



IDP shelters in Gokjak, Piji/Canal county

BACKGROUND

The conflict in Jonglei state that erupted in December 2022 and escalated in early 2023, has displaced an estimated 20,000 people to Malakal town, Canal/Pigi, Baliet, and Ulang counties due to fear of loss of lives and reports of abductions. The conflict mainly transpired in the Northern Jonglei counties of Akobo, Nyirol, and Uror where civilians fleeing the areas are visibly traumatized due to unconfirmed reports of deaths, injuries, extortion, looting and heavy damage of public and private infrastructures, and conflicted-related sexual violence. GBV incidents and family separations have been widespread and the number of unaccompanied or separated children is on the rise.

CURRENT SITUATION

Gokjak is a spontaneous site in Mareng Payam (Piji/Canal County, Jonglei state). The site is located along the Sobat River and is approximately one and a half-hour boat drive from Malakal town. The IDPs started fleeing to the site in December 2022 and according to the RRC and community leaders, there is a total population of 2,123HH (roughly 16,884 individuals). During their assessment, protection teams could only confirm some 3,000 individuals, however, it was noted that some IDPs were not present during the assessment as they were looking for food in locations nearby. IDPs expect more people to join them in Gokjak as the situation in their places of origin remains volatile. There is no static humanitarian presence in the area with only health partners conducting mobile response. The area where the IDPs have settled was given to them by the local authorities for them to construct shelters and cultivate freely, this was confirmed by the Payam administrator, the RRC and the IDPs. However, all IDPs reported that they lack tools to undertake farming activities. The majority of the population are women, children, elderly and persons living with disabilities and are extremely vulnerable. Most of the men remained behind to protect their properties, others were killed, and many others are missing. The IDPs left their cattle behind in order to mitigate any risks of inter-communal violence in Gokjak. Currently, the area is not militarized and there are three policemen present at the location to ensure security, law, and order.

KEY PROTECTION CONCERNS

- **Safety and security in Gokjak:** The situation now is calm and stable. The IDPs from Nyirol County and host community leaders confirmed there were no tensions or discrimination.
- **GBV:** Women in Gokjak feel unsafe sleeping outside due to the risk of wild animals and sexual and gender-based violence. Sanitary materials are also lacking, with women using old clothing during their menstrual cycles and requesting soap and sanitary kits.
- **Child protection:** Community leaders reported 36 separated children are under the custody of their immediate families, needs further verification. Women spend most of their time searching for food, leaving children unattended, with many seen without clothes or in dirty clothing. One child drowned crossing the Sobat River in March.
- **Shelter/NFIs:** 98% of IDPs are living under trees, putting vulnerable groups like female-headed households, the elderly, and people with disabilities at heightened risk. Shelters are typically made from old clothing, blankets, and plastic sheets. Floods have made it difficult to find grass for shelter. Although some aid has been provided, needs are extremely high, with IDPs walking for up to 12 days to reach their destination with only essential items
- **Food** - IDPs rely on fishing and foraging for survival, often walking several kilometres in search of food. Some men burn charcoal for income, but face transportation challenges as charcoal can only be sold in Canal or Malakal. Coping mechanisms include skipping meals or eating once per day.
- **Health:** There are mobile health services being provided by both IMC and MSF. IDPs reported 7 cases of acute diarrhea, 6 cases of measles among children and 1 death. The six sic children were referred to Malakal for further treatment. Some children were observed to be malnourished. IDPs treat with local herbs and in case of emergencies, the patient is being transported by canoe to Khorfulus or Canal hospitals.
- **WASH services are not available.** IDPs fetch water directly from the Sobat River for their domestic use. There are no latrines, open defecation was observed. Poor hygiene is assumed to be causing diarrhea and eye trachoma to children.
- **Education is disrupted and most of the children do not attend school as there is no functioning facilities in the area** resulting in increased child labour and risks of forced marriages. The RRC confirmed that they can provide volunteer teachers but lack materials to renovate schools which were destroyed during the conflict and floodings. The IDPs requested education partners to provide tents or plastic sheets for temporary classrooms construction, exercise books, blackboards, and chalk to establish a learning space for their children.
- **Potential for return:** IDPs reported they have no intention to return to areas of origin, until the security situation improves. They also have no intention to relocate to other locations as they plan to undertake farming and fishing activities to sustain their livelihoods and do not have sufficient financial resources to cover transportation costs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- All clusters to extend mobile response and **expedite provision of basic services to the most vulnerable** (food, shelter/NFIs, WASH, Health, Education). Of particular concern is **shelter** as IDPs are sleeping under the open air with the rainy season closely approaching exposing them to health and protection risks.
- **Education** with no functional school in the area. **Nutrition** and **WASH** as there are no facilities in place nor hygiene promotion or water purification tablets. **FSL** with great need to provide one-off emergency response, seeds, farming/fishing tools. **Protection** with urgent need to distribute dignity kits.
- **Advocate with the government and UNMISS to extend patrols** to this area
- **Conduct headcount** to confirm the number of IDP population on the ground to guide the humanitarian response. (DTM).
- **Child Protection** partners to establish community care structures to mitigate risks of children drowning; conduct case management for Unaccompanied and Separated Children (UASCs).
- **Provide cash support to the most vulnerable IDPs and PSNs** to address immediate protection and health concerns
- **Establish and capacitate community-based Protection Networks (CBPNs)** to monitor and provide feedback on protection related issues and quality of service in collaboration with local authorities.
- **Enhance support for women and girls** including provision of dignity kits, clothes and other NFI.

FGD with IDPs in Gokjak, Piji/Canal county

