THE RETURN TO SOUTHERN SUDAN OF THE SUDANESE REFUGEES FROM ITANG CAMP, GAMBELA, ETHIOPIA

A Report on their Current Situation, Numbers, Areas of Origin and Present Location along the Baro, Pibor and Sobat Rivers of Southern Sudan

United Nations, Nasir, Southern Sudan, August 31, 1991
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1. SUMMARY

On May 26 1991 when Itang camp was evacuated, some 150,000 permanent residents of the camp crossed back into Sudan, the majority heading for their areas of origin. Many more than 150,000 people were receiving assistance from Itang during seasonal migrations in and out of the camp. Within three weeks, 132,000 returnees were registered by the UN passing through Nasir, where partly due to the lateness in delivery of relief, most of them continued on their journey. Some 28,000 reached their home areas down the Sobat and along the Pibor rivers and 32,000 have settled within alien communities, but are supported by local kinship networks now expanded to include friends made in Itang. 90,000 have remained in Nasir area, 32,000 of whom originate from the Nasir area itself. The 58,000 non-local returnees around Nasir are the most destitute of all the ex-Itang group.

All returnees are attempting to cultivate and become self-reliant, but they require significant support in the early stages of this effort.

2. INTRODUCTION

This report is a compilation of assessment findings and general field notes collected by the author between May 24 and August 24 1991. Areas where the majority of the ex-Itang refugees have settled were visited, representatives of the returnee and local community interviewed and local authorities consulted during river journeys totalling some 1,200 km.

This report attempts to show the situation facing the returnees and lay out suggestions for future assistance. A breakdown and analysis of registration data with supporting assessment data is also included which it is hoped will satisfy the requirements of donors, UN and NGOs as to both the location and numbers of returnees.
3. ITANG

3.1 The Largest Camp Established in Ethiopia for the Refugees from the Sudanese Civil War

Itang camp was established by the Government of Ethiopia and UNHCR in June 1983 to cater to the needs of the victims of Sudan's ongoing civil war that had just broken out in that year. The camp was run by an administration drawn from the refugee community and assisted by ARA, the Administration for Refugee Affairs, a department of the Ethiopian Government. Food and other relief supplies were provided by WFP, UNHCR and UNICEF and in its later years by some international NGOs. The UN never had an international presence based within Itang itself.

Despite a somewhat controlled life in which even agriculture was frowned upon, existence for the Sudanese refugee community in Itang was verging on the comfortable; with not only a complete food basket provided to every family, but also adequate shelter, a fully functional health and education service and clean drinking water. The market place was full and in many respects the camp became a small Sudanese town within the borders of Ethiopia.

On 26 May 1991, the camp became the victim of insecurity associated with the fall of the Mengistu government in Ethiopia and the refugees were forced to leave after reported attacks on the camp. They moved en masse towards their homelands in Sudan and began to re-establish their former lives.

3.2 The Demographic Make-Up of Itang

The impact and devastation of the civil war was vividly illustrated by the demographic make-up of Itang. The majority of the refugees registered as living in the eight villages that made up the camp came from the Nuer speaking peoples of south Sudan. Large numbers of Dinka speakers were also present and smaller numbers of Shilluk, Anuak, Didinga, Latuka, Toposa, Murle, Nuba and even some people from Western Equatoria. In mid 1990 a significant number of Uduk and other peoples from southern Blue Nile region moved into Itang after the refugee camp at Tsore, near Asossa was attacked. Therefore by February 1991, Itang's population represented virtually every area affected by Sudan's conflict.

Many visitors to the Sudanese refugee camps in western Ethiopia noted that there appeared to be a disproportionate number of males and unaccompanied young boys present. This seems to be true of both Fugnido and Dimma, but less so of Itang and Asossa camps. With the demise of Asossa camp and the integration of its population into Itang, the balance of the sexes was probably fairly normal.

When the entire Itang population moved to Jekau on the Ethiopian/Sudan border at the end of May 1991, the UN assessment team observed people moving
as family groups and estimated 40% adults, male and female and 60% children. This was later borne out during the registration of returnees at Nasir in July which shows a breakdown of 17% adult males, 22% adult females and 61% children under 14.

3.2.1 Unaccompanied Minors

Great interest has been shown in the matter of the unaccompanied young boys of whom there were some 5,000 registered at Itang grouped together in early 1990 at a school at Tarpaam. The refugee administration report that both boys and girls fled to Itang, but girls were absorbed into families at Itang, being useful and worth dowry and boys were left to fend for themselves. The camp administration report that they set up a school for the boys in an attempt to prevent them from becoming degenerates. Interviews with these unaccompanied boys near Nasir seem to point to the fact that most did indeed leave their homes during times of insecurity although some came in search of education. Some of the children are orphans, but many simply do not know the current location or what happened to their families and most left with others from their villages, sometimes with sisters and brothers. There had initially been 3,500 boys at Nasir in June, at a site named Pandanyang. Some 1,500 left during June and July: it seems that those who came from accessible home areas continued walking home. Groups of boys were interviewed by UN monitors on the roads leading out of Nasir. Most of the 2,000 that currently remain at Nasir are Nuer speakers from Bentiu District which is currently inaccessible due to flooding en route and to some extent to hostilities. They also appear to be the weakest of the original group.
No accurate census or breakdown of the Itang camp population was ever made during the time that the refugees were present in the camp. This is unfortunate as it has allowed many claims and counterclaims regarding who the people really were and how many were really there. One of the more common accusations was that most of the population were members of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA). It is probable that a certain number of the refugees were connected with the SPLA. Guerilla armies are by their nature made up of people who are often part-time soldiers and as such are likely to turn up in refugee camps. Also most soldiers in the SPLA have families and these families are often from areas that have seen much ravaging by war - therefore these people are often candidates for refugee status. It is also known that virtually every civilian official inside SPLA-controlled Sudan had family in Itang. It appears that Itang was a safe haven for both those who supported the war and those who did not.

