



IDPs leaving camps in Ezo to return to Tambura are in need of transport and re-integration support

SUMMARY

In 2021 a conflict erupted in Tambura County resulting in the displacement of 21,800 civilians to five IDP camps within the county (St. Mary, TOB IDP, SSPDF Barracks, Ayat and Ministerial Complex) and 33,000 people to six IDP locations in Ezo county (Nakofo, Napere, Regina Mundi, Nambia, Manzinzi, and IDPs integrated). Currently, there are only two remaining functioning camps in Tambura and six in Ezo hosting 383 IDPs and 26,255 IDPs, respectively.

The Protection Cluster South Sudan deployed a field mission to Yambio, Tambura and Ezo From the 1st to the 16th of March to identify critical protection concerns that affect the IDPs and host communities.

During the mission, it was observed that the vast majority of the 21,800 IDPs that were residing in the Tambura IDP camps have now returned to their place of habitual residence or have relocated to nearby settlements due to the relative peace there, where discouragement of ethnic clashes has been advocated by the local authorities, led by the Tambura Commissioner.

IDPs who are still residing in Ezo and wish to return to Tambura County have stated that lack of transport and support for return has been their biggest barrier, particularly for women, children, the elderly, and those with specific needs.

During the mission, the team also looked at strengthening the protection coordination mechanism in Western Equatoria. This included, supporting the state cluster with the election process for the co-leadership position of the cluster and assessing SSHF funded protection activities in the state. It is worth mentioning that cluster members showed interest in further capacity building on 5W reporting and Protection Monitoring System.

PROTECTION ANALYSIS

- While many people stated feeling tensions in Tambura had reduced and it was safer for them to return, many, especially those in Ezo IDP camps, need support to enable them to make a safe and dignified return to their pre-conflict communities.
- The lack of humanitarian assistance including food assistance (last food distribution was implemented in June 2022), especially in Ezo IDP camps, needs immediate response at least until return opportunities are available.
- It was noted that there are increased tensions between the Ezo IDP camp dwellers and local communities over farming and other basic resources such as for firewood.
- Among the 283 people still in camps in Tambura (251 in TOB and 32 in St.Mary), some have expressed their interest to integrate into those payams as they have found sources of livelihood there, while others are in the process of returning back to their homes.
- In Ezo County there are still 26,255 IDPs remaining in the 6 IDP locations, where it has been stated that It has been very difficult for the vulnerable PSN to return.

"I want to return to Tambura County because there is no food, cultivation site is not available and there is a lack of humanitarian assistant in Ezo. I also feel that is good to support the ongoing peace process in the county.

In case we do not go, our children will need humanitarian support which is currently lacking here in Ezo county. If we decide to go, we will need transportation to Tambura, which most of us cannot afford right now.

Upon return to Tambura, we will need support for basic items, seeds, and tools. If we are not supported, the most vulnerable persons, such as elderly, single mothers and children will suffer most as they will not be able to support themselves."

IDP resident in Nakofo/Ezo County

KEY PROTECTION CONCERNS AND GAPS

- While safety is increasing in Tambura, some IDPs express fear returning to some locations due to potential of killings or otherwise being targeted.
- Vulnerable community in Ezo camps have limited access to humanitarian assistance, especially food due to lack of food security actors and resources
- Both the recent returnees (due to lack of seeds and tools) and IDPs (due to inability to receive consent from host communities) are unable to cultivate their land which will negatively affect their food security in the upcoming period, potentially aggravating their protection situation leading to negative coping mechanisms such as child labor, early marriages, GBV and others.
- Children are reportedly dropping out of school or unable to reach schools due to lack of access to transportation and high school fees, increasing protection risks for these children.
- Girls are also reportedly dropping out of schools due to lack of proper services such as dignity kits, trained teachers, and Girls' Education in South Sudan programmes to support girls of reproductive age.
- Lack of sufficient water forces household members, especially women, to travel long distances exposing them to increased risks especially GBV.
- Returnees need shelter as many homes were destroyed during the conflict. Lack of support may trigger secondary displacement or negative coping mechanisms.
- Conflict and displacement trauma is very much present among communities and requires MHPSS response. Lack of dignity kits adds an extra layer of protection concerns for women and children.
- General state of poverty, trauma and break down of traditional coping mechanisms has reportedly increased various types of protection violations and negative coping strategies. For example, community leaders cited due to poverty there is increased domestic violence, teenage pregnancies and early marriages, and family neglect.

PROTECTION COORDINATION

To address protection coordination gaps in the state, the Protection Cluster support mission facilitated an election among the members to select a cluster co-lead in Yambio, BRAC South Sudan was elected as cluster Co-lead. Additionally, further elections were conducted at county level to identify focal points which would ensure effective coordination and information sharing between state and county.

- In Ezo, Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) was elected to ensure cluster level leadership, while the Catholic Medial Mission Board (CMMB) will be coordinating activities pertaining to Gender-based Violence and child protection.
- In Tambura, World Vision (WV) and CINA continue to support the protection coordination.

Through the national protection cluster's roving field support team, coordination between the national and state level is being further enhanced through more regular engagement with State-level coordination focal points. During the cluster meeting, a presentation on Protection Monitoring System (PMS) was conducted to raise awareness on the system and the importance of the data for evidence-based programming and advocacy, most participants expressed their interest in having further trainings on the protection cluster's 5W System and protection monitoring. A training plan is being developed for dedicated sessions.

SSHF Projects: It was noted that the host community-based activities implemented by some partners are well on target while certain activities implemented by others, mostly in IDP camps, will have to refocus to follow the population in the areas of return.

RECCOMENDATIONS

- To ensure an environment conducive for return, there is a need to continue high level support to Tambura authorities' efforts in promoting peace and return.
- UN and other agencies to support the peace conference in Tambura. Need for UNMISS, UNDP and Council of Churches to push for consultations and involvement at the County level to ensure ownership of the peacebuilding process and the Peace Conference.
- To ensure safe and dignified voluntary return, organized transport and return support packages are needed, especially for people with disabilities.
- Ensuring immediate availability of agricultural tools and seeds support is crucial to a sustainable return and improve the food security situation.
- Those unable to return and continue to dwell in IDP camps need continued humanitarian support including food, shelter, WASH, and key protection services such as dignity kits and psycho-social support.
- Partners on the ground, especially those implementing SSHF funded projects, need to **refocus locations and types of actions due to increased return** and closures of IDP sites, especially in Tambura. The reprogramming needs to also ensure that the people who are left behind are continued to be supported.
- Delivery of training on 5W, Protection Monitoring System (PMS) as well as enhancing capacities of county and state level Protection Cluster coordination mechanisms is **crucial for enhanced implementation of activities.**
- Need to **map out locations of return and services that are available** in these communities which government and partners could build on to provide the necessary assistance to the most vulnerable population.