Koch Mission report
Period: 30th June – 2nd July 2020
UNHCR led mission
Location visited: Koch town, Mirmir, Patit, Nyeruop port, Pachol, Guar

Background overview
The mission was led by UNHCR to Koch and joined later by other partners who operate in the area that include IRC, World relief, and Mercy corps to Mirmir aiming to understand and confirm 5,000 IDP and Refugee returnees reported earlier. And held a bilateral meeting with local authorities, RRC/ROSS coordinators in Koch town and SPLM/A-IO administration in Mirmir. Besides, key informant interviews and observation was also another method used to understand the humanitarian situation of the population.

Koch is in the southern of Unity state and borders Guit County to the northeast, Mayom County to the west, Rubkona County to the north, and Mayendit County to the south. It shares its adjacent border with Tonj East and North County of Warrap state to the west. The county has seven payams: Gany, Norbor, Pakur, Boaw, Ngony, Mirmir and Jaak. It is estimated that the total population in according to 2008 census stands as 74,863 and 12.78% in the state population. The county is predominantly inhabited by Jagei Nuer people, of which there are five distinct clans, namely Rayien, Boor, Lang, Wuot and Jidiet. Koch communities rely on livestock, agriculture, fishing and oil revenues for their livelihoods. Koch County has 11 roads previously murrum that connect it to various Payams. None of these roads has tarmac and are thus inaccessible during the rainy season. Road networks between Koch and Rier, Mirmir, Patit, Buaw and Ngony are still passable for both light and heavy vehicle but bouncy with lots of potholes.

General protection/safety
In general security briefing made by the local authorities [IG&IO] in Koch, Patit and Mirmir caretaker commissioner, key informants, humanitarian partners confirmed calmness for the last 2 weeks apart from cattle raid is quite hard to control and its adjacent neighboring youth in the last two weeks. The local authorities at the discussion stated that, there were no issues reported between the community members and soldiers in the nearby military barracks [SSPDF and IO] in Mirmir, Patit, Nyeruop port, Koch town and Pachol. No major cattle raiding, intra communal violence and armed robberies reported in the last 2 weeks. It was also noticed, the cattle theft in the surrounding villages of Koch town has been off and on.

In June 8th, areas of Marial, Thalel, Parbuny and Tap villages of Bauw Payam herds of cattle were raided and suspected civilian armed youth from Rubkona/Leek. According to Koch local authority, the raids led to displacement of civilian to neighboring villages. And another displacement in Guit county where cattle keepers were raided of their herds of cattle and chased to Koch in April. Noted, most of the people lost their belongings. As results, estimated 200 individuals displaced in Gol village to Koch town and est. 300 people were displaced from Guit to Rier/Koch. The displaced
families never received any assistant after they were expelled out from the respective locations.

Peace initiative: following the frequent cattle raids between Koch, Rubkona, and Guit armed youth; the former commissioners of the respective counties led an initiative call "peace with brothers and return cattle." The committee is overseen via state secretary general. In June 29th, state SG pay a visit to Rier, Koch county to witness the return or handing over herds of cattle collected from raiders to Rubkona/Leek and Guit/Ikany communities. At the time, total of 160 herds of cattle reported to be returned to respective communities in which 120 herds were returned to Rubkona/Leek while 40 herds to Guit/Ikany.

In other hand, Koch/Jagei community left to Guit and Rubkona to return their raided herds of cattle back, the assembled cattle. It was not clear on the number of the cattle assemble for Koch/Jagei community. It was also stated, there is no punishment for those who decided to return their cattle voluntarily. Those who refuse to return herds of cattle are fine with 5 cows and subjected to other disciplinary order.

IDP/refugee returnees' situation
According to Koch local authorities. From November 2019 to June 2020 more than 2,000 individuals in Koch were tracked via the county RRC but have not receive BM registration since. It was indicated across all the locations visited in Koch county; spontaneous refugee and IDP returnees have either settle on their own lands or hosted by relatives. The returnees returned from Sudan, Uganda, Kenya, Bentiu POC, Juba POC, Malakal POC, and Fangak. The returnees are tracked and monitored by the RRC/ROSS offices in the Payams/Bomas visited during the mission.

Mirmir: the general population of Mirmir Payam stand as 7,203 people, according to figures shared by the county local authorities. The initial reports by partners estimated 5,000 returnees from Sudan, Fangak, Juba and Bentiu POC. However, according to the finding and what the local authority shared, 2,481 individuals are reported to have returned to Bentiu or Rubkona due to shortage of food and other basic services related, majority have returned to POC, and 2,519 returnees currently resided in Mirmir but integrated into the community in areas of Mirmir center, Patit, Gany, Buok and Ngony. Community leaders reported overcrowding in sleeping rooms/tukuls up to 15 people as a result of influx returnees.