3.2.2 Camp Population

In February 1991 the Multi-Donor Technical Mission of Refugees and Returnees (MDTMRR) stated that 403,805 Sudanese were seeking assistance and protection in Ethiopia\(^1\). UNHCR reported in July 1990 that 242,093 were claiming relief in Itang camp in the Gambela region of western Ethiopia and 280,000 by January 1991. The MDTMRR report does not provide a clear figure for the camp population of Itang, indicating the confusion that existed as to actual numbers. NGO staff reported subsequently that actual camp residents did not appear to exceed 150,000, but that other registered persons were resident in the surrounding area.

Itang camp is situated in Gajaak Nuer country a group whose territory straddles the Ethiopia/Sudan border in the Baro river basin. So the majority of refugees in the camp, being Nuer, were related through linguistic ties with indigenous local population. Sudanese Gajaak refugees were reportedly living amongst their Ethiopian kin in the area around Itang and were registered for relief. It also seems that many of the indigenous Ethiopian Gajaak were registered at the camp as well. This also would appear true of the Anuak, another group who are found in both Sudan and Ethiopia. Thus, whilst there may have been around 150,000 living permanently in the camp itself, there were also considerable additional numbers living in the surrounding area.

This has been verified by the chiefs of the Gajaak Nuer, who admit that they and their people were all receiving from the camp even though some of them were resident over 1 week's walk from Itang itself inside Sudan. Kinship networks can dissipate relief commodities over a very wide geographical area and population.

Up until the fall of the Mengistu regime, the entire administration of Gambela region, where the camp was located, was mostly constituted of Nuer speaking

\(^1\)Report of the MDTMRR, Addis Ababa, February, 1991
peoples who have very close ties with their kin across the border in Sudan. This administration was closely involved in the running of Itang.

A further key consideration is that Itang became the market place for a very large area of the eastern southern Sudan. Many people migrated into the camp to be resident only at certain times of year. It appears that anyone who turned up at the camp registered as a refugee entitling them to relief items. Newly registered persons received packages of shelter materials as well as a ration card.

Apart from movement mentioned based on economic trade, another important movement in and out of Itang was connected with the traditional hunger season. The hunger season is defined as the period between the exhaustion of the previous years' harvest and the reaping of the new harvest. It is clear from interviews that many people, particularly from the Upper Sobat/Pibor Rivers, moved into Itang during this period and moved back to their homes during better times. Another version of this would be certain family members remaining within the camp while others moved back to their home areas to cultivate2, - a trend that also appears to be the case around the food distribution points at Nasir now.

It is noted in the MDTMRR report that the registered persons at Itang was a "cumulative figure" indicating that there may have been persons on the books who were not always present.

It is felt that a fair figure for full time residents (excluding Gajaak and Anuak) would be in the region of 150,000 and the difference between this figure and any higher one would be due to the above mentioned points.

3.3 The Impact of Itang on the Economy of Upper Nile and Jonglei

It is impossible to try and separate the issue of the provision of relief inputs to the registered refugee population from the camp and the impact of the provision of this relief on the entire population resident in Sudan who had access to Itang. The key linkage in this is trade and Itang's role therein.

Within the areas of Sudan under the control of the SPLA very little in the way of economic activity is taking place. The cash economy is by and large defunct and although it has improved slightly over the last two years, the economic activity that does take place is largely barter for locally produced items. Nevertheless people still aspire to ownership of such items as clothing, fishing equipment, radios, batteries, salt and so on.

It has been shown that the demise of the Arab merchant and lack of access to cash and transport has over the years since 1983 led to a gradual but distinct impoverishment of the general population in southern Sudan3. Itang and the

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2An Investigation into Production Capability in the Rural Southern Sudan, A Report on Food Sources and Needs, UN/OLS, June 1990. p. 26
3Ibid
merchants that flourished there played a very important part in halting this process. For example in years of bad harvest when surplus grain was not available in Sudan, people from as far away as Bor would take cattle to sell in Itang and then use the cash generated to buy grain - and often some consumer items. Others would go to Itang and buy items for resale and on their return would establish small markets utilising Ethiopian currency as the medium of exchange. The status of Itang as an important market was due partly to its position within the relatively well developed Ethiopian marketing network, but also may have been facilitated by the provision of around 75,000 MT of relief food to the Sudanese refugee camps in Ethiopia each year.

In interviews with chiefs, often many days walk from Itang (for example Abwong approximately 2 weeks walk away) the loss of the market place was considered to be more significant than the arrival of large numbers of destitute returnees. Within the rural southern Sudan, cattle are regularly traded for grain, but the surpluses (if any) that are available are limited. In many respects Itang was the replacement of the Arab trader and was an important safety net to people in times of economic trouble.

