



EMERGENCY RAPID NEEDS ASSESSMENT (ERNA) REPORT

Assessment Location: Nasir County, South Sudan

Date of Assessment: March 23rd – 30th 2025



**Prepared by
HANDLE South Sudan Assessment Team**

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1. BRIEF OVERVIEW

Nasir County, Upper Nile State, has experienced escalating violence since early 2025. Clashes between the South Sudan People's Defense Forces (SSPDF) and the Nuer White Army began on March 3, 2025, resulting in the White Army capturing Nasir town and its military barracks. Subsequent airstrikes by the SSPDF have led to civilian casualties and mass displacement. The conflict has disrupted humanitarian operations, with attacks on aid workers and facilities, including an MSF convoy in January 2025. The area faces critical shortages in food, healthcare, and protection services. Against this background, HANDLE South Sudan (HSS) designed and conducted an Emergency Rapid Needs Assessment (ERNA) in Nasir County to understand the immediate and emerging humanitarian needs of conflict-affected communities. The area has been significantly impacted by recent intercommunal violence, which has led to displacement, destruction of property, and disruption of basic services. This report summarizes qualitative findings from community consultations and integrates secondary quantitative data to present a comprehensive overview of the needs across key sectors: security, protection, livelihoods, peaceful coexistence, and community priorities.

2. ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES

This assessment was guided by the following objectives;

- To identify the most urgent humanitarian needs resulting from recent conflict in Nasir County.
- To analyze the security, protection, peacebuilding, and livelihood context.
- To provide actionable recommendations for humanitarian response and early recovery planning.
- To strengthen coordination between humanitarian actors, local authorities, and affected communities.

3. METHODOLOGY

The assessment team from HANDLE South Sudan employed a qualitative approach which was grounded in qualitative engagement. Specifically, Key informant interviews (KIIs) were held with local chiefs, elders, health workers, teachers, and market vendors. Focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted separately with men, women, and youth to ensure inclusivity and sensitivity to social dynamics. Direct field observations allowed the team to assess visible damage to infrastructure, shelters, and farmland. Given the ongoing security challenges in many villages, remote data collection was also carried out with the support of community mobilizers and trusted local partners. Secondary sources, including reports from MSF, UNMISS, and humanitarian monitoring platforms, helped triangulate field data with broader trends.

4. KEY FINDINGS

The assessment identified several critical themes across sectors that reflect the pressing needs and priorities of the conflict-affected communities in Nasir County. The findings below present perspectives from community members, local authorities, and secondary data sources. These are presented thematically to highlight the interconnected nature of the crisis and inform responsive programming.

Reviewed reports points out that since February 2025, airstrikes and violent clashes have displaced an estimated 80,000 people in Nasir, Ulang and Longochuk counties. Approximately 23,000 have fled into parts of Gambella region, Ethiopia. Many others wait in displacement sites along the Sobat River. Widespread fears of a further escalation, including reports that fighting might resume in Nasir, indicate mass displacement is set to continue.

4.1. Security situation

- The security situation in Nasir County remains fragile and distressing following recent violent conflict. Respondents described widespread **killings, sexual violence, theft, and displacement**, with women, children, and the elderly identified as the most affected. *“There was mass killing, raping, and other petty crimes... women and children are the most affected,”* reported one community leader.
- Several **villages remain unsafe**, prompting large-scale displacement to the county headquarters and even across the Ethiopian border. Local authorities, including chiefs, have played a mediating role but remain under-resourced, and community trust in their effectiveness is limited.
- Fear continues to limit safe access to basic services such as **healthcare, food distribution, and markets**, contributing to ongoing hardship. While conditions are reportedly stabilizing, returnees still face **uncertainty and trauma**, with many homes destroyed and livelihoods disrupted.



Figure 1: Humanitarian Shelters destroyed in Nasir



Figure 2: Houses burnt causing displacements



Figure 3: Majority of children, women & men fleeing their homes, heading to Ethiopia

4.2. Protection needs

- The conflict has escalated serious protection risks, particularly for adolescent girls and women, who face increased vulnerability to sexual violence and exploitation. *“Girls and women were raped and underwent different types of violence during the conflict,”* a respondent shared.
- Barriers to accessing protection services include lack of information, cultural taboos, stigma, and service disruption due to NGO withdrawals. The community’s primary recourse remains traditional justice, which may not be sufficient or appropriate for serious protection violations.
- There is an urgent call for psychosocial support, safe spaces, community dialogues, and strengthened referral pathways. Respondents also emphasized the need to equip local protection actors with skills and resources, particularly in handling GBV cases.



