

## **A Journey of hope, resilience and collective action in Twic East County**

### **By Technical Advisory Group (TAG)**

#### **Overview**

Since the end of 2025, a profound sense of hope and renewal has taken root in Twic East County as people began to return to their ancestral homeland. This renewed hope did not come by chance. But it reflects the strength of a sustained collaboration and shared purpose. Through a combined effort of local communities, and supporting partners, meaningful steps have been taken to restore the land and foster a safer, more resilient settlement for the county.

#### **From Crisis to Coordination (2020–2021)**

In mid-2020, catastrophic floods swept through large parts of South Sudan, triggering one of the most devastating displacement crises in recent memory. Twic East County was among the hardest hit. Within weeks, floodwaters inundated the entire county, causing almost a complete evacuation. To this day, many residents are still living as internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Mongalla and Guolyar among other IDPs, while others sought refuge in refugee camps mostly in Uganda and Kenya.

In response to this crisis engineers and scientists from Twic East County came together to form the **Technical Advisory Group (TAG)** – a voluntary body dedicated to identifying, designing, advising and advocating for practical and sustainable flood-mitigation solutions that would reduce both immediate risks and long-term vulnerability.

Several members of this group had been exploring ideas independently and sharing concerns online and among themselves. Realizing they were dealing with the same issue in isolation, they connected and began exchanging ideas. This collaboration led to formal establishment of TAG in 2021, with its founding members being Chol Mabil Awer, Deng Kuir Wach, Ajak Maluk Ader, Malith Chol Atem, Thon Kuany Arok, Ajang Deng Aguer-kuerjok and later joined by Dr. Deng Diar Diing. TAG remains supplemented by Twic East engineers and scientists from around the globe.

#### **A Strategy for Long-Term Resilience**

By the end of 2021, TAG completed the first draft of a flood-mitigation framework. Towards the end of 2022, after extensive review, the final document was printed and shared with several stakeholders. It outlined a comprehensive approach combining long term structural and non-structural measures designed to reduce flood risk and promote sustainable land reclamation. The key proposed interventions included:

- Construction of a new primary dyke, prioritizing the most critical 21 km section between Jalle and Nyany (Mabior-Gol included).
- Rehabilitation and extension of the southern dyke (known as Thiek de Akol Chol).
- Construction of local rainfall-storage reservoirs.
- Development of flood-diversion canals to drain water into the Jonglei Canal.
- Construction of emergency flood-evacuation roads, connecting Payam headquarters to the canal road.
- Planned, community-led expansion to safer areas, east of the Jonglei Canal

On the planned, community-led eastward expansion, TAG had this to say *“Twic East Community should establish their presence in the east so that in case of any major flooding event like the 1916-19, 1961-64 and the 2020 – present, they will not have to evacuate far away from their traditional villages. However, relocation of communities is not an easy process and may involve high environmental, social,*

*economic, and emotional costs. We therefore recommend that a comprehensive political, environmental, and socio-economic assessment be done before considering this option.”*

This blueprint sets the foundation for partnerships among government, communities, and humanitarian agencies.

### **Community Mandate and Government Engagement (2022–2023)**

TAG's engagements secured broad community and political support throughout the journey. As the first step, TAG engaged with the then commissioner, the late Deng Mabeny Kuot, who immediately endorsed the initiative. Shortly after, TAG met with Hon. Deng Dau Deng (Twic East County MP to R-TGONU), who also offered his endorsement. At the 2021 TECA-Juba-Diaspora Leaders Conference, TAG's mission was publicly announced by the commissioner. Thereafter, former TEYA chairman, Garang Atem Ayiik, convened a global virtual meeting in April 2022, bringing together TAG and Twic East professionals worldwide.

By December 2022, TECA chair, the late Ambassador Gen. Bior Ajang Duot, invited TAG for a briefing. This led to a joint field visit to Panyagor to assess the damage and consult with the affected communities. Immediately after the field visit, TECA-Juba convened a community meeting attended by MPs, county leadership, chiefs, and representatives from across the world. TAG presented its technical assessment and recommendations, leading to the formation of a **Flood Management Committee** chaired by the current TECA-Juba Chair, Gen. Biar Mading Biar and deputized by Hon. Atem Mading Atem.

Given the limited success of earlier dyke rehabilitation attempts by the United Nations, World Food Programme (WFP), largely due to gaps in local knowledge, TAG empathised that sustainable development must be rooted in community ownership. TAG pushed for community-driven solutions grounded in field understanding. Effective flood mitigation required listening to the people - understanding their priorities, concerns, and expectations – and fully integrating them into the planning process.

Further coordination was required to align the UN agencies with the community. TAG requested an official meeting with H.E. Vice President Rebecca Nyandeng de Mabior, whose office oversees the Humanitarian, Women, and Youth Cluster. Mama Rebecca accepted the request for engagement. On 3 January 2023, TAG and TECA-Juba leadership met with the Vice President and presented community concerns and the proposed flood mitigation recommendations. Mama Rebecca endorsed the initiative and agreed that it be formally presented to the WFP. Mama Rebecca subsequently facilitated a high-level meeting with WFP.