It is clear that Itang’s attraction as a major social and economic centre had forced changes on communities whose movement patterns had evolved over many generations, with the result that these migrations were redefined in order to take into account the existence of Itang and the decline of indigenous markets. The very presence of Itang certainly retarded the process of economic reconstruction within eastern southern Sudan. Itang’s services also helped to retard the re-establishment of health and education services within large parts of SPLA-southern Sudan. Now, however, the past status of places such as Nasir, Waat, Akobo and Abwong as major trading and service centres should begin to revive.

3.4 The Demise of Itang - What Happened?

On 26 May Itang camp as described in this section of the report ceased to exist. There are many conflicting stories regarding what happened, but it is apparent that Itang became a victim of the insecurity that plagued Ethiopia at the time of the fall of Mengistu’s regime. Whatever caused it, the entire population departed hurriedly and en masse in the direction of Sudan, finally crossing into Sudan at Jekau, where their movement was witnessed by a UN assessment team.

Itang camp still exists and in fact never officially closed. The ex-Asossa refugees for example moved out of the camp when insecurity become a problem, but after everyone had departed sent representatives back to the camp to negotiate (successfully) with the Anuak militia who had taken over, to be given food from the stores to help them on their journey.

A complete change in administration has taken place in the area, notably the Nuer have been deposed by their rivals the Anuak, elements of whom have for many years had been fighting both the Mengistu government and the SPLA in
the guise of the Gambela Liberation Front (GLF). This in itself has created insecurity and instability. Until now reports are still being received from Itang suggesting that security in the area remains a problem.

On the other hand it has been reported that a steady influx of people are arriving back in the camp, but who these people are (if it is true) is not known. No noticeable movement of people away from the Sobat/Pibor river areas has been noted, nor reported by local chiefs. It is more likely that those returning to the camp are Anuak, or perhaps Gajaak who belong to the area.
4. THE RETURNEES

On 29 May the UN witnessed the arrival of approximately 15,000 people at Jekau. These people were encouraged to move on by the bombing of Jekau on that same day. Most proceeded to Nasir (some 130,000 were registered during the subsequent three weeks passing through Nasir) as the town was a stopping point on their route homewards as well as a base for potential relief. A smaller group (perhaps some 20,000) who originated from the Akobo area returned straight home. Interviews with those arriving at Jekau indicated representatives of every area of origin known to have been at Itang except for the Blue Nile group (who appeared later). The conclusion was that all the residents of Itang camp had left. Later on, registration of 16,000 families at Nasir revealed in more detail the breakdown of population by origin.

![First Registration of Ex-Itang Returnees Breakdown by Origin](chart-image)
4.1 First Registration

In Nasir the UN and SRRA established six registration sites where family heads were interviewed and registered. This first stage of registration continued between 1st and 20 June 1991. Details collected included full name, age, sex, number of dependants and area of origin (Annex I). It is not possible to assure complete accuracy, for example exaggeration of dependants was sometimes noted, although the people received no benefit linked to their registration. The resulting figures can be considered indicative of the situation and numbers.

The Sobat, White Nile, Jonglei and Blue Nile areas have the highest representation amongst the returnee population and are areas of southern Sudan which have witnessed some of the most destruction caused by war. Not only was there fighting between Government of Sudan (GOS) and SPLA, but also significant militia activity. Linked to this was an increase in inter-tribal raiding, which was the result of the general breakdown of law and order as well as the access to automatic weapons.

It is not surprising that 93% of returnees originate from these areas which were also particularly vulnerable to long term collapse due to their fragile environments and lack of developed services and trade. The 18% of returnees who originate from Blue Nile region are the ex-Asossa camp group who were displaced originally from their home areas due to the fighting in the Kurmuk and Geizan areas in 1987 and the resulting high level of insecurity that has since been prevalent.

The registers show people coming from each of the eight villages within Itang. There is a mix of male and female-headed households, with an average of 8 individuals per family.

4.2 Initial Movements and Second Registration

From the time the returnees arrived in Nasir until the first provision of relief food, five weeks elapsed. Most people on their arrival in Nasir were visibly exhausted from their journey and hungry. Possessions brought from Itang such as clothes, blankets and cooking utensils were traded with the local people for food and those that were entitled cashed in on kinship ties and received food from relatives. After waiting for the arrival of relief for as long as they could, large numbers decided to move on to accessible home areas or, if their homes were inaccessible, moved to areas nearer their homes. The majority of people found in the Nasir area now are the ones who had local entitlements to both food and land for agriculture (ie Nuer of local origin or those from places such as Waat who have ties by marriage), people who arrived when the food airdrop had started (for example some significant groups of Shilluk from White Nile), those from very distant homes who could not move anywhere close enough to claim traditional entitlements (such as the Uduk and Maban from Blue Nile) or those so destitute that they could only wait for relief. In addition some families from adjacent areas, notably Akobo, appear to have sent some representatives to Nasir
to reduce the food pressure in their home villages whilst they cultivate. The flux of population thus stabilised by the end of June 1991 and a second registration was undertaken at the sites around Nasir with a view to providing relief food and other commodities.

The second registration recorded full names, areas of origin, place of first registration and details of dependants and was completed by late July. Spot checks were conducted by UN monitors.

