

DRC | ASPIRE

Aspiring for Peace and Inclusion Research

Report on preliminary findings | Year 1, 2023

Endeavours for Peace

Young South Sudanese refugees' efforts to create better and more peaceful futures



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Young refugees in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement @ Ayo Degett/DRC



Report on preliminary findings

This report is an analysis of the preliminary findings of Aspiring for Peace and Inclusion Research (ASPIRE) during the project's first year of implementation, 2023. This report has been written by Ayo Degett, PhD and Programme Manager of ASPIRE for the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Susan Reynolds Whyte, Professor at the Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen.

The contents and opinions expressed in this report represent the authors' point of view and should not be attributed to, and do not necessarily represent the views of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the European Union (EU) Directorate-General for International Partnerships (INTPA).

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Motorcycle taxi drivers on a break @ Ayo Degett/DRC



Executive summary

Aspiring for Peace and Inclusion Research (ASPIRE) aims to understand young people's efforts for peaceful coexistence, their engagement with peers and communities, and interventions by political authorities and humanitarian, development and peace (HDP) actors over a period of 15 years. This report builds on ethnographic data from South Sudanese living in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement in Northern Uganda, primarily collected in September and October 2023.

The report suggests that these 'endeavours for peace' should be examined from the perspective of the young people as acting subjects dealing with the current conditions within Rhino Camp. These include funding gaps, especially cuts in food assistance, and violence across the border in South Sudan. The endeavours we have explored in this period are attempts to spot incipient conflicts on the rise and de-escalate them. With only a few months of field research completed, we are beginning to address our three research questions. In the coming years, it will be possible to follow endeavours we have now identified and see how they play out. The fact that ASPIRE has such a long time frame gives us the opportunity to explore the changes in conditions and how they affect the ways refugees' plans unfold into endeavours for peace.

Not all the endeavours we have examined so far were undertaken by youth. The research underscores the centrally important inter-connection of generations when it comes to conflict and peace at community level. This raises the question of whether future research should focus exclusively on endeavours undertaken by young people or whether the challenge is to examine the ways in which youth fit into the larger picture of peace endeavours, as we have been doing in this initial phase. The report concludes with a discussion of questions to be explored for further research, opportunities as we see them and feedback from the refugee community and other stakeholders in presentation of this report (sections 6, 7 and 8).



Research assistants from Rhino Camp @ Ayo Degett/DRC



1. Introduction

Aspiring for Peace and Inclusion Research (ASPIRE) is a long-term ethnographic research project developed in partnership between the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and funded, via UNHCR, by European Union (EU) Directorate-General for International Partnerships (INTPA). It follows a generation of young refugees in multiple countries over a period of 15 years, exploring how they perceive and pursue opportunities for peace in their communities. This report presents preliminary findings from Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement primarily collected in September and October of the very first year of this long-term project. It is a beginning step in the analysis of people's endeavours for peace.

The report starts with an introduction to ASPIRE, the research set-up and the data generated (sections 1 and 2). After a presentation of the social context of Rhino Camp and patterns of frequent conflicts (section 3), we suggest an analytical framework that directs focus to the conditions that people experience for engaging in peaceful coexistence in their communities (section 4). Building on an analysis of these and other conditions for endeavours, we examine the interlinkage of endeavours for peace conducted by individuals and groups, and their approaches of counselling, advising, dialogue, mediation and 'stepping in' (section 5). The report concludes with a discussion of questions to be explored for further research and opportunities as we see them (sections 6 and 7).

1.1. The ASPIRE project

1.1.1. Objective

The overall objective of ASPIRE is to provide new in-depth knowledge about how young people affected by the civil war(s) in South Sudan contribute over time to peaceful coexistence in their communities and how they see their options and challenges. Simultaneously, the research investigates how interventions by humanitarian, development and peace (HDP) actors are used by – and influence – young people in their trajectories and practices.

