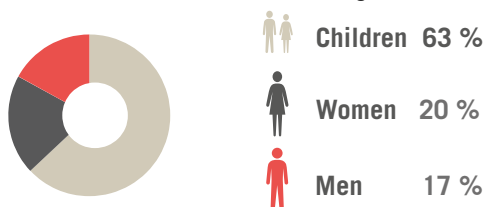
FGD respondents and host community government officials reported that most of the people who left Kajo-Keji County since July 2016 have settled in Palorinya Refugee Settlement in southern Moyo District. Palorinya was established in December 2016, and hosts an estimated 180,000 South Sudanese.<sup>9</sup> Conditions are challenging, with insufficient infrastructure, shortages of food and

non-food items, and environmental degradation of surrounding lands;<sup>11</sup> this has led some refugees to relocate to host community settlements in Moyo District.

## Populations in host community settlements in Moyo District

Displaced South Sudanese, primarily from Kajo-Keji County, also live in host community settlements across Moyo District. Local official KIs in Moyo, Lefori and Afoji towns estimate that they host a total of 1,057 South Sudanese, 379 of whom are in Moyo town. Additional South Sudanese are said to be living in other host villages and in the bush in Uganda. Population estimates are extremely difficult to verify, and are likely below the actual figure, as many South Sudanese living in host community settlements reportedly fear that they will be forced to return to the refugee settlements if they are discovered.

**Figure 2: Estimated demographics of Ajo, Kerwe and Logo IDP spontaneous settlements and surrounding bush areas<sup>10</sup>**



Many FGD respondents and host community government official KIs expressed the belief that South Sudanese refugees are not legally allowed to live in host community settlements, and that if they do so they risk losing refugee status and the access to food distributions and other benefits it affords.<sup>12</sup> However, most FGD participants stated that they still utilized their refugee status, but preferred to stay in host community settlements in order to access schools, health services or improved shelters that were not easily

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**Figure 3: Estimated population of spontaneous IDP settlements and surrounding bush areas in Kajo-Keji County, January 2018<sup>10</sup>**

Age	Ajo		Kerwe		Logo		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
0-4	707	748	1,075	1,768	2,409	3,260	9,967
5-11	715	671	1,400	1,427	1,184	1,701	7,098
12-17	511	525	1,005	1,090	1,701	1,667	6,499
18-59	838	970	1,648	1,748	1,698	1,704	8,606
60+	453	444	509	670	1,312	1,952	5,340
Total	3,224	3,358	5,637	6,703	8,304	10,284	
Grand Total	6,582		12,340		18,588		37,510

available in the refugee settlements.

As already described, most FGD participants reported that this was not the first time they have lived in Uganda, having done so during previous conflicts in South Sudan. A few reportedly continued to do so even after the previous conflicts subsided, preferring to keep their children in Ugandan schools, or in order to maintain a successful business. A few respondents reported losing their land, homes and businesses in Moyo in 2014 during localized tensions between the communities of Moyo District and Kajo-Keji County. The Moyo District Land Board is reportedly working to resolve outstanding ownership issues, but respondents state that this is a slow and challenging process.

## Returns to Kajo-Keji County

Most FGD respondents reported that throughout 2017 people were sometimes killed by armed combatants when attempting return. They reported that some still attempt return, but this was typically just single-day visits in order to complete specific tasks: farmers would harvest cassava, cattlekeepers would tend to their herds, and others would recover their personal property for use or sale in Uganda.

During November 2017 - January 2018, in the start of the dry season, larger numbers of people reportedly returned to clear the grass that had grown around their huts, in order to prevent the home from burning during seasonal fires. However, these too were short trips, after which people returned to Uganda.

In February 2018, at the start of the cultivation season, South Sudanese KIs reported that tribal elders and church officials had successfully negotiated with armed actors to allow people safe access to their home villages, in order for them to cultivate before the wet season. Again, most of this movement continued to just be one day trips of people checking on their property and planting crops.

As of March 2018, KIs reported that more permanent returns were increasing across Kajo-Keji County. After near abandonment in late 2016, Kajo-Keji town has reportedly seen 760 permanent returnees.<sup>13</sup> KIs reported widespread cultivation in the northern end of the county, along the Kajo-Keji - Yei road between Gaderu,

Kansuk and Kayaya. Other villages frequently reported to have significant presence of people include Bamurye, Bori, Jalimo, Kiri, Litoba and Longira. Reportedly these returns are primarily done by individuals and partial households, rather than entire households; some FGD respondents stated that this reflects hesitancy and the poor quality of life in the refugee settlements, rather than a clear return to normalcy.

FGD respondents report that others have returned to Juba or Nimule; most often this is reported to be young adults in search of job opportunities. This is reportedly done through a small ferry crossing at Paajala/Dufile, in the far eastern edge of Moyo District, which crosses the Nile River directly to Nimule town; from there, some continue by bus to Juba.

## Future intentions

FGD respondents stated mixed intentions about returning to South Sudan. Some are planning to return when there is peace, while others want to stay in Uganda, regardless of the situation in South Sudan. In FGDs, cattlekeepers who brought their herds into Uganda stated the strongest intentions to return, because they need the land back home for grazing. Farmers often stated their desire to return to their lands as well, as arable land was reported to be in greater supply in Kajo-Keji County than in Moyo District.