Figure 4: Emergency medical service being provided to the affected individuals

4.3. Peaceful coexistence

- Despite past and ongoing tensions rooted in economic strain, political divisions, and cultural differences, Nasir County communities reflect a strong foundation for peaceful coexistence. Local respondents noted that dialogue and cultural exchanges are key tools in fostering reconciliation. *“People live together peacefully despite occasional tension dialogue has been our way forward,”* said one elder.
- Current peacebuilding efforts include community dialogues and cultural integration activities, though more systematic, inclusive efforts are needed. Community leaders play a vital role in conflict prevention, yet require greater support to maintain unity amid ongoing uncertainty.

4.4. Livelihoods

- The conflict has severely impacted livelihoods by restricting movement, displacing families, and cutting access to farms and markets. Farmers, traders, and daily laborers were particularly affected, with many losing critical assets. *“The roads to the gardens were blocked, homes destroyed, utensils burnt or looted... people had to flee,”* shared by a displaced farmer.
- The most urgent needs include food assistance, cooking utensils, water containers, and temporary shelter. While some communities have started kitchen farming or small-scale businesses, these coping strategies remain insufficient to restore sustainable livelihoods.
- The majority of the participants expressed optimism for a long-term rebound if peace holds, but emphasized the need for livelihood restoration support, such as vocational training, cash-for-work (CfW) opportunities, and reestablishing market access.

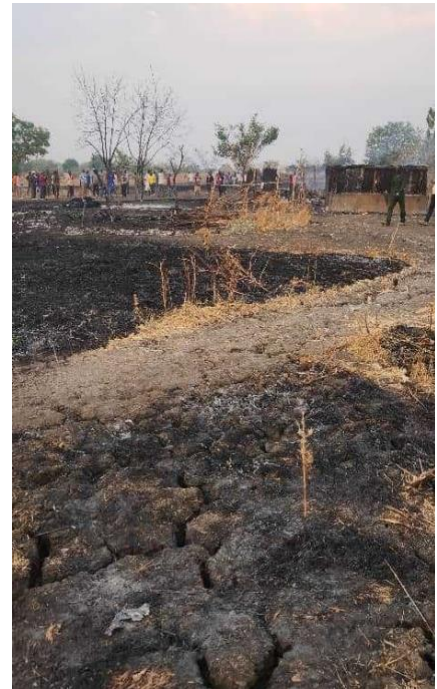


Figure 5: Farm land destroyed

4.5. Community prioritization & Recommendations

- When asked about top priorities, the community emphasized; 1) Peacebuilding through community dialogue; 2) Emergency food assistance; and 3) Psychosocial and health support services.
- Additional recommended actions include:
 - ✓ Provision of temporary shelter and non-food items
 - ✓ Strengthening of community-based protection mechanisms
 - ✓ Support for safe and voluntary return of displaced persons
- Vulnerable groups requiring special focus include children, elderly, and persons with disabilities (PwDs), many of whom are unable to relocate or access humanitarian support. *“Lack of food is the greatest challenge. People are crossing to Ethiopia just to find something to eat,”* said a local mother.

5. CONCLUSION

- The findings from Nasir County highlight a humanitarian crisis rooted in conflict, displacement, and disrupted services. Communities are showing resilience but remain in dire need of coordinated, timely assistance to meet life-saving needs, rebuild livelihoods, and foster long-term peace and recovery.

- **HANDLE** South Sudan calls upon partners and authorities to urgently address the critical gaps in protection, food security, and shelter, and support inclusive peacebuilding efforts that strengthen the community's capacity to recover with dignity.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of the assessment, the following recommendation could contribute to the realization of the emergency needs of the affected population in Nasir

- Humanitarian organizations should prioritize life-saving services such as food distribution, health care, and protection services for vulnerable groups, particularly women, children, and the elderly.
- Strengthen protection mechanisms by providing safe spaces, legal assistance, and establishing referral systems for survivors of violence.
- Support economic recovery through cash-for-work programs, vocational training, and agricultural inputs to help households restore their livelihoods.
- Enhance peacebuilding efforts by supporting local leaders in conflict resolution, organizing community dialogues, and addressing the root causes of conflict such as economic disparities and resource competition.
- Invest in infrastructure and basic services including clean water, sanitation, and the rebuilding of health facilities and schools to support the return of displaced populations.