

REPORT

FACT FINDING MISSION, RENK COUNTY 14th to 17th February 2017

1. Background statement

Located on major routes from Sudan to Paloich and an important crossing to the West Bank of the White Nile¹, Renk has been at high risk of conflict related displacement since the beginning of the conflict in 2013². The County is currently hosting three main camps for displaced population. Abayok camp and Wunthau camp were first constituted by population repatriated in 2011. Conceived as transit sites, they have endured as the returnees have not been able or willing to return to their areas for origin. Abayok is sheltering between 4,000³ and 5,000⁴ individuals and Wunthau around 2,000 individuals⁵. Payuer camp is home to 1,000⁶ to 1,711⁷ IDPs that fled the shelling in Jodha the previous year. Without recent registration and camp coordination, population figures are unconfirmed for those locations.

On 30th January 2017, there were exchanges of fire on the West Bank of Renk, with territorial control shifting in Gabat. On 1st of February 2017, the fighting had reached Masebel (30 minutes from Renk on the west bank) and the border with Sudan in Gerger was reported closed by the South Sudanese authorities. It reopened soon afterwards without generating any unusually high number of crossing towards Sudan.

Some clashes were also reported in Bedinis village and Duk-Duk village, which are mainly farming areas with a heavy military presence and therefore few families. It is likely that the farmers fled toward Renk or in the bush around Bebinis⁸. The skirmishes also affected the area surrounding Atem (GPS coordinates 11.418195, 33.123940), forcing its inhabitants to seek refuge in Chammedi village (GPS coordinates: 11.547055,32.985306) which remained unaffected by the events. On the 7th January 2017, territorial control of Kuek at the border with Sudan also changed hands between armed elements.

Since then, military positions have been reinforced in Renk town and in Kuek, as a defensive measure. Some of the troops in Chammedi were first shifted to Renk before the town received reinforcement from Paloich or Juba and the SPLA 1st Division returned to its post in Chammedi payam. Military presence remains heavy after the clashes.

After a week of interruption, Medair (health, nutrition and WASH), MTT⁹ (child protection), IOM¹⁰ (health, DTM) resumed their activities out of town as the security situation returned to normal with roads once again open. Additionally to these organizations, the Comboni sisters are also providing education services in town and did not suspend their activities.

The latest confrontation generated new influx of population in Renk town from Orokona, Wadokona, Gabat, additionally to new arrivals from Maban, mostly Mabanese and a minority of

¹ <http://www.refworld.org/pdfid/49a65b190.pdf>

² <http://southsudanhumanitarianproject.com/counties/11763/>

³ According to Medair data

⁴ According to figures provided by MTT based on the 2012 registration

⁵ According to the camp leadership

⁶ Idem

⁷ According to interviews with Payuer camp leadership

⁸ This information was provided ahead the assessment and could not be confirmed

⁹ Mobile Theater Team

¹⁰ International Organization for Migration

Shilluk, the total estimated number is at 300 individuals¹¹. The displaced persons were requested by SSRRC¹² in Renk to seek accommodation with relatives within the host community. Attempts by humanitarians to assess the new arrivals were unfruitful as they were not able to reach any of the newly displaced population as they have integrated in the host community. MTT¹³ has received 17 UASC for which the families were rapidly contacted except one case as the child report the abduction of his mother.

In view of those developments, a fact-finding mission was conducted by a DRC team comprised of Shelter, Camp Manager and Protection staff based in Melut upon request by the Protection cluster and UNHCR.

2. Purpose of the fact-find mission - Rationale and objective(s)

- The mission aimed at better understanding patterns of displacement due to the recent surge in fighting and possible movement patterns in case of an escalation.
- It aimed at understanding protection, camp management and shelter concerns in Renk and surrounding areas and establishing a service mapping.
- Finally, it aimed at identifying and establishing contacts with local authority (formal and traditional) as to facilitate further mission and intervention.

3. Methodology

Due to the limited time available for the mission (two days), the team focused on key informant interviews and focus group discussions in Abayok, Payuer, Renk town, Chammedi and Atem. No sampled individual interviews or sampled household assessments could be conducted.