The research is implemented among South Sudanese youth in Uganda and will be extended to refugee settings in countries neighbouring South Sudan (Kenya, Ethiopia and Sudan) and among returnees inside South Sudan, conditions permitting. It takes place alongside the UNHCR Regional Youth Peacebuilding Project (RYPP), a programme that trains and supports groups of youth peacebuilding mentors in locations across these countries. ASPIRE will only be implemented in selected locations in these countries. The purpose of ASPIRE is not to conduct an impact analysis of RYPP, but rather to follow some of the same communities and young people over time.

The research is ethnographic and primarily conducted through participant observation, which means that the research team members follow processes, people, events and initiatives by participating in – and observing – key interlocutors' everyday lives, conditions for peaceful coexistence, communication with HDP actors and community members and their efforts to realise ideals that matter to them, including peace in their communities. These investigations

are conducted by a comprehensively trained team of eight grass-roots anthropologists (seven refugees and one Ugandan national) technically supervised by the Programme Manager (PM), who also conducts fieldwork and interviews contributing to the data generation. The research is guided by three overall research questions:

How do young people's plans and efforts for peaceful coexistence take shape and unfold into action over time?

How do contextual conditions and shared memories of a humanitarian past influence these efforts?

How are young people included in – and how do they seek to influence – interventions and decisions that affect these efforts, including decisions by political authorities and HDP actors?

It is anticipated that the findings generated over time will illuminate why some plans and practices succeed, some fail, and why some youth might, along the way, choose to redirect their engagement into initiatives that open up different paths in life, such as engagement in formal or informal institutions that are facilitating conflicts in this context.

Three hypotheses inform the direction of the research:

- Young people’s engagement with peace is characterised by aspirations for better futures, capacities and real efforts for change.
- Humanitarian, legal and political conditions¹ are important for what youth hope for and how plans unfold.
- The young people will draw on past experiences (from humanitarian aid and conflict) when engaging with individuals, communities and institutions on their journey towards better futures.

1.1.2. Supporting young people on their own terms

The findings of ASPIRE will provide comprehensive insights into the ways young people seek peaceful coexistence and how contextual conditions (conflict, security, economic, educational, gender, ethnic, legal and humanitarian) facilitate or constrain their hopes, plans and efforts. Mapping these dynamics over many years across multiple locations in the region will ultimately create a unique overview of what types of activity have the potential to best support young people’s efforts on their terms.

The study understands peaceful coexistence not so much as a state that can be ultimately achieved, but rather as an ideal. It looks at the processes and effects of young people’s efforts towards the ideal of peaceful lives and peaceful social environments. No other study has attempted to capture how young people, displaced to multiple countries by the same armed conflict, engage in peacebuilding including with HDP actors. Mapping these dynamics over 15 years across very different countries of asylum will offer a much better picture of how and where HDP actors should focus their efforts in the region.

The South Sudan conflict is one of the three largest refugee crises in the world. Many studies and assessments highlight the multiple barriers, constraints and limitations that seem to keep the future generation in the vicious circle of poverty,

resource scarcity, illiteracy, unemployment, violence and (sometimes) retaliation (Lynge 2015:8,12; DDG 2017; Khadka 2017:5). But we have alarmingly little knowledge about how efforts to support peace affect the long-term prospects of young South Sudanese and how they can best be supported.

ASPIRE is unique as it seeks to put young people and their efforts for positive change at the centre of the research by exploring issues from their point of view. This approach builds on findings from a five-and-a-half-year doctoral research project on participation led by DRC. The study shows that many young South Sudanese refugees succeed in breaking out of negative patterns of domestic and inter-ethnic violence, improving their relations with host communities, becoming self-reliant, demanding participation and accountability from humanitarian actors and promoting peaceful coexistence (Degett 2023).

Tailored, adaptable and quality support for young people’s efforts to attain more stable and peaceful social environments are more relevant than ever. By discovering, examining, and mapping the existing efforts of youth, ASPIRE seeks to develop more solid and nuanced understandings of the existing structures and initiatives for peaceful coexistence.