**REGISTRATION OF EX-ITANG RETURNEES AT NASIR BY ORIGIN**

**FIRST AND SECOND REGISTRATIONS - JUNE/JULY 1991**

NB. This chart does not include data from Nordeng. Blue Nile data is estimated, source: WFP
With the exception of the ex-Asossa group, the average family size found during the second registration was just over half that of the first, i.e. 5 per family. This indicates that family groups may have split to return home, build and cultivate and once the harvest has come in the remaining members will then join them.

Analysis of the differences between the first and the second registrations provide some pointers towards the movement and settlement patterns of the returnees. As can be seen from the chart above, many people left the environs of Nasir between the first and second registrations in June and July respectively. The only area of origin which shows an increase is that of Sobat itself, which represents people from Nasir. The additional 4,500 families originating from Nasir who registered during the second registration are probably local Gajok who at some time in the past had visited Itang, but were not necessarily part of the May 26 exodus.

During the first registration at Nasir 16,500 families registered (a in the table below) and some 2,250 dispersed to home areas (b). Analysis of records to assess what proportion of those who registered during the second registration had registered in the first, show a percentage of 40% percent who had moved on (some 6,000 families) predominantly downstream along the Sobat to places such as Ulang and Baliet (c). Whilst the first registration showed an average family size of 8, the second showed an average of 5 for all but the Blue Nile group. An average of three from every non-Blue Nile household had moved on (d). 1,700 families coming from Akobo arrived at Nasir in July and registered during the second registration (e). The second registration also included a large number of people from Nasir itself who had not previously registered (f).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locations</th>
<th>Families</th>
<th>People</th>
<th>Family Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) First Registered Nasir</td>
<td>16,500</td>
<td>132,000</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Arrived Akobo (not registered at Nasir)</td>
<td>2,250</td>
<td>20,000</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Departed Nasir after first registration</td>
<td>6,500</td>
<td>52,000</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Individuals leaving Nasir leaving Family representatives behind</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>21,000</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) New Arrivals at Nasir from Pibor river area - included in second registration</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>8,500</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) New families from Nasir itself included in second registration</td>
<td>4,500</td>
<td>22,500</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>g) Those registered in both first and second registrations at Nasir</td>
<td>7,000</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) Blue Nile group - registered in both first and second registrations at Nasir</td>
<td>3,000</td>
<td>24,000</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THEREFORE IN NASIR AREA NOW (a-c-d+e+f)</strong></td>
<td><strong>16,200</strong></td>
<td><strong>90,000</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

60% (approx. 10,000 families) of the families who had registered in June remained at Nasir. Of those now in Nasir, 50% are Nasir Nuer, 23% are neighbouring Nuer with kinship ties and 18% are ex-Asossa. Between June and July the ex-Asossa group did not split or increase and shows an average family size of eight, but the other groups do seem to have become smaller with an average family size of five (g & h).
4.3 The Situation of the Returnees Now

Compared to Nasir as seen in early June when large numbers of returnees were congregating on the town, what is now seen is very different. Notably the original relief distribution points which were very crowded during the first weeks of the influx are now more sparsely populated. The major exception to this is Nordeng, the site occupied by the ex-Asossa group from Blue Nile. This has every appearance of a true displaced people's camp. This is because the ex-Asossa group have no links whatsoever with the Sobat peoples, have no kinship entitlements or even linguistic ties and have therefore not been able to move to more permanent settlements away from the Nord distribution site. These Udok, Maban and other groups will have to be resettled to an area more compatible to their traditions after the rains.

The other sites are now small villages each housing an average of 500 families in new huts or shelters around the distribution site and around 1,200 families integrated into existing houses some as much as two to three hours walk from the centre of the village.

Most of the Sobat and Jonglei regions are now experiencing a fair level of security and have done for the last two years. White Nile still has many insecure areas, connected with its proximity to Malakal and other government garrisons along the Nile. Therefore it is not surprising that the majority of people from Sobat and Jonglei have already returned home and are rebuilding their previously largely deserted villages. A few people from places such as Waat who have remained near Nasir state that they could not reach home due to seasonal flooding. In addition there are a few destitutes who came to Nasir via Akobo and the Pibor river area who arrived in Nasir in search of relief after the airdrop had started. These may be related to people who are cultivating at home but who have sent their family members to collect relief until the harvest is in, in the same way as was done in Itang.

It is suspected that in fact many of the Pibor river returnees were already planning a permanent move home prior to the mass exodus from Itang at the end of May. Interviews with returnees along the Pibor river down to Akobo show that the Nuer and Anuak of that area had already planned a move back this year encouraged by the improvement in security in that part of Sobat/Jonglei. Not only had hostilities between the SPLA and militias and GOSS ceased, but a major peace conference between the Nuer, Anuak and Murle had taken place in June 1990. This resulted in an agreement between the parties and no inter-tribal raiding has taken place for over a year.

White Nile as used in this report is an area stretching from Pangak, northwards along the Nile up to Renk. This zone is characterised by continuing insecurity. 50% of the Shilluk and Dinka from White Nile (some 2,000 families) have

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4 For further details of the ex-Asossa group, please see: Background report and guideline for Future Planning: Nordeng Centre for Sudanese Returnees, Nasir, Dr. W. James, WFP, August 1991
moved down the Sobat towards Malakal and across country towards their homes on the Nile. They have settled in villages close to their home areas whose people offer the possibilities for de facto integration based on historic ties between contiguous groups or on friendships made in Itang. It is most gratifying to note that these communities have welcomed with open arms people from completely different ethnic or linguistic groups than their own. A new type of kinship network has evolved.