Key informants:

- Authorities: RRC head of office, County commissioner, Director of organization affairs for the county, Gerger Payam director
- Traditional authorities: Renk county paramount chief, Chammedi Umda and sub-chief, Niel Umda and Gosfami Umda, Atem chief
- NGO/ civil society: IOM, Medair, MTT, Comboni sisters
- Camps leaderships in Payuer, Abayok and Wunthau

Focus group discussion/interviews

- Abayok:
 - FGD with residents of the camp since 2012: 5 women (between 19 to 40 years old) and 2 men (between 40 and 45 years-old) and one elderly woman.
 - FGD with new arrivals from Gabat and Masebel: 8 women between 20 to 40 years, including women headed-household with young children (family separation and one widow).
- Payuer:
 - FGD with long-term resident of the camp: 4 adult women and 8 adult men, aged 45 to 69 years-old
 - FGD with new arrivals from Gabat and Wadakona: 8 adult women between 23 and 32
 - Individual interview: one adult woman from Wadakona, 5 women from Gabat

¹¹ These figures were provided by the South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation in Renk before the mission and have not been verified

¹² South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation

¹³ According to an interview with MTT officer on the 10th of February in Melut

4. Key findings

a. Population movement

Population movement in Renk and Manyo County is extremely fluid according to the security situation. Additionally, there have been reports of recent new arrivals from Yei by air¹⁴. The scope of the displacement remains hard to evaluate as part of Renk population had fled town in 2015 while a substantial number of new arrivals (from Malakal, Manyo county and other parts of Renk county like Chammedi or Atem) settled with relatives in town, in unoccupied buildings or rented accommodation¹⁵. So far, this situation has not created any major concern on lands and property rights as the occupants of the abandoned buildings are requested to leave upon return of the owners in a given period or to pay rent. If it cannot be afforded or a new accommodation cannot be found by the occupants, they move on to Abayok or Payuer camps¹⁶. Both camps leadership and inhabitants are under the impression that the population is increasing, while IOM reports stable figures.

Due to the clashes in the West Bank from the 30th January 2017, SSRRC¹⁷ reported that 49 households¹⁸ coming from the West Bank and MTT reported 750 individuals arriving. The government authorities facilitated the transport of some new arrivals from the port to Zero (block of Renk town close to the main checkpoint), further on to Abayok, Payuer camps or integrating in Renk town. From the 11th to the 13th of January, Abayok camp reportedly received 214 new arrivals with 117 new arrivals from Gabat and Masebel and 97 new arrivals from Wadakona¹⁹, while 26 individuals found their way to Payuer camp²⁰. Those numbers cannot be confirmed as no registration of new arrivals has been conducted. Women newly arrived in Payuer stated that most people who had fled from Wadakona had returned as no shelter, NFI or food assistance was provided in the camp by agencies or the government and so as to look after their properties in Wadakona. The displaced individuals remaining settled either with relatives or in abandoned shelters²¹.

Preliminary findings on the population showed that almost exclusively women and children²² arrived to Renk, mainly the family of the soldiers posted on the West Bank of Nile. Medair reported a significant number of pre-natal consultations among the newly arrived population. It is believed that the Shilluk families that fled the violence preferred crossing to Sudan.

Mobility between Chammedi payam and Renk town is particularly high: men move (or stay) in Chammedi and Atem to attend to the farms during the raining season, collect wood or burn charcoal for trade, collect Arabic gum or tend to the animals as casual labor during the transhumance²³, the women and children move from Atem to Chammedi or Chammedi to Renk when the security is perceived as deteriorating. The same patterned was followed during the latest confrontations, part of the population fled to Chammedi and Renk where they live with host community or occupy empty properties²⁴. Some household in Chammedi also fled to Renk fearing the possible escalation of the clashes. The traditional chiefs reported that some of the population had come back to Atem and Chamedidi when the clashes stopped. No figures have been provided regarding the scale of this movement or the composition of the population.

¹⁴ According to KII in the Comboni sister schools, there has been an increase of arrivals recently, in particular from Yei with at least 30 children registered for the school year newly arrived from Central Equatoria.