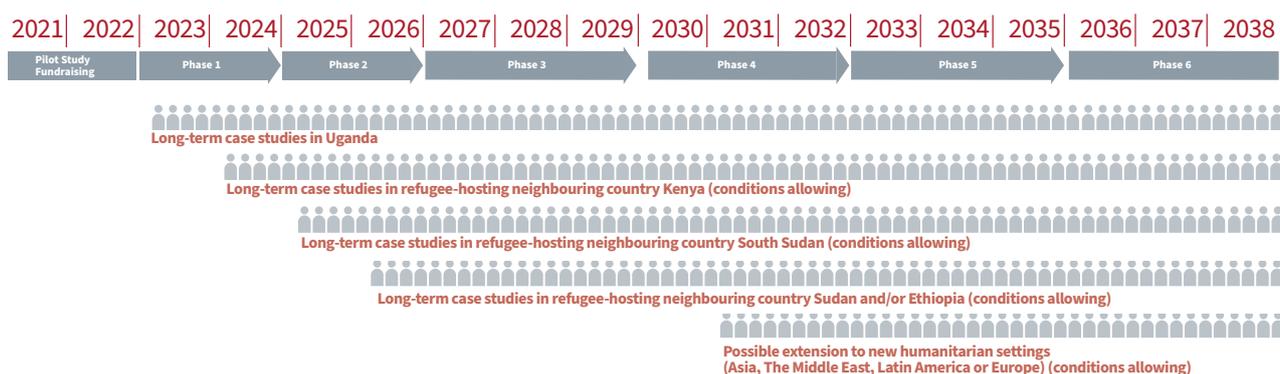
¹ These include: 1) The local humanitarian set-up, including the HDP actors, their practices, their provision of services, their access to funding and how they are able and willing to let refugees participate in the decisions that affect their lives (Degett 2018); 2) The implications for being a refugee in a particular location, including the formal refugee legislation and the informal procedures and attitudes towards refugees (Crawford et al. 2018; O’Callaghan 2018); 3) the local power and conflict dynamics - internally among refugees (including governance and customary authorities) and with the host population (Khadka 2017; Lynge 2015; Van Laer 2019; Braak and Kenyi 2018).

1.1.3. Relevance

These research findings will appeal to a wide group of stakeholders engaged in youth, peacebuilding, the South Sudan situation and beyond. They will feed into many current policy agendas, global standards, priorities and commitments, including: The Grand Bargain (particularly the Participation Revolution²); the Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS) (particularly *Commitment 4: Communities and people affected by crisis [...] participate in decisions that affect them and Commitment 7: Humanitarian actors continuously learn and improve* (CHS 2023)); the humanitarian-development nexus also referred to as the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (EU 2017) coming out of the New Way of Working (NWoW)(UN 2017); the UN Resolution on Youth, Peace and Security (UNSCR 2015); the Peacebuilding Impact Hub (UN PBC 2023); UNHCR 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (paras 13, 34, 40); the 2019 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development Peace Nexus and A New Agenda for Peace (UN 2023).

ASPIRE has synergies with the overall global agenda on localisation, which is central to most of the commitments and initiatives coming out of the New York Declaration³ and other policy commitments and practice standards. Through solid ethnographic data, the research will generate valuable knowledge about the local work of refugee-led organisations (RLOs) on peaceful coexistence including their making and remaking through – and adaptation to – volatile local conditions, mobility patterns across borders and access to funding through HDP actors, faith-based communities, small-scale local contributions and the diaspora. While running on an unprecedented time frame the research will generate evidence and input for decision-making while it is ongoing (Figure 1). Participatory methodology and approaches are in the DNA of ASPIRE. This approach is not only the best way of ensuring research ethics, relevance and that the project lives up to global participation ambitions, it also feeds into the new CHS commitments to communication and participation that are being drafted and adopted during the months of writing this report⁴.

