

# **RAPID PROTECTION ASSESSMENT REPORT**

## **MALEK & ADIOR COUNTIES, LAKES STATE // SOUTH SUDAN // JANUARY 2020**

### **1. BACKGROUND AND TRIGGER FOR ASSESSMENT**

Malek and Adior Counties are located in Yirol East of former Lakes State, bordering the Nile River and Jonglei to the East. In December 2019, a dispute over administration of the main island of Cuét Akuet and surrounding islands referred to collectively as Toich resulted in conflict in the area and displacement of the affected households (HHs) into Malek and Adior Counties of Yirol East.

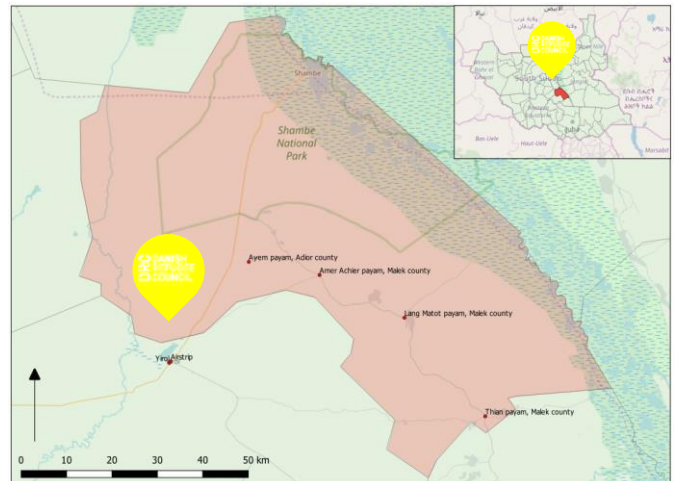
In January 2020, the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) – Danish Demining Group (DDG) completed a Rapid Protection Assessment (RPA) to assess the protection environment of the conflict-affected population in Yirol East. To conduct the RPA, DRC deployed with ERM Shelter/NFI and WASH partner PAH and used a combination of focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews (KIIs), direct observation (DO), household visits and service point audits in the displacement sites of Amer Achier, Lang Matot, and Thian payams in Malek County, and in Ayem payam of Adior County. 19 FGDs were completed with 479 community members including women, men, elderly and youth, and 20 KIIs were completed with 85 community leaders, elders, local authorities, partners and service providers. Local GBV and WASH partners TOCH, Women Aid Vision, HAGI, and Caritas supported the assessment. DDG conducted an additional 3 Mine Risk Education (MRE) sessions during the assessment to raise awareness on mine risks in Lang Matot, Thian, and Baburjeet.



### **2. DISPLACEMENT CONTEXT**

According to respondents, the conflict on the islands began in March 2019, and culminated following the most recent outbreak of violence during an attack by armed actors on the main island of Cuét Akuet on December 5<sup>th</sup>. As a result of the fighting, local authorities report that 5,682 individuals (approx. 2,400 men, 2,600 women, 350 boys and 332 girls) have displaced into Malek County and 4,646 individuals (approx. 980 men, 1,982 women, 633 boys and 1,051 girls) into Adior County. The dispute is linked to the demarcation of state boundaries as a key element of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan (R-ARCSS), as control of the area and in particular a checkpoint on Cuét Akuet allows for strategic leveraging of taxes on goods transported along the Nile, and also provides ample livelihood opportunities for communities inhabiting the area. Following the attack, local authorities have reported that government armed forces have been deployed to the islands to disarm the attackers, and that the majority of civilians have left the area.

As a result of the attack on December 5<sup>th</sup>, HHs reported displacing primarily westward into Yirol East, with others displacing eastward



into Twic. The direction of displacement was based on proximity, with IDPs fleeing towards the closest coast<sup>1</sup> HHs displaced from Cuét Akuet first, followed by residents of the other smaller islands and inhabited areas along the Nile. HHs displaced into the payams of Amer Achier, Tot, Lang Matot, and Thian of Malek County, and into Ayem, Machar Achiek, Thochnhom, Biling and Shambe payams of Adior. Many affected HHs have experienced multiple rounds of displacement due to a cycle of revenge attacks between March 2019 and January 2020, and due to limited resources and access to services in areas of displacement in Yirol East. In particular, HHs have reported moving further inland from Shambe and displacing between Amer Achier, Lang Matot, Thian and Ayem payams.