The other 50% of the White Nile Shilluk and Dinka who did not leave Nasir were those who came into the area later in large community groups and who could not continue homewards due to seasonal flooding, sickness, destitution and a concern for security. These groups have established themselves in villages near to Nasir and will probably remain there for the foreseeable future.

4.4 Production and Food Security

This year the rains have been very good in most of the Sobat and Jonglei areas and the assessment team has observed an excellent first harvest both in terms of quality and extent. This harvest was planted in April and therefore does not include many of the ex-Itang returnees in its direct benefits (with the exception of Akobo see section 5.2). However, indirectly it is already benefiting a very large proportion of the returnees, i.e., those with kinship entitlements. In addition those who have no alternative are able to barter relief items such as blankets for the plentiful maize. Finally the presence of abundant local seed for a September planting is a major bonus.

Everyone who stayed in the Nasir area is now cultivating. Those with local kin have access to better land than others, but from all our survey work we have yet to find one returnee family that is not in some way directly involved in some form of food production. Land is available, the area was so significantly depopulated until 1991 that large areas remained uncultivated and uninhabited. Limited amounts of seed and tools have been distributed by the relief agencies and maize seed is now being acquired in all areas from the local harvest.

The Blue Nile groups are currently growing vegetables on a limited scale. If successful, these vegetables may be sold enabling cash purchase of food items in times when relief food is not available. They will plant maize and sorghum in September when the floods recede from the riverside land. In addition to planting some vegetables, the Shilluk residing in and around Mandeng are skilled fishermen having brought nets and canoes with them from Itang and at times of relief food scarcity are surviving on the sale of fish for cash and food. It is important to remember that the current high levels of relief food need in the Nasir area will probably decrease within the next months as the various harvests come in, but there will be a continuing need to supplement food supplies with relief inputs.
The chart below shows a comparison of the average state of the vegetation in Nasir district in 1989, 1990 and 1991. The satellite-derived data provides a measure of green biomass (normalised difference vegetation index), which indicates whether or not growing conditions exist and shows the progress of vegetation growth over time. NDVI value 0.2 is the level below which no significant green growth can be expected. As can be seen below, the 1991 rains began in early April, 20 days before they began in 1989 (a reasonable year) and 60 days before those of 1990 (which was generally a very poor year). Whereas the conditions in 1989 were good, there were few people in the area to take advantage of them. This year, the first crop has been considerable and great hopes are held for the September planting, which as stated before, the returnees are banking on. The graph represents an average figure for the entire districts and therefore does not account for the many microvariations that result from elevation and soil type.
The agricultural system in the Sobat basin varies from year to year depending on the pattern of the rainfall. In a year such as 1991, when the rains started early and have continued well, a first crop is planted in late April and harvested in early August (see chart below). In August extensive flooding begins to creep across most of the farmland. In some locations where there is high ground above the flood level, a crop may be planted in July/August to catch the last three months of rain. Finally a third crop utilising residual moisture may be planted in September on land opened up by receding flood waters. It is on this third crop on the lower (and more extensive) land that the returnees are placing their hopes of a harvest. However it must be noted that such a harvest cannot be expected before January.

Regarding the food security of returnees who either moved on from Nasir in mid-June or those who never came through Nasir on their way home, the situation is somewhat different. Only those resident within the Nasir area have received food, seed or assistance with shelter from the UN/NGO emergency programme, yet many of these are consuming as little as one third of the minimum daily recommended requirements. Those outside Nasir have been surviving totally on traditional entitlements to assistance and bartering of anything they may have managed to bring with them. By and large these groups have survived reasonably well and have all apparently cultivated. It could be that a reason people departed Nasir quite quickly after their arrival was not just that they were running out of exchange items to barter food, but also they were keen to reach an areas where they could plant crops in time to catch the middle part of the rains. It must be noted however thatdespite the first harvest, considerable strain has been put on their host communities, indeed many communities have doubled or tripled in size. Whether new arrivals are in their home areas or not, their situation remains vulnerable and if their cultivation fails they risk destitution.

A notable exception to this picture are the people who returned to the Akobo/Fibor river areas. All families visited had sent representatives back to their old village areas to cultivate and they cultivated enough land to support their entire families. Obviously they were forced to move earlier than perhaps expected, but it appears that their first harvest was good and they are now looking forward to a second.

4.5 Provision of Basic Services

Even though the provision of education and health services in Itang has helped a whole generation of children to both survive and begin to be educated, this, in many ways, stifled the provision of these services within SPLA southern Sudan itself. Now limited services and schools are functioning at the rural level in most of the areas that the returnees have moved into, therefore nearly all the services that held these people in Itang are available to them in their home areas, at least to some extent. This has been repeatedly reported by chiefs and returnees to be enough to encourage the people to resettle permanently, as long as the provision of material inputs required is maintained.
5. AREA OVERVIEWS

5.1 Jekau to Jikmir

The population centres between Jekau and Jikmir are predominantly located along the Baro river which is itself the border with Ethiopia. The area is populated by Gajaak Nuer whose territory straddles the border and who are found in considerable numbers both in Sudan and Ethiopia. Of the eight major sections of the Gajaak, five are in Sudan and three in Ethiopia. This particular stretch of the river was visited by the author at the time the first returnees arrived in Jekau at the end of May and subsequently meetings were held with the local chiefs at the time of their visit to Nasir at the end of July. One of the issues raised at these meetings was the presence of returnees in their areas, mostly Gajaak. Chiefs from the Maiwut and Daju areas to the north of Jekau reported numbers of returnees integrated within their local communities, but this area has yet to be visited by many assessment team, though it should be as it is an area identified for possible resettlement by the ex-Asossa refugees.