Figure 1:
Preliminary Timeline



² The Grand Bargain framework has changed several times during the past eight years. The Grand Bargain 3.0 has recently been endorsed placing participation as an Enabling Priority (Focus 1). The wording 'Participation Revolution' is from the original commitment in 2016 and is also part of the 2.0 version in 2021 (IASC 2023).

³ The New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants was signed in 2016 and is the ground pillar for many of the most important current commitments for refugees (UN 2016).

⁴ Commitment one (People and communities in situations of crisis and vulnerability... – Know their rights and can actively participate in actions and decisions that affect them) under 'Key Requirements' 1.1, 1.4 and 1.5: Establish processes for sharing information, facilitating communication and enabling participation in actions and decision-making processes, in line with people's and communities' priorities and preferences. Ensure representation of people and communities in decision-making processes is equitable and inclusive, involving them at all stages of work. Ensure communication representing people and communities has their informed consent, and is accurate, respectful, ethical and preserves their dignity and agency (CHS 2023).



Compound in Rhino Camp @ Ayo Degett/DRC



2. Research set-up

The ASPIRE Research Design, a 60-page document developed by DRC, was endorsed by DRC and UNHCR in December 2021 (Degett 2021). The principles, approaches and focus described therein inform the implementation of ASPIRE in 2023 and beyond. While these overall key elements remain in place, the research design is adjusted to developments in the region that influence access, feasibility and new opportunities (for instance, the situation in (and access to) Sudan has changed significantly since the Research Design was developed). Over the years, these developments have included the growing insecurity in Ethiopia and Sudan as well as political developments, such as the introduction of new refugee legislation in Kenya.

A key element of the research design is the need for genuine inclusion of the people who are subjects of the research in the project's implementation and in decision-making processes.

In addition, ASPIRE stands on the shoulders of analytical and practical lessons learned from an ethnographic research project on participation and community-based efforts for influencing interventions implemented in the same setting between 2018 and 2023. In this section, we outline the key elements of the research set-up in Rhino Camp in 2023, the first year of implementation. The organisational structure of the project is described in Appendix A.

2.1. Research Assistants

The actual research implementation is taking place in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement as a collaboration between the PM and eight local Research Assistants (RAs) employed by DRC in Uganda, who are conducting research in their own communities and zones in the settlement. The eight RAs comprise seven refugees from various ethnic groups (four male and three female) and one host community member (female). They are permanently based in five zones of the settlement: Ofua, Siripi, Ocea, Eden and Tika. Here they follow people, processes, governance structures and community initiatives. Throughout 2023, the RAs have each focused on two to five cases, where people aspire to and handle issues relating to peaceful coexistence in their communities. Some of these cases are informal groups of concerned parents, some are individuals who play key roles in conflict mediation between ethnic groups or families, some are informal community-based organisations (CBOs) or more formally registered RLOs and others are interventions implemented by non-governmental organisations

(NGOs) or UN agencies. At the same time, the RAs are mapping community-based key actors who implement interventions relating to peace in their zones. The PM herself conducts ethnographic fieldwork through about five field trips per year, following processes, people and communities. The RAs are divided into two groups: Upper Rhino Camp (Ofua and Siripi) and Lower Rhino Camp (Ocea, Eden and Tika). These two groups receive comprehensive supervision from the PM bi-weekly on their individual research implementation, methodological approaches, research ethics and the opportunities and challenges they might face. Based on experience from the first supervision sessions, we decided to group them in peer-support groups because they learned a lot from each other's ways of handling their daily engagement with research participants. All RAs participated in a comprehensive ethnographic methodology training in September 2023 and will participate in a follow-up module scheduled for December 2023. These are facilitated by the PM and a specialised training consultant.