Fear of insecurity was by far the most frequently stated barrier to returning. Many FGD respondents expressed indecisiveness about when they will return, due to the unpredictability of the conflict. They stated that they would need robust indicators of peace before they return; these included disarmament campaigns, elections and/or the introduction of international peacekeeping forces. South Sudanese KIs reported that violence from cattle raiding in Kajo-Keji County, which sometimes even extends into north-western Moyo District, may continue to displace people, even if fighting between armed actors ceases. The construction of healthcare facilities and schools was a factor frequently stated as supportive of or necessary for returns.

Many FGD respondents shared that even when they are ready to return to South Sudan, they intend to leave their children behind in Uganda, so that they may continue their education. Most FGD respondents reported that families have done this during previous

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displacements into Uganda, with the children left in the care of one parent, a friend or an older child.

## Access to services in Kajo-Keji County<sup>14</sup>

Basic services are reported to be extremely limited in Kajo-Keji County. However, movement to Uganda for essential goods and services is reportedly possible. Displaced South Sudanese KIs reported that no populations in Kajo-Keji County have been isolated or trapped by fighting.

Health facilities are reported to be non-existent in nearly all areas assessed by AoK. FGD participants stated that medical care was very poor and not easy to access due to insecurity. A lack of medicine has reportedly forced people to resort to traditional healing methods, such as herbal medicine, or to travel to Uganda. It was also reported that most healthcare workers have fled.

Many houses are reported to have been destroyed, primarily by fire. Metal roofs of houses and schools have reportedly been stolen. Most respondents report that no education opportunities exist, primarily due to the destruction of schools, and that those few primary schools that do remain have less than half of their normal enrolment.

Insecurity is a primary concern, with killing, sexual and gender based violence (SGBV) and robbery being reported regularly. Many FGD respondents reported feeling afraid to move around, due to fear of insecurity along the roads. Some reported that those who have returned cultivate land near their houses during the day, but sleep in the bush at night, for fear of being attacked in their homes.

Food security and livelihoods (FSL) are strained. AoK data indicate that displacement and the destruction of crops by fighting have led to severe hunger in most assessed settlements. Food prices are cited by South Sudanese KIs as a major challenge, due to the high rate of inflation leading to a loss of purchasing power; a lack of markets is also a concern. FGD respondents and AoK KIs reported that people are relying on fruit, wild foods and cassava from abandoned fields. Nearly all settlements assessed by AoK reported possession of, and access to, cattle, which aligns with FGD respondent statements that cattlekeepers are one of the groups most likely to remain in Kajo-Keji County. Access to land for cultivation was not shared as a concern in most settlements assessed using AoK.

AoK findings indicate that most assessed settlements have functioning borehole wells. However, FGD respondents and South Sudanese KIs reported that the borehole wells in more remote villages were broken, and that people living in the bush were relying on unprotected water sources

Many FGD participants shared an expectation that returning to their homes in Kajo-Keji County would be difficult, because violence, property destruction and cattle raiding has forced them "to start life from scratch."

**Figure 4: Service access of South Sudanese by location**

	Access to FSL	Access to WASH	Access to Health	Access to Education
Palorinya Refugee Settlement	●	●	●	●
Moyo District host settlements	●	●	●	●
Kajo-Keji County towns	●	●	●	●
Kajo-Keji County bush	●	●	●	●

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

### Endnotes

- 1 Including [REACH. Regional Displacement of South Sudanese: Returns from Kalobaye Refugee Settlement, Turkana County, Kenya. December 2017.](#)
- 2 National Bureau of Statistics, Population projections for South Sudan by County 2015-2020. March 2015.
- 3 5th Sudan Population and Housing Census. 2008.
- 4 [Uganda Bureau of Statistics. 2015](#)
- 5 Localized conflict has recurred in Moyo District for over 13 years over border demarcations, land tenure and rightful presence of South Sudanese. This history, and the residual tensions it created, limits opportunities to conduct any population count of South Sudanese living with the host community. [Elema, R. & Iceta, S. "Moyo leaders shun land conflict meeting." Daily Monitor. 30 March 2017.](#)
- 6 [REACH. Situation Overview: Displacement and Intentions in Central Equatoria State. October 2016.](#)
- 7 [REACH. Situation Overview: Displacement and Intentions of IDPs in Kajo-Keji. December 2016.](#)
- 8 [OCHA. Kajo-Keji IRNA. December 2016.](#)
- 9 Registration in all refugee settlements in Uganda is currently being verified, as the original counts were revealed to be highly unreliable and potentially inflated. [Okiror, Samuel. "They exaggerated figures": Ugandan aid officials suspended over alleged fraud." The Guardian. 8 February 2018.](#)
- 10 As estimated by humanitarian actors.
- 11 [UNHCR. Uganda Refugee Response Monitoring Settlement Factsheet: Palorinya. December 2017.](#)
- 12 Host community government official KIs repeatedly referred to South Sudanese living outside of refugee settlements as *self-settled aliens*, and stated that these people did not have refugee status, either because they never registered or because they lost the status when they moved out of the refugee settlements. According to Uganda's [Refugee Act of 2006](#), refugees have freedom of movement, but this is subject to "reasonable restrictions," which are not clarified in Uganda's [Refugee Regulations of 2010](#). As such, it is unclear what status these South Sudanese actually hold. For some officials, this term had a negative connotation: a suspicion of coming to engage in illicit activities.
- 13 As reported by South Sudanese KIs. Kajo-Keji Relief and Rehabilitation Commission reports over 3,000.
- 14 Further information available in [REACH. Kajo-Keji County: Food Security and Livelihoods Profile. January 2018.](#)