On 19 January 2023, TAG presented its strategy to WFP's senior leadership in South Sudan, alongside the Vice President and her executive team, TECA-Juba, represented by the late Ambassador Bior-Asuod, Gen. Biar Mading and Gen. Jurkuch Barach. WFP officials commended the initiative, describing it as a rare and exemplary model of locally driven, comprehensive, and technically sound planning, a first of its kind in South Sudan.

A key outcome of this engagement was that WFP proposed recruiting two TAG engineers. TAG initially declined the offer in order to maintain independence. However, TAG later agreed after WFP highlighted the need for embedded technical support from local engineers well-versed with the area. Eng. Ajak Maluk Ader and Eng. Ajang Deng Aguer-Kuerjok were recruited, representing both TAG and the Twic East Community as a focal point between WFP and the community. Their employment placed TAG at the centre of planning and implementation of flood control infrastructure in Jonglei State. They spent an extensive amount of time in the field (dyke construction site) providing technical support.

### **TAG's Technical Role in Action (2023–2024)**

From early 2023 through to 2024, TAG supported WFP's dyke rehabilitation efforts across Twic East and Bor Counties. Their field assessments highlighted critical weak points, especially the 21-km stretch between Jalle and Nyany, which required urgent reinforcement. While WFP leadership was aware of these vulnerabilities, TAG's community-endorsed assessments strengthened WFP's case to seek funding, increase resources and improve planning.

TAG's direct on-site role concluded in 2024 when the two engineers departed for other engagements. However, TAG continued providing coordination and oversight through Thon Kuany who conducted site visits, coordinated with communities to mobilise youth, supplemented by Dr. Deng Diar Diing.

### The 2025 Breakthrough at Mabor-Gol

Despite intensified efforts from early 2023, dyke rehabilitation continued to face setbacks due to repeated breaches at critical sections particularly the Mabor-Gol into 2025. Exhausted youth volunteers from Ajang-Thuch appealed to Dr. Deng Diar, for technical guidance, warning that their capacity to keep combating the floods was diminishing. Dr. Deng Diar was urged to coordinate with relevant stakeholders, on how a permanent dyke could be constructed across the critical Mabor Gol section. Ajang-Thuch pledged to mobilize hundreds of youth volunteers to support the work of the already contracted companies.

In response, TAG, led on the ground by Dr. Deng Diar and Thon Kuany strengthened coordination with WFP. Hundreds of youths were mobilized, and tireless efforts ensued to manually seal breached sections using sandbags. The placement of the sandbags proved highly effective in blocking breached points for the land to dry up and provided a stable platform for heavy machineries to operate. These community-led efforts were reinforced with food assistance, shelter, and heavy machinery from humanitarian partners. Several heavy machineries such as bulldozers and excavators were mobilized to site to seal Mabor-Gol section.

By late 2025, a sustainable dyke was successfully completed through the Mabor-Gol section with the aim to complete the 21 km designated section — a historical turning point for Twic East and Bor counties. This milestone illustrates the potential of coordinated efforts among community leaders, and development partners in advancing land restoration and resilience-building initiatives. The progress achieved so far offers a foundation for the anticipated return of more flood-displaced families and contributes to broader goals of stability and sustainable development in both counties.

### Key Practical Recommendations

As Twic East County continues to dry up and communities returning, safeguarding recent gains is essential. TAG recommends:

- Reinforcing the following weak sections of the dyke under TAG's technical guidance to improve structural integrity.

Item	Name and Location	Recommended Action
1	Thöl yök – Maar	Backfilling
2	Kuëër ë Mabor ë Mariër – Paliau	Straightening
3	Between Kuëër ë Deng-Arab & Wëer-këi – Paliau	General reinforcement
4	Wëer-këi – Paliau	Backfilling
5	Around Paan de Deng ë Koch – Paliau	Backfilling
6	Around P'ir Ayou – Paliau	Straightening

7	Palooi Curves – Dong	Straightening
8	Kuëër ë Yaak-Marol to Kuëër ë Deng Ayiël – Wanglei	Straightening & backfilling
9	A section After Sedaap – Wanglei	General reinforcement
10	Any section initially fixed with sandbags – Twic East	General maintenance
11	Crossing point along the dyke – Twic East	General maintenance

- Addressing settlements on the dyke, especially fishing camps that accelerate erosion and heighten breach risks. Pursue community-led relocation or protective works.
- Extending dyke rehabilitation beyond the initial 74 km, by 19 km from Padol to west of Wernyol. The UN WFP designated a total of 93 km of dyke rehabilitation. However, the rehabilitation currently appears to be only focusing on 74 km. We recommend the remaining 19 km to be also rehabilitated in order to reclaim more land.
- Building smart on return – all new homes are recommended to be constructed on elevated ground, with perimeter swale drains to safely divert rainwater away from the residential areas.
- Constructing of livestock crossing ramps along the dyke at designated locations.