The unregistered returnees hardly access the humanitarian support and depend on the host communities or relatives in sharing the existing limited services. There is no discrimination in accessing the existing services health services and has been reports of conflict between the women at the water points. The authorities expressed concerns of lack of assistance and services to the returnees who are not registered by IOM/DTM to access WASH, food, health, shelter, and NFIs services as such; it is affecting their integration and some of them are forced to go back to Bentiu POC and Rubkona town in order to access services.

GBV: Forced marriage of schoolgirls and early pregnancy which is attributed to COVID-19 lockdown were reported. The local authority/commissioner in Mirmir stated that, he has documented 10 schoolgirls forced to marriage and 7 were impregnated, yet the community leaders and local authority believed some of such cases are in hidden because majority do not want to report. Commissioner acknowledged; his administration cancelled/dissolved 3 forced marriage cases. The authority reported, these incidents happened between March to June period, and much of it attributed to COVID-19 lockdown effects.

Child protection/education
In all areas visited during the mission, both boys and girls were strongly expressing their concern on the need of psychosocial support and recreational materials/activities like football, child friendly space and other sport activities that could help them fight social imbalance and school closure. When asked about COVID-19 spread, most of them say it does not exist in Koch and have not convinced to school closure. All schools remained closed due to COVID-19 prevention measures imposed, and when to open schools worry children. They were asked, if aware of currently learning through radio Miraya and other radios. All the children asked never heard of such lessons being provided, stated lack of radio as
reason why they couldn’t know. In a meeting with child protection partners, it was reported that most of the cases related children especially young girls are less attend into via traditional/informal set up courts. But local chiefs when asked, said that doesn’t exist in their setting.

Local court: In Koch, local chiefs confirmed that there are functional traditional courts in the county but lack capacity due to changes on precious chiefs trained. The informal justice system is accessible to every community member without discrimination. The courts attend to and sort out cases related to marital cases, land dispute, revenge killing, communal fighting, cattle raiding. If the cases aren’t resolved, they are referred to C. Court in the state capital.

Health/COVID-19
There is growing malaria concerns in Koch and its adjacent Payams that was reported during the mission. On this note, more than 3 cases of malaria are reported a day in Patit health facility/PHCC according to local health workers, via this virtue high attention is needed. On COVID-19 spread, it was learnt all schools, church services, wedding and other social gatherings in the Koch have been banned. The overcrowding in sleeping rooms/tukuls up to 15 people as a result of high returnees poses threat to measure to control COVID-19 due increase population in the household level.

WASH
Major concern of fighting between women at water points/sources was reported in Mirmir due to overcrowding, as a result of population increased, and many community members reported fetching water for domestic use from swamps increasing the prevalence of diarrhea. Hence, 3 boreholes drilled by ICRC, among them 2 dry up though installed and 1 functional. No WASH items distributed in Mirmir in the last 9 months.

NFI/SHELTER
No active S/NFI partner in Koch that have conducted the need assessment or distributed items in the last 9 months. Thus, host community sharing shelter and other household items with IDPS e.g tukuls, blankets etc. according to community leaders/chiefs an average of 15 people reportedly sleeping or shared one shelter/tukul. The seasonal local materials for construction like grass have faced out, which made it difficult to construct till next year. An immediate blanket distribution of NFIs i.e. plastic sheets, blankets, jerricans, sleeping mats, soaps, buckets, mosquito nets and cooking utensils are highly needed. The team witness congestion when it rained while in Mirmir.

FSL
Most of the people started cultivation of their backyard gardening and by August some of the maize will be ready for household consumption. In Nyeruop port, families asked if they can be provided with fishing tools to skill up their livelihood activities. During the community leader’s discussion in Koch town, most of the people were not aware of changes to general food distribution plan. But blamed NRC for communicating only to RRC not community leaders which they asked to change and engaged community leaders directly in all food distributed to avoid any inconvenient that may arise.

Road access
Road networks between Koch town and Payams/villages and to Bentiu are accessible via both light vehicles and trucks, but all may cut off, if it rains heavily in few days to come.
Priorities recommendation for Immediate Humanitarian response

- There is need to register unregistered sp. refugee returnees and reactivation of IDP returnees might have registered elsewhere in the state via IOM-DTM is strongly recommended. To enable them to access the WFP food ration and ease pressure from the other members of the family households.

- Provision of blanket distribution of NFIs like mosquito nets buckets, soaps, blankets, jerricans and other tarpaulins to cater for quick construction of shelter for returnees is urgently needed.

- Provision of agricultural farming tools and urgently needed.

- Provisional of hygiene promotion/community sensitization to influence behavior change on COVID-19 spread is needed.

- Provision of fishing tools, and earlier communication to community leaders in changes to regular distribution plan.

- Protection partners should scale up PSNs documentation in areas accessible

- Partners on ground should fill up gap in communication with community leaders not considering only RRC rather involve community leaders, that will mitigate misinterpretation and provide feedback to communities.