No registration of numbers of returnees was made in this area, but as mentioned earlier many of these Gajaak received regular allocations of relief items from Itang, even though they were not actually resident in the camp. This was confirmed in the meetings with the chiefs, who stated that at least half of their population was registered at Itang. However, actual population numbers were not discussed, although the chiefs noted that the entire area had been dependent on food from Itang. In addition they would buy veterinary drugs, clothing, fishing lines and hooks from the market place there. None of the Gajaak returnees had come to Nasir and so are not included in the registered number of returnees.

There are also Dinka, other Nuer, Nuba, Shilluk and Uduk living amongst the Gajaak at Lari, Uring, Maiwut, Jekau, Malwal and Pakak. All returnees are being supported by local networks.

The chiefs said that the first harvest should be good, although some areas, notably along the Adur River (in Ethiopia) have been affected by flooding. The insecurity that is still prevalent along the border is also a problem. The Gajaak are not able to reach Itang, due to ongoing difficulties with the Anuak and stated that two representatives sent to negotiate with the new administration in Itang had been killed by the Anuak militia.

The area was previously totally dependent on Itang for health services and education, though there are now functioning clinics at Jekau, Malwal, Maker and Jikmir, all on the Baro river. Schools are also functioning in these same locations staffed by returnee teachers, though resources are in very short supply.
5.2 Jikmir to Akobo

The area from Jikmir to Akobo and beyond along the Pibor river was visited in July and the returnees found were local Gajok (not Gajaak) Nuer, though reports were received of a limited number of Shilluk and Dinka in villages away from the river who were cultivating. Only in Akobo town were people actually interviewed who came from other districts. The 350 individuals interviewed came from such areas as Bor, Waat, Fangak, Kongor and Malakal, with a couple of people from Juba. They were all waiting to move to their home areas and had been stopped by the seasonal flooding.

Below Akobo, in Othil (Wunthill) court centre, Anuak were visited who had returned to their home areas from Itang. All groups had come directly to the area without passing and registering at Nasir. A group of approximately 1,000 people arrived at Akobo during the assessment visit, coming from Fugnido via Pochalla and on their way to Waat, their area of origin. No registration has taken place outside Akobo, so it is very difficult to estimate the number of Gajok Nuer returnees, but it would appear that there are more returnees than people who stayed behind. For example, the chief of the Cieng Kuek section of the Gajok stated that 5,000 people had stayed behind and some 7-8,000 had returned from Itang and Fugnido5.

Earlier reports from UN/NGO assessment teams refer to a high number of returnees in the area, many of whom were from more distant homes and it is probable that these people have moved to Nasir to receive relief. Around 1,000 families (family size average 5) arrived in Nasir in July saying they had come from Akobo. Akobo was the only place visited by the assessment team where Nasir was thought to have bountiful supplies and variety of relief.

All the Nuer and the limited number of Anuak visited had made provision for their return home this year by sending family members (mostly young men) ahead to clear land and cultivate. The first harvest of maize and some sorghum appears good and all areas are preparing for their second planting. There appear to be a limited number of livestock in the area, but their numbers seem small, perhaps as a result of serious depletion of numbers from the years of insecurity within the district.

There are schools and clinics with trained staff from Itang in most court centres, such as Wanding and Kier, though few are functioning properly due to lack of resources. The clinic and school in Akobo are functioning well.

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5Akobo Assessment Mission #3, UN/OLS, August, 1991
5.3 Jikmir to Duording

The area between Jikmir, Nasir and Duording along the Sobat river was an area that suffered much destruction in fighting prior to 1989. Both Jikmir and Pandanyang were bases utilised by the Anyanya II and Nasir town was under siege for over a year, prior to its fall to the SPLA in January 1989. The local population, predominantly Gajok Nuer, had largely abandoned the area for Itang and they comprise the largest percentage of returnees now in the Nasir area. Along this stretch of the river are situated five relief distribution points, in the villages of Mandeng, Kwarenga, Torpot, Nor and Duording. Two further distribution centres are located on the Khor Wakau (a tributary of the Sobat), the first at Pandanyang servicing the needs of the unaccompanied children and the second at the village of Kot. There is a small refugee camp of Ethiopians also on the Khor Wakau. The charts in Annex II illustrate the make-up of each of these sites.
As noted above at least two-third of the 90,000 returnees currently registered at these distribution sites are integrated into the communities. The remaining third (some 30,000 people) are living in temporary shelters nearest to the points of relief distribution. This appears to indicate a greater level of impoverishment and dependency than is the case for any other returnees. All these people are cultivating at least to some extent, but only if there is a satisfactory harvest, will they cease to be dependent on the provision of relief food. Without access to this food they will be dragged down into the spiral of total impoverishment created by their selling all their possessions for food.
An important consideration is that most of this area, and in particular areas up the Khor Wakau, were nearly completely deserted prior to the return of people from Itang. The population densities around Nasir are now probably similar to the levels found prior to the outbreak of the civil war. This fact alone has caused a certain amount of confusion in attempts to estimate population of returnees. As 60% of all returnees in the Jikmir-Duording area originate from the district, they should be expected to claim rights to shelter with their kin and have therefore to all intents melted into the general topography. Anyone who visited Nasir prior to the arrival of the returnees and after cannot help but notice how the area has filled with people.
Eight clinics and a health centre are now fully functional at sites around Nasir and schools have opened at a number of villages.6