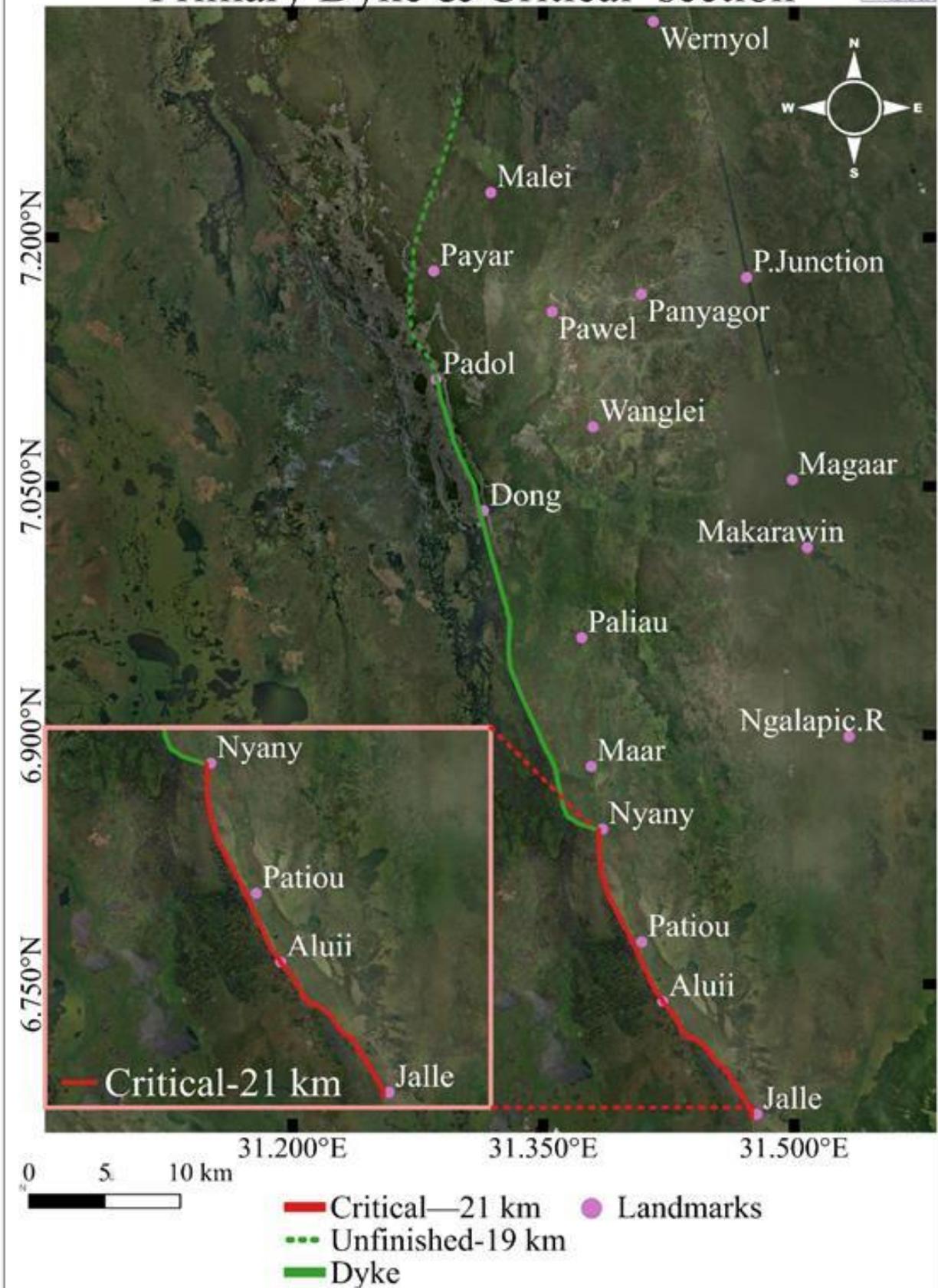
### **Conclusion – A Call to Our Community**

The journey of Twic East, from disaster to resilience, is a testament to what is possible when knowledge, community spirit, and determination are united by purpose. The completion of the Mabior Gol dyke stands not only as an engineering achievement, but as a symbol of resilience, dignity, and collective will. From devastating floods to renewed hopeful return of displaced families, the journey has been long and challenging but also inspiring.

As families return home and the land begins to recover, Twic East stands on the threshold of rebuilding. With continued commitment, coordination, and community driven planning, the county will rise stronger, safer, and more prosperous. As the county rises again, we are reminded that rebuilding is not the work of one group, one leader, or one agency. It is the work of an entire people- all united by a shared vision to reclaim the land and build a stronger, safer, more resilient settlement in Twic East County.

We encourage families to continue returning and rebuilding on their ancestral land. While challenges remain, the progress achieved so far demonstrates that sustained collaboration can establish hope for meaningful recovery and long-term stability. Continued investment in community-led initiatives, supported by strategic partnerships, will be essential to ensuring that displaced families can return with dignity and that Twic East County moves steadily toward a more secure and sustainable future.

# Primary Dyke & Critical section



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