2.2. Participatory and community-led focus

ASPIRE employs methods that are participatory in nature and techniques that support research participants' involvement in the research process, including determining the priorities of the study, contextualising the information collected, and collecting data through community-based RAs. This strong focus on participatory approaches ensures ownership of the research, accountability, and a meaningful implementation of global participation commitments. By its explicit focus on participatory methods, ASPIRE seeks to counter the history of

colonial attitudes and extractive practices in field research that often seem to lack connection between findings and priorities in the communities studied. At the same time, these collaborative approaches give priority to seeing and understanding the life experiences of young South Sudanese in their own right: their own expertise and their capacity to create and direct new knowledge about the central themes of the research. In practice, the participatory and community-led elements are expressed through various approaches described below.

2.2.1. Ownership of local research priorities

The inhabitants of Rhino Camp have been involved from the time of writing the research design in 2021. At that stage, a workshop was conducted to ensure refugee consultation and inputs on all of the key elements of the research. Because people are experts in their own lives, the suggestions and questions raised were accepted as relevant and used in the design. So was the advice. For instance, it was highlighted that the RAs needed to be 'someone' in their communities, for people to trust them and answer their questions. It was also highlighted that at least some of the RAs needed to be engaged in the local CBO community, in order to draw on the networks needed among CBOs and RLOs.

From the outset of the implementation in 2023, the approach has been to let the RAs themselves choose the initiatives and research locations they feel are most relevant to the overall research focus of ASPIRE. This approach leaves a substantial amount of ownership to the RAs and therefore to members of the communities that are subjects of the study. At the same time, it is explorative because the RAs have chosen quite diverse initiatives and groups to study, which makes it challenging but interesting to

identify patterns that are relevant at an overall level. In addition, most RAs were used to working in jobs where the workplans, priorities and deliverables were pre-defined by others. Therefore, their new roles required a mindset change and some needed more support than others in preparing a research focus and specific questions to ask in interviews.

In practice, the RAs design their own 14-day workplans sketching out their planned participant observations and interviews and the events, activities and meetings they plan to attend. These are then discussed with the PM in the bi-weekly supervision meetings based on the field notes shared with the PM from the previous 14 days of work. The peer group and the PM discuss the opportunities and challenges with the suggested activities listed and the PM guides the individual RAs according to his or her needs. In some situations, the obligatory supervision sessions are followed up by individual supervision on specific topics, such as an RA who wanted – but struggled – to conduct a life-story interview with an important female peace mediator in her community.

2.2.2. ASPIRE User Board(s)

A central part of the ASPIRE participatory approach is the User Board modality (see figure 2). Originally, we planned to have one user board that would send one representative to the Steering Group (SG) to ensure representation of the refugee community in the SG. As part of launching the project, the ASPIRE team travelled to all five zones of the settlement to conduct zonal kick-off workshops where the inhabitants were asked for their input to the process of establishing the ASPIRE User Board. After all consultations were completed, it was clear that the inhabitants strongly suggested zonal-based user boards who would then send 1–2 members to a settlement-wide User Board.