5.4 Duarding to Achil

In common with the rest of the Sobat this area populated by Gajok Nuer suffered much destruction in the years up to 1989. Both Ulang and Doma beyond it have received significant number of returnee most of whom are local Gajok. However, it is not uncommon to find people from many different parts of Sudan living with friends form this area made in Itang. From registration undertaken in Ulang and verified through analysis of the registrations at Nasir we estimate that some 1,150 families have moved into the Ulang area alone from Itang via Nasir. Of these, approximately 15% are people from groups other than the Gajok, such as Shilluk, Dinka, other Nuer and even one family from Equatoria.

Registration Figures from Ulang

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Origin</th>
<th>Number of Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ULANG</td>
<td>555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GOGRIAL</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KHOR FULLUS</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABWONG</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARIENG</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WAAT</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAIWUT</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BENTIU</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AKOBO</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KONGOR</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PANGAK</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BALIET</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOR</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AWIEL</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YIROL</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NIMULE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALL</td>
<td>643</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A group of Ngok Dinka returnees who are originally from Baliel were interviewed in Doma and reported that they had been accepted as settlers by the Doma Nuer as a result of friendships forged in Itang. The group had not moved on to Baliel as they stated that they had no remaining kinship links with the area, having been away so long. Roughly ten kilometers beyond Doma, at Khor Nyaiyin there is a significant number of Dong Jol Dinka from Renk and other Dinka from Pangak and Bahr el Ghazal settled, all of whom came from Itang in June.

6Details of the situation in and around Nasir are provided in UN/NGO sitreps and special reports.
Ulang located roughly half way between Nasir and Achil is an important administrative centre. Ulang has produced small surpluses of grain in the last two years. Chiefs interviewed in many locations on the Sobat have stated that they go to Ulang area to trade for grain, when theirs is exhausted. The result being that Ulang is reasonably well off both in food supply and in livestock (many of which came from grain for livestock exchanges). The Cieng Wang Dong section of the Gajok located around Doma also reported a good 1990 harvest. This year’s first harvest of maize appear good, although the second planting of sorghum is reported to be doing less well due to flooding. The additional sharing which will have to be made to assist these returnees will undoubtedly place certain strain on food reserves. The area is expecting to plant again in September if the rains continue well. No returnee interviewed had any intention of returning to Nasir for relief despite its proximity. People were unwilling to displace themselves and their families again now that they have come home or have resettled.

There are clinics at Ulang and Doma with trained community health workers and schools are open in most court centres. The chiefs said that teachers were working, but could not speak for their competence as the chiefs themselves could not read or write.
5.5 Achil to Baliet

From Achil downriver to Baliet and slightly beyond, the local people are Ngok Dinka. Due to insecurity in the district, the administrative centre has been moved from Baliet to Abwong. The Ngok chiefs stated that the returnees that have settled in the area are nearly all original inhabitants, but there are also some from other areas such as Bentiu (Panaru) and Atar. All were reported to be Dinka speakers. The returnees form outside the district were all staying with friends made in Itang who were supporting them. According to the chiefs, almost every Ngok who was in Itang has now returned to Baliet and only a few without strong kinship ties have stayed in places such as Nasir and Doma. The registration data shows some 1,400 Ngok Dinka families at Nasir in June and 400 in July. These 400 are of smaller family size than previously, indicating that individuals from the family had returned to Baliet to re-establish their homes. The following was the approximate numbers of returnee families by section given by the chief of each section:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Number of Families</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amagut</td>
<td>Many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiir Kur</td>
<td>Some</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Panyanik</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pagak</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Banglai</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atiap</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wuriding</td>
<td>250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dut</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baliet</td>
<td>500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>1,738</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Ngok Dinka (who are related closely with the Ngok of southern Kordofan) have been living in the vicinity of Abwong and Baliet and have adapted to life in an area plagued by insecurity. Roughly 20 kilometers down the Sobat from Baliet at Nagdiar is both a government garrison and militia base. Baliet is the front line in the war. All Ngok Dinka villages have moved well away from the river and the main Malakal to Nasir road. Much of this area used to be linked to the Nuer areas, in particular the Lau for trade, marriage and exchange, but due to the tension created by the militia raids, (most of the militia being Lau Nuer from Waat) relations between the Ngok and both their Gajok and Lau neighbours are now practically non-existent although some improvement has been reported.