¹⁵ Confirmed during an interview with IOM

¹⁶ According to an interview with Chammedi Umda

¹⁷ South Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission

¹⁸ According to interview on 14th of February

¹⁹ Interview with camp leadership

²⁰ Interview with newly displaced women from Gabat in Payuer camp

²¹ Some shelters were abandoned by the Nuer household as they left the camp for Sudan during the intense fighting that took place in Renk in 2015

²² According to MTT

²³ <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/resources/maps/detail/en/c/272872/>

²⁴ According to KII with Chammedi Umda on the 15th of February and Atem chief on the 16th of February

Chammedi and Atem appeared very quiet. In Atem particularly, few women and children could be observed as mostly male civilians as well as military were present in the village²⁵.

b. Protection Monitoring

During the clashes on the West Bank, women and children were reported to have been abducted by armed elements mainly from the Gabat area. In Payuer, DRC team spoke with one family member who reported her five children abducted in Gabat²⁶. Civilians were also submitted to deliberate physical violence by armed forces as one eye witness accounted beating by armed men.

In Atem, during the clashes, the leaders reported that some houses were looted²⁷ and five farms with their harvest burnt²⁸, creating some concerns over availability of food during the lean season. It is seen as a predatory behavior on the part of the armed groups that are crossing from Sudan to loot and destroy before crossing the border again, rather than an attempt at gaining control over territory²⁹.

There are rumors of continued presence of armed men in the bush surrounding the area and the population fears going out to collect wood, grass, Arabic gum or charcoal, the main sources of income in the village. Though the effective presence of armed group is difficult to confirm, one incident of livestock theft by an armed group was reported³⁰ in Chammedi's vicinity.

In Abayok, the women included in the focus group discussed the prevalence of sexual violence when moving out of the camp to collect firewood or grass, although Medair was providing CMR and PSS services and as included access to services for survivors in their outreach work. Between 2012 and 2016, 15 incidents are known, including 10 referred for medical treatment, allegedly by armed men in plain clothes or fatigues. Since the 8th of February, a woman has been reported missing after going to collect firewood in the bush on the eastern side of the camp. The case was reported to the local authorities³¹. The reporting rate for GBV incidents is very low due to a strong taboo³², hence poor reflection of its prevalence. In Payuer, no such concerns were reported during the focus group discussions.

In Abayok, 18 individuals, male and female, were found dead after going out of the camp to collect wood, burning charcoal or cutting grass³³. The perpetrators or motives are unknown. No clear partner seemed to emerge in terms of community affiliation of the victims.

Intercommunal relations are overall globally positive though there are tensions relating to access to livelihood between the host community and the IDPs/returnees who have to pay in order to collect grass or wood according to prices fixed by the land owner. Land properties and cultivation are problematic, particularly in Abayok where the land has already been surveyed making it hard for communal grazing and/or farming as this is likely to attract some land, housing and property rights.

As there is little livelihood opportunities for the residents of Abayok and Payuers camps, children, at a young age, collect scrape metal, drive donkey carts, sell small items on the markets and, for girls, sell tea in the market. There is no access to education in the camp, and in Renk town, only two schools are currently functioning (including one led by the Comboni sisters). Some children also engage in petty crimes and anti-social behaviors like fighting. The idle youth in Payuer is also organizing in groups, quarrelling, harassing or displaying violent

²⁵ Site visit on the 16th of February, morning

²⁶ MRM incident report was filled with relevant information

²⁷ The leaders estimate the number at 200 household looted, however no obvious sign of destruction could be observed in the village, and due to the size of Atem, this number seem high. Sorghum, NFI (cooking utensils, jerry cans, etc.) and groundnuts were reported stolen.

²⁸ This assertion could not be confirmed

²⁹ Interview with the local authorities and Umda

³⁰ Second hand source; incident reported to one of the key informant

³¹ Focus group discussion conducted in Abayok on the 15th of February

³² Confirmed by Medair health worker

³³ According to camp leadership

behaviors towards the younger children or women. In the market, groups of children could be observed late in the evening, roaming around and begging. In school, the younger children are also displaying behavioral problems that can be attributed to the constant movement of families³⁴. 86 UASC have been identified by MTT. Family separation is still prevalent with fathers working in the North or Juba and the families living in Renk, or on the opposite, men working in Renk with their families in Sudan (either in camps or integrated in host community, mainly to access education and other services). However, due to the current economic crisis and plummeting of the exchange rate, families are brought back from Sudan as the incomes generated in South Sudan are not sufficient to pay for school fees and life expenses in Sudan.

The intentions reported were different among the IDPs according to the date of arrival. Returns in Abayok present in the camp for the longest seem willing to integrate locally would they be provided the land³⁵. In case of escalation of the conflict from the west, individuals would seek refuge in Sudan and, if the threat came from the east, they would move on to Melut or Paloich. Newly arrived IDPs stated that they would follow other population in case of intense fighting. The biggest threat to the civilians in Renk would occur should the fighting escalate simultaneously on the West Bank and in Chammedi payam to reach Renk, they would then be trapped in the crossfire.