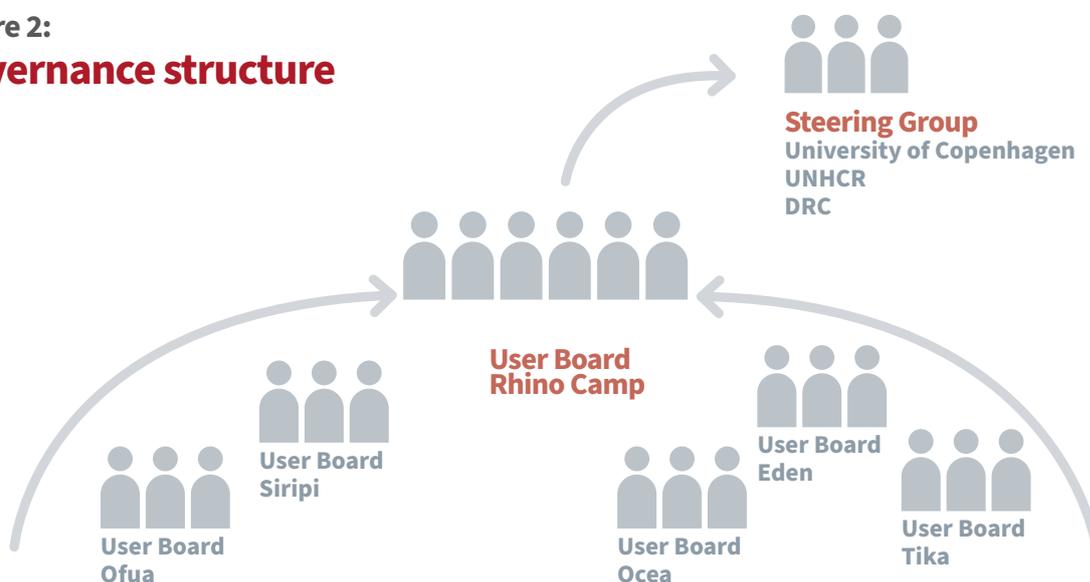
Because decision-making by research participants is at the heart of ASPIRE, we decided on five User Boards – plus the original overall User Board for the entire settlement. In the kick-off workshops, the residents showed great excitement about ASPIRE and based on excellent inputs from the participants, the research team became aware of the great potential of using these zonal User Boards as representatives that would receive information about ASPIRE to be shared locally, acting as ambassadors for the project.

The five zones of Rhino Camp where ASPIRE is implemented all defined their individual processes for electing User Boards and this has been unfolding over the months of October and November

during the writing of this report. In December 2023, the findings from this report will be presented to User Board members at settlement level. The User Boards will help the research team to include community members' inputs and suggestions. The process for electing User Board members have been managed by community members themselves to adhere to participatory methodology. The age, gender and diversity (AGD) principle has however been employed in all zones and all User Boards will send a male and a female representative to the overall settlement-based User Board.

The overall research process is that data from the implementation area of the research (Ofua, Siripi, Ocea, Eden and Tika) is collected by the Research Assistants and the PM. The data is then analysed and used to inform an annual report of findings, such as this report. These findings are shared, annually and discussed with the three boards (the User Board, the Steering Group and the Academic Advisory Board), adjusted and adopted into a plan for the focus of the research the following year. The User Boards will meet at a minimum every quarter, but to avoid top-down decision-making, they are encouraged to develop their own meeting structure within this frame. As we are currently (at the time of writing this report) setting up the User Board structure, details of this structure need to be developed in collaboration with the communities and will be shared in the 2024 report.

Figure 2:
Governance structure



2.3. Methodology and data

The research design primarily builds on in-depth qualitative anthropological methods, but one of the advantages of ASPIRE is that it approaches the research questions from a mixed-methods perspective and seeks to employ the methods and approaches that are most suitable for addressing the question at hand. While ethnographic methodology is at the centre, we plan to test and track a few themes through quantitative data, when relevant. For instance, we keep a database of the community-driven peacebuilding activities implemented by RLOs. We update this database on a weekly basis through data from a simple questionnaire. This participatory and explorative methodological approach is one of the central strengths in the research design of ASPIRE, which along with the many research locations and extremely long-term

implementation period will contribute unique new knowledge to existing debates in peace, development and humanitarian practice communities, policy communities and academia.

The first year of the study, however, has been focused on training the RAs in basic ethnographic methodology and understanding their capacities, strengths and methodological challenges. ASPIRE signed its first funding in June 2023, all research staff were recruited and trained in anthropological methodology by October and this report was written in October and early November. Accordingly, this report builds on relatively limited data compared to the great amount of ethnographic data that will inform the project over the years.