IDPs reported fleeing the islands initially on improvised boats made of plastic sheets and reeds, which they used to carry vulnerable community members including children, elderly and disabled across the water. Displaced HHs made multiple trips, leaving those transported to shelter in Shambe while additional crossings were made. HHs then continued their journey on foot from Shambe to the areas of displacement, averaging 1-day travel time from Shambe into Yirol East, and between 1 and 10 days to complete the full journey, depending on time spent in Shambe. The affected HHs took 9 main routes from Shambe into Malek and Adior Counties, transiting through Papiu, Matok, Akurapet, Panaomham, Pathioc, Limlal, Akunybei, Aber and Kereer. Other IDPs have reportedly remained sheltering in the bush, as it is perceived to be safer and shielded from cattle raiding, and has better access to wild fruits.



### **3. CURRENT POPULATION INCLUDING COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP**

According to HNO data, approx. 114,954 individuals are living in the host community administrative area of Yirol East. A displaced total estimate of 10,328 HHs indicates a population increase by roughly

<sup>1</sup> The scope of the RPA only covered Yirol East. See section 7 "Key Recommendations" for follow-up related to displaced HHs in Twic.

8.9 %. Displaced HHs affected by the attack are those that had been inhabiting the islands of Toich and the areas along the Nile in Shambe. HHs from Malek and Adior had originally migrated to the islands and riverside during the conflict and following periods of draught and severe food insecurity in Yirol East periodically since 2016. Due to their location in the Nile, the islands presented relatively higher commercial and livelihood opportunities and improved food security, creating an economic pull factor for migration from both Lakes and Jonglei. Due to familial links with HHs still residing in Malek and Adior, most IDPs report to be residing with extended family members in host communities of the two counties, the main influencing factor in determining area of displacement. IDPs without family in their area of displacement reported to choose the location based on proximity and most direct displacement route from Toich. Community leaders from Toich displaced with community members, and work with host community leaders to continue to engage in community leadership functions and traditional dispute resolution in the areas of displacement.

Due to stretched resources in the areas of displacement, the majority of IDPs assessed reported intention to return to Toich so that they can resume their livelihoods and have better access to food, but also report hesitancy to do so due to fear of the formal and informal armed actors currently occupying the islands. Moreover, IDPs reported that they are unable to return to Toich without sufficient Shelter/NFI support to reestablish their homes.



## 4. SAFETY & SECURITY

Safety and security of the affected population deteriorated during the attack and immediately following during the displacement process. IDPs and local authorities have reported that during the attack on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 7 persons were killed and 11 injured by gunshot or artillery, and number of people were raped (reported numbers were not verified and therefore not shared). IDPs reported unanimously that their shelters on the islands were destroyed and household NFIs looted, including boats and fishing gear, and that small businesses on the islands were robbed.

During the displacement process, additional individuals died due to injuries sustained during the attack or drowning, and others experienced injury and sexual violence while fleeing the islands both to Shambe and into Yirol East. In Amer Achier and Lang Matot, IDPs reported additional injuries sustained while sheltering in Shambe, including severe cuts due to running through the sharp reeds and 1 case of snakebite.

IDPs report that there may not be civilians left on the islands, which are currently occupied by armed actors. Community members have reported that some IDPs have attempted to return to Toich and Shambe to locate separated family members or to assess damage to their property, and have faced violence along the way in the form of attack, injury and harassment by armed actors and youth. In particular, 2 respondents in Ayem reported physical attack and torture, and that 6 other IDPs were abducted and yet to return. As a result, IDPs face restricted movement, and fear leaving their area of displacement.

In Malek and Adior, IDPs and host community members are facing additional safety threats due to the presence of cattle raiding in the area. Two cattle raids in host communities and areas of displacement resulting in injury and abduction of IDPs from Toich as well as host community members took place during the assessment period of January 16 – 23, 2020.



## 5. DETAILED PROTECTION CONCERNS



## GBV

GBV incidents and risks in the area are high; affected community members reported exposure to GBV both during the incident and subsequently during displacement, and IDPs and community leaders have described pre-existing GBV concerns worsening as a result of the conflict and displacement. During FGDs, community members reported multiple cases of rape taken place during the attack, during the displacement process, and in areas of displacement, and that the majority of survivors have not accessed medical or post-exposure care.

While multiple agencies provide GBV response services in Yirol and population centers of Malek and Adior Counties, services do not reach the more remote payams of Lang Matot and Thian. PHCU/C in Yirol East have only 11 midwives in 3 payams trained to provide clinical management of rape (CMR), limiting access to response services for survivors of sexual violence where outreach is not available. There is also high risk associated with limited access to post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) treatment, as PEP is only available through Yirol Hospital in Yirol town, and distance and cost constraints associated with travel from payams of Thian and Lang Matot limit survivors' access to critical response services within the PEP administration timeframe.