Other concerns reported were the lack of access to education services, clean water in all locations, health in Chammedi and Atem, land and resources in Abayok and Payuer. In Wunthau, Payuer, Abayok, biometric cards and food ration cards that were lost or destroyed have not been replaced preventing households to receive their monthly rations.

c. Shelter/NFI

There are no regular shelter and NFI partners on the ground, MEDAIR providing punctual assistance. The last NFI/shelter distribution was conducted in 2014 for all IDPs with plastic sheeting, mosquito nets, sleeping mats and blankets.

In Abayok, Wunthau and Payuer, shelters are made of poles, grass and bush sticks. Though these materials are available locally, they either need to be purchased in the market or a fee needs to be paid to the host community in order to be allowed to collect them. As little livelihood opportunities are available, shelter construction and maintenance are challenging and those who cannot afford to do so live with their relatives in overcrowded shelters. No shelter assistance was provided to new arrivals in the camp and they settled either with relatives or in abandoned shelters. In Wunthau, plastic sheets ahead of the raining season were requested to avoid flooding the shelters through the grass roofs³⁶.

In all three camps, shelters are in bad condition but it remains difficult to assess the scope of the need without a more comprehensive household survey.

³⁴ As reported by a teacher in the Comboni sister's kindergarten

³⁵ According to interview with Medair staff

³⁶ Interview with the camp leadership on 16th of February



Shelter in Abayok camp

The last NFI distribution was led by Medair in 2014 for plastic sheeting, mosquito nets, sleeping mats and blankets. Requests were made for NFI assistance in all locations; however, it is particularly difficult to assess the scope of the needs. Nets and blankets were requested in Chammedi, cooking sets, jerry cans, blankets and mosquito nets were requested in Atem. In Payuer, the FGD participants requested plastics sheets, jerry cans, kitchen sets, blankets, and mosquito nets.

In Abayok, we were reminded by the leaders of DRC commitment made last year to provide CRI UASC present in the camp through referrals by MTT and were provided with a copy of the list.

5. Recommendations

- There needs to be an PSN assessment conducted by DRC for CRI distribution for UASC identified by MTT and Medair in Renk
- Assessment and intervention mission in Renk by DRC and Medair to assess scope of NFI/shelter needs for conflict affected population in Atem and Chammedi
- Protection monitoring mission by DRC in Wadakona to establish local contacts, assess the presence of civilians in the areas, the guarantee of freedom of movement for the civilians as well as any possible population movement.

Annex 1| Service mapping

Sector	Summary of the services provided/activities conducted	Criteria	Agency
Camp Management	NA	NA	NA
NFIs (General)	No Regular NFI activities Last blanket distribution of plastic sheeting, mosquito nets, sleeping mats and blankets	Blanket distribution	Medair
Shelter	No regular shelter intervention Last plastic sheet distribution in 2014	Blanket distribution	Medair
Registration	NA	NA	NA
Health	Primary health care Maternity Awareness and outreach	Services available to all IDPS, Abayok, Chammedi, Gelhak, Wunthau	Medair
	Primary health care Maternity Awareness and outreach	Services available to all IDPS Payuer (closing), Wunthau	IOM
Nutrition	Nutrition screening Outpatient therapeutic care for children Targeted supplementary feeding for children	Malnourish children abayok, Payuer, Wunthau. Chammedi, Atem, Gelhak	Medair
FSL	NA	NA	NA
WASH	Hygiene promotion through community hygiene promoters Water point creation, water point maintenance and water supply and distribution Sanitation facilities construction, operation and maintenances	Services available to all PSNs Abayok	Medair
	Hygiene promotion through community hygiene promoters Water point creation, water point maintenance and water supply and distribution Sanitation facilities construction, operation and maintenances	Services available to all PSNs Payuer, Wunthau	IOM
Protection	NA	NA	NA
Gender Based Violence	Child protection (FTR, registration of abducted, unaccompanied and separated children etc.) Case management, PSS services, community engagement CFS management MRE awareness raising		
	CMR Psychosocial support Awareness and outreach	Service available to all IDPS	Medair
Education (General)	Kindergarten Primary school	Above 800 children, Renk town	Comboni sisters