In 1990 Baliet had a good harvest, particularly of sorghum. This year's first crop of maize is ready for harvest and sorghum was being planted on high land at the end July. It was not possible to get a good picture of the state of most of the crops due to the distance of the fields and villages from the river. However, what was growing near the river appeared to be doing well and people interviewed thought that the harvest would be "alright". They gave an production estimate of 15 - 30 sacks per family, which is a very reasonable amount. Again, as in most areas, they anticipate another planting in September, though the area is drier than areas further upstream, as can be seen from the chart below. Very few of
the Ngok in this area own livestock due to many years of raiding. To some extent they have come to terms with being Nilotics without cows as they are no longer such a target for cattle raids, but on the other hand it makes their food security situation precarious. For marriages and other important events that culturally require cattle, "paper cows" are used, to be paid back at some time in the future. Purchase of cattle with their surpluses has been difficult due to the animosity that has existed between the Ngok and their Nuer neighbours. One chief said that even if he found someone to exchange a cow with him for grain, he would be unable to bring it home without someone stealing it on the way.

AVERAGE NDVI VALUES
MALAKAL DISTRICT
1989 - 1991

normalised difference vegetation index is a measure of biomass greenness as detected by satellite-based radiometers

There is a clinic at Baliat with a trained health worker, but schools were reported not to be functioning as very few children were present in Baliat itself due the insecurity. Many of those that came back from Itang were children and now that they had arrived they would like to start some schools.
6. CONCLUSION

All the available data from the registration exercises and many interviews show a picture of the returnees from Itang having largely integrated into settlements in Jonglei and Sobat Regions. The transition from a relatively easy life in the refugee camp to the hard realities of poor shelter, little food and unreliable climate is not an easy one. To a rural Sudanese in Itang, not being able to produce food for ones family is tantamount to having lost control of ones destiny. Nearly everyone interviewed held the opinion that it was good to be home or at least in Sudan. A UNHCR officer reported that despite the paucity of relief and difficulty of their circumstances, the returnees looked far healthier when she saw them in Sudan then when she had worked with them as refugees in Itang.

It is apparent that none of the returnees that moved through Nasir to their home areas or to areas nearer home, have returned to Nasir to re-register themselves and receive free food. In fact the question was often asked at the end of interviews with the returnees "why have you not moved back to Nasir?". Invariably the answer given was that it was better to be with ones relatives and friends rather than standing in line waiting for food. At the beginning of the emergency operation, many believed that the provision of food in Nasir would attract people. This has not happened, instead requests have been made through chiefs that returnees and local people alike should be assisted with tools, seeds and fishing equipment, health and education, cattle vaccination to assist everyone in ensuring their own food security and survival. Even those who remain near the distribution sites at Nasir are cultivating, fishing and trying to provide for themselves.

The loss of the Itang camp as a source of free food in times of distress, a centre for health care and education or as a major trading centre will be yet another contributing factor to the overall impoverishment of southern Sudan's people. However, it should not be necessary for people to live beyond their own borders for the purposes of trade, relief or basic services. If the general level of security declines and people are once more displaced by fighting or bombing, it may be necessary to readjust programmes, but whilst being prepared for this eventuality, relief and rehabilitation work in the home areas of all affected will go far to enhance the efforts of the people in developing their own food security and basic services.
EX-ITANG RETURNEES REGISTERED BY AREA OF ORIGIN AT DUORDING VILLAGE SECOND REGISTRATION - JULY 1991

84.07%

2.34% 4.33% 0.48%

0.38%

8.27%

0.13%

TOTAL FAMILIES = 3,119

SOBAT EQUATORIA JONGLEI Bahr El GHAZAL
WHITE NILE N. SUDAN
EX-ITANG RETURNES REGISTERED BY AREA OF ORIGIN AT KOT VILLAGE
SECOND REGISTRATION - JULY 1991

TOTAL # RETURNEE FAMILIES: 3,085

- BALIE 156 Families
- MALUT 589 Families
- NASIR 2,170 Families
- RENK 170 Families
EX.ITANG RETURNEES REGISTERED BY AREA OF ORIGIN AT KWARENGA VILLAGE
SECOND REGISTRATION - JULY 1991

TOTAL RETURNEE FAMILIES = 912

- SOBAT
- WHITE NILE
- BENTIU
- BAHR EL GHAZAL
- JONGLEI
- EQUATORIA
EX-ITANG RETURNEES REGISTERED BY AREA OF ORIGIN AT MANDENG VILLAGE
SECOND REGISTRATION - JULY 1991

- SOBAT: 511 Families
- Bahr El Ghazal: 13 Families
- BENTIU: 73 Families
- WHITE NILE: 477 Families
- JONGLEI: 23 Families

TOTAL RETURNEE FAMILIES: 1,097
EX-ITANG RETURNEES REGISTERED BY AREA OF ORIGIN
AT TORPOT VILLAGE
SECOND REGISTRATION - JULY 1991

- Soba: 1,231 Families
- Jonglei: 1,345 Families
- Equatoria: 72 Families
- Bahr el Ghazal: 540 Families
- White Nile: 481 Families
- Northern Sudan: 39 Families
- Bentiu: 434 Families
Total Families = 3,708
EX-ITANG RETURNEES REGISTERED BY AREA OF ORIGIN AT ULANG VILLAGE JULY 1991

88.70%
7.22%
1.26%
2.67%
0.16%

TOTAL NUMBER OF RETURNEE FAMILIES: 643

- SOBAT
- WHITE NILE
- BAHR EL GHAZAL
- JONGLEI
- EQUATORIA