Moreover, pre-existing GBV concerns including domestic or intimate partner violence (IPV) are understood to be increasing in the displacement context due to psychosocial stress from loss of resources and livelihoods, lack of privacy, and exposure from lack of shelters. According to community leaders, cases of rape have traditionally been resolved at the community level by either requiring the survivor to marry the rapist in exchange for a payment of cattle to the survivor's family, or through inter-familial revenge violence. If the case cannot be resolved at the community level, leaders and GBV partners reported that the survivor will be transferred to Yirol, where hospitals still require "police form 8", a process of forced reporting that is not survivor-centered and discourages overall reporting of GBV, as it necessitates the reporting of physical injuries related to GBV to the police in order to receive medical treatment.



## CHILD PROTECTION

The main child protection concern linked to the conflict is abduction. At least 3 children (unconfirmed figure) were reported to have been abducted during the attack in Toich, and have not yet been reunited with their families. Currently there is no partner providing family tracing and reunification services in Yirol.

Within both the IDPs and host community, forced and early marriage is common, and girls cannot refuse a marriage arrangement. According to community leaders, in cases where a woman and man want to marry outside of an arrangement made by the male head of household, the man in question will be killed, frequently prompting a cycle of inter-familial revenge violence. The woman will be ostracized by the community and prohibited from leaving her home. As a result of early marriage, girls are less likely to attend school. Boys are also frequently engaged in labor and exposed to additional risk of abduction and injury during cattle raids, as they are engaged in cattle herding under the assumption they are at less at risk of being killed than adults.



## VULNERABLE GROUPS

There are a high number of persons with specific needs (PSN) in both the host community and IDP populations. Among IDPs, PSN reported difficulties traversing the Nile while fleeing to Shambe, and additional challenges meeting basic needs in displacement, such as scavenging for wild fruits and walking long distances to

access water points. Both IDP and host community PSN in Lang Matot and Thian payams are at greater risk of exclusion from humanitarian service provision due to the centralization of service delivery in the population centers of Yirol town and Malek, and operational partners should take care to ensure any static or mobile assistance reaches the most vulnerable.



## MINE RISK

During the assessment, coordinates of 1 reported unexploded ordnance (UXO) in Baburjeet area of Yirol town were shared by DDG for mapping and recommended for explosive ordnance disposal (EOD). Due to the reported use of artillery during the attack, a technical survey is also recommended for the areas around Toich. Based on risks identified for the mobile IDP population, DDG conducted an additional 3 Mine Risk Education (MRE) sessions during the assessment to raise awareness on mine risks in Lang Matot, Thian, and Baburjeet.



## 6. ACCESS TO SERVICES AND COPING MECHANISMS

Both IDPs and host communities in Yirol East have limited access to services, with access decreasing as distance increases from population centers close to Yirol. Lack of access to services is due to three main factors, including limited and centralized humanitarian service provision in Malek and Adior centers, the proliferation of formal and informal armed actors as a result of the attack in Toich, and increasing intra-communal tensions. Scarcity of services is particularly pronounced in the hard to reach payams of Lang Matot and Thian in Malek County, where poor road conditions during the rainy season and distances during the dry season limit movement between the payams and main towns of Yirol, Nyang and Malek (closest town to Thian payam and 14 hours walking distance). As stated by one community member in Thian, *“we hear about distributions taking place, but never reach them”*. Additionally, HHs experiencing restricted movement have likewise restricted access to services. Community members in Amer Achier reported that attackers involved in the dispute have now blocked the roads to Shambe and Majok, cutting off IDPs and conflict-affected HHs from critical services, particularly health services. In addition to the recent deployment of SSPDF troops to Toich, informal armed actors are also reportedly based in Cuet Akuet, Lietbuoi, Lietmamol, Kemcier, Majak, Marol, Panaomham, and Limlual. Finally, due to emerging intra-communal tensions between IDPs and host community members as a result of reducing resources, IDPs are increasingly excluded from accessing basic public services in their areas of displacement. As an example, IDPs in Thian reported being restricted by the host community from using the closest functional borehole, and were therefore drinking unfiltered swamp water.

## FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOODS

Food insecurity and loss of livelihoods associated with the attack and subsequent displacement represent a major need in Yirol East. Traditional livelihoods practiced by both the IDP and host communities include small scale subsistence farming of beans, tomato, sorghum and cassava, and HHs in Toich engaged in fishing for both commercial exportation and HH consumption. IDPs reported unanimously across all assessment sites that their fishing gear and boats were looted during the attack in Toich, impeding their ability to resume their livelihoods and forcing reliance on negative coping mechanisms in displacement. Among the host community HHs that planted, the majority reported that their crops were not successful, and those that were have subsequently been destroyed by insects. According to IPC analysis from September 2019, 10,000 people are in Level 5 “Catastrophe” in Yirol East, with food insecurity expected to increase throughout the dry season.