2.3.1. Participant observation of endeavours

A central element in ASPIRE is to examine and understand the choice of action by young people and the central actors in their life-worlds over time. The research project seeks to understand ‘what people do’ in addition to ‘what they say’ and ‘what they say they do’. Qualitative methods widely used in anthropological research such as participant observation, life trajectory interviews and focus group discussions are particularly suitable for this focus on behaviour and action. Through participant observation, researchers will follow situations and interactions over time, by being present while they unfold and observing the statements, reactions and behaviour constituting them. For instance, the field researchers follow the development of ideas for peaceful coexistence (such as communal tree planting with host community members, conflict mediation sessions between conflicting youths or a community-driven solution to stray cattle) through the planning, potential raising of funds, use of social connections and networks to the execution, adaptation or dismissal of the idea or plan. The field researchers document their participant observation in systematic and comprehensive notes, which the researcher reviews together with them at the bi-weekly supervision

sessions. The research methods are therefore iterative, and thus interviews, conversations, etc., are only structured in that they follow and build on the findings of the previous interactions.

By following the same processes and people continually over many years, explanations, patterns and nuances will appear, which can rarely be observed through short-term interaction or interviews alone. This long-term engagement with the same actors over fifteen years will build trust, which usually allows people to be more open about their plans, problems and concerns. In this way, patterns of efforts, or endeavours, to handle the limitations of the humanitarian arrangements appear in the data and inform the findings about how young people handle humanitarian decisions.

Concretely, the RAs are following interventions and initiatives, also referred to as ‘cases’ or ‘case stories’, which are often undertaken by groups but also in some cases by individuals. The cases they have decided to follow are very diverse and we have been reminded increasingly of the high relevance of the RA’s own position in their communities and the networks that they are able to draw on. For

some of the youngest RAs, who are not necessarily well-connected to people of power and seniority in their community, we have stressed the importance of following groups and initiatives among their peers. Gaining access to conflict-resolution meetings held by local clan leaders might be difficult and irrelevant for now. At the same time, some RAs

who are older and better connected to informal and formal refugee leaders follow clan leaders and their ways of handling conflicts and approaching peace. The RA's positionality is therefore key to their access and focus areas and therefore, ultimately, for the data we gather in ASPIRE.

2.3.2. Data

Having a participatory approach and implementing a project with RAs who have very different positions in their local communities, and who have differing interests, access, skills and capacities, means that the data is very diverse. Due to time limitation, this report builds on minimal data, but it is sufficient to identify emerging patterns and themes that might be more relevant to focus on in the coming period. Depending on the contextual conditions in the research location, it is our plan that in 2024 the ASPIRE team will work with more-specified thematic areas that the RAs will fit into their priorities and engagements at local level.

Because ASPIRE is exploratory in nature, a wide variety of data will be collected throughout the research period to ensure that findings provide satisfying answers to the research questions. In practice, the data will include:

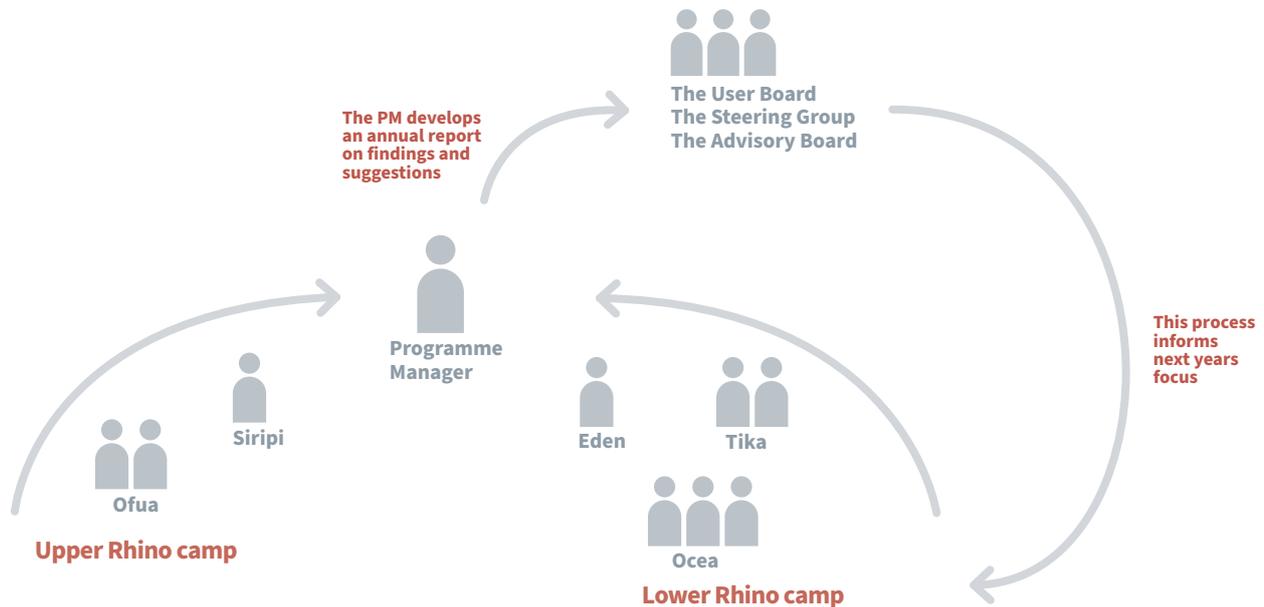
1. Field notes from participant observation, conversations and informal interviews conducted at the research locations.
2. Interview transcripts from the recorded interviews.
3. Survey data from the more-quantitative questionnaires, some of which will be rolled out later to

test the scale and translatability of findings across borders.

4. Exercise results. Alternative methods will be useful such as conversations about photos, drawing of maps, or exercises where refugees are asked to show their trust in certain processes or actors.
5. Reports, assessments and minutes from consultations with the User Boards, the RAs, the community and local actors and HDP communities.
6. Review of literature, including studies conducted by other actors operating in the context and the monitoring and progress reporting of the RYPP implementation.

The data is collected and stored in a responsible manner, in line with existing guidelines on confidentiality in humanitarian action and research ethics. All individuals and actors are given pseudonyms from the first point of noting down their statements and actions, and the project does not store identifying data. In this report, identifying information has been removed, to ensure anonymity.

Figure 3:
Research setup



3. Context

3.1. Rhino Camp

The research setting in this first year of ASPIRE is Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement. Most of the settlement is located on clan-owned land⁵ and it stretches about 85km in rocky or swampy areas, making farming difficult (Degett 2023). It takes about two hours' drive on dirt roads to reach the nearest town, Arua, on a dry day, in a suitable vehicle. Rhino Camp has hosted refugees since 1980. The majority are from South Sudan; others are from DR Congo, Sudan and Rwanda, with a handful from Burundi and Eritrea.

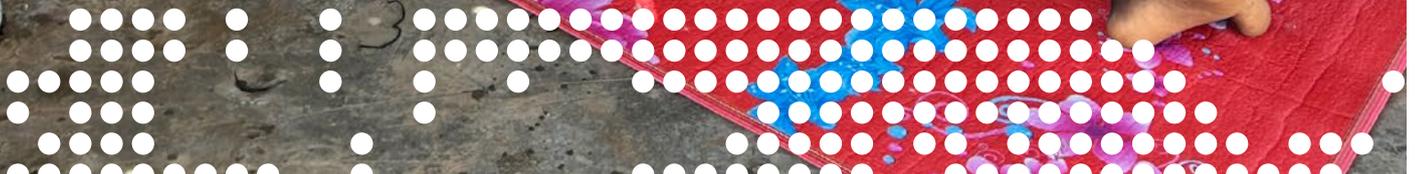
At the time of writing this report (October 2023) approximately 850,000 (UNHCR 2023) refugees from

South Sudan are hosted in Uganda; 149,368 live in Rhino Camp, of whom 93% are South Sudanese (UNHCR & OPM 2023