There are no markets in Thian and Lang Matot payams, and markets in Adior and Amer Achier lack food items (only item observed available was sugar). In Thian, FGDs found that 3 persons had died due to hunger in the past 2 weeks. Compounded by the quick influx of IDPs from Toich, already limited food resources are increasingly stretched. As a result, affected HHs are increasingly engaging in negative coping strategies, including attempting to return to Toich despite the ongoing presence of armed actors, and reducing consumption, particularly for women.

## WASH

WASH needs in Yirol East are high and services stressed as a result of the displacement, leading to the development of inter-communal tensions. For the RPA, ERRM partner PAH completed a coordinated WASH assessment. In both Malek and Adior counties, findings indicate high levels of congestion at water points, need for repair and maintenance of boreholes as well as spare parts, contamination of water points, and need for refresher trainings for existing water management committees and pump mechanics. The only pit latrines are located in the PHCU/C, and most community members engage in open defecation. There was observed joint use of water points by humans and livestock, limited knowledge on proper hygiene practices, and a significant lack of WASH NFIs in HHs and available in the closest markets. As a result of the high WASH needs, protection concerns including developing inter-communal tensions and the restriction of IDPs to services based on status was reported, as well as increased risk for community members (in particular PSN and IDPs) needing to travel longer distances to reach functional boreholes. Menstruation management was also reported as a challenge for women and girls, as limited WASH facilities result in girls not attending school.

## SHELTER / NFIs

For the RPA, ERRM partner PAH also completed a parallel S/NFI assessment. In both Malek and Adior counties, IDPs reported that all their household NFIs were looted during the attack, and that their shelters made of papyrus and reeds were burnt down. In displacement, IDPs are residing in host community shelters, resulting in high levels of congestion (10+ persons per shelter), negatively impacting on health outcomes and disease contagion, as well as reducing privacy and increasing psychosocial distress. Where there is insufficient space, IDPs reported sleeping outside, increasing exposure to the elements and reducing personal security. Due to the frequency and fear of attack by cattle raids as well as over-cultivation, the host community has burnt the surrounding grasses used for shelter construction, resulting in limited availability for new shelters. Shelter items and NFIs critically lacking and unavailable in the local markets that have been requested by IDPs and host community members include cooking sets, blankets, plastic sheet, rope, mosquito nets, sleeping mats, jerricans and soap.

## HEALTH AND NUTRITION

In all assessment sites, there are available but limited Health services accessible to IDPs and host community members alike. According to IDPs, there were no medical facilities in Toich, but outreach services would reach to the main island of Cuet Akuet once per week to deliver critical medicines. Critical cases would be transferred to the mainland for treatment, approx. 2 hours travel by boat and then on foot or by vehicle to either Yirol or Bor.

There are PHCU/C in Amer Achier and Lang Matot payams in Malek and in Ayem payam of Adior, Support by Doctors with Africa (CUAMM) and Caritas has enabled intake of approx. 200 patients per day, but the PHCU/C face challenges in terms of receiving and storing medicines through a cold chain, and are critically understaffed and lacking basic sanitation facilities, such as functional boreholes. There is no PHCU/C in Thian. In all areas, host



community members and IDPs report being able to access the services but more frequently choose to treat with traditional herbs due to the lack of medicines, or to long travel distances required to reach the centers. Severe cases in all assessment sites will transfer cases to Yirol Hospital, requiring hiring of a vehicle for 20,000 SSP or walking for 14 hours, inhibiting access for the most vulnerable.

Most common health concerns reported by community members are malaria, typhoid, diarrhea, scabies, meningitis, pneumonia, eye infections and blindness.

## EDUCATION

There is limited access to education services in all assessment sites, particularly the rural payam of Thian in Malek County. According to IDPs, prior to their displacement there was erratic education available for children in Toich, with some living on the main island of Cuét Akuet accessing occasional schooling while those on the outlying islands did not. While there were no education facilities on the islands, some HHs transported children to Shambe or Lang Matot to receive primary education. There are primary schools providing P1-P8 located in Amer Achier, Lang Matot and Ayem, but host community HHs and IDPs alike report prohibitive costs (approx. 1,000 SSP per term), lack of materials, and severe hunger as the main factors inhibiting access to education services. In Thian, community leaders expressed hopes to start a school with classes under a tree for the coming term, but lack basic materials.



## 7. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

**Prioritization of PSN in hard to reach locations:** The centralization of service provision in population centers of Malek and Adior is reducing access of PSN to humanitarian assistance, especially in hard to reach payams of Thian and Lang Matot. Provision of assistance through emergency or mobile teams should prioritize Thian and Lang Matot payams. Static partners based in Yirol should scale-up outreach services so that outlying areas have increased access. Humanitarian actors should explore increasing cross-county assistance from hubs in Awerial.

**Do No Harm:** While sector-specific responses should be scaled-up immediately to ensure the provision of lifesaving assistance to conflict and displacement-affected IDP and host community households, the timing and type of response should be taken into careful consideration to ensure adherence to Do No Harm. In particular, due to the ongoing presence of armed actors in Toich and along the Nile and reports of protection violations against IDPs attempting to return to the area, *responding agencies should carefully consider whether the provision of specific NFIs (e.g. fishing kits) would encourage a premature return by beneficiaries to the area, thereby exposing them to greater protection risks.* To adequately manage this, responding agencies should engage in careful communication with communities about the ongoing risks linked to return to the island, so that beneficiaries are able to make informed decisions and initiate a voluntary and dignified return when it is safe to do so.

**Needs-based rather than status-based response:** Due to the historical variation in access to livelihood opportunities and improved diet for the inhabitants of Toich compared to the host communities of Malek and Adior, the assessment found that both IDPs and host community members demonstrate critical multi-sectoral needs. Due to the stress on limited resources the displacement has had on host communities and emerging intra-communal tensions, any response in the area should be need-based using standard beneficiary identification and verification criteria, and ensure that assistance reaches the most vulnerable in both groups. To this end, responding agencies should ensure conflict sensitivity analysis has informed assessment and response planning so as to not exacerbate existing tensions.

**Population movement:** Flow monitoring in reception areas of Jonglei should be initiated to identify additional caseloads and to ensure the needs of IDPs displacing eastward into Twic are adequately assessed and responded to.

**Gender-Based Violence:** The high rate of GBV and risk of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in the context of reducing resources requires a multi-pronged approach, including:

- GBV Sub-Cluster to support in advocacy against the ongoing use of “police form 8” to ensure that survivors have access to medical care and reporting avenues follow a survivor-centered approach.
- Information dissemination should be initiated on the availability and location of GBV response services, including PEP kits.
- Support to static GBV partners should enable expansion of GBV prevention and response programming into hard to reach locations of Malek and Adior. Addition of the establishment of Women and Girl Friendly Spaces (WGFS) should be included in 2020 planning and supported by donors for payams in Malek and Adior Counties.
- Provision of training to community leaders in rights of women and GBV, to improve sensitization and reduce stigmatization related to GBV and SV.
- Expansion of support for CUAMM through training to grow clinical management of rape (CMR) capacity across the counties.

**General Protection:** Advocacy for intervention of a general protection actor to cover underserved locations around Yirol East with programming in protection monitoring and protection mainstreaming support to operational partners in the area.

**Child Protection:** Provision of information dissemination and training of community leaders on the negative impact of child labor, and on the rights of children. Advocacy for FTR services in Yirol East and with local authorities for follow-up on reports of abduction.

**Mine Action:** EOD team recommended for follow-up on UXO reported in Baburjeet area of Yirol. Due to the reported use of artillery during the attack in Toich, a technical survey is recommended in areas on and around the affected islands. Additional MRE sessions are recommended to be provided to IDPs prior to their return to Toich.

**Food Security and Livelihoods:** Immediate intervention by FSL actors to ensure critical needs are met. The provision of agriculture inputs (seeds and tools) should be considered in host community areas. Fishing kits and gear recommended to be distributed to IDP HHs to restart their livelihoods, however this particular response should take into account careful timing to ensure that assistance provided does not prompt a preemptive, unsafe return to Toich while armed actors are still present.

**WASH:** Both short and long-term WASH interventions should be considered to ensure access to WASH services. In particular, static WASH partners (amplified through emergency mobile support) should engage in borehole repair/upgrade and maintenance plus provision of spare parts, trainings for water management committees and pump mechanics, construction of emergency latrines in health and education facilities, provision of trainings and tools for community latrines construction, provision of community hygiene promotion campaigns, and distribution of WASH NFIs, including soap and reusable menstrual pads.

**Shelter/NFI:** Coordination of available partners to provide basic NFIs to IDP households in their areas of displacement across Malek and Adior Counties, as well as to host community members with high need. If shelter materials are provided, NFIs should be complemented with small cash assistance to PSN so that local labor can be hired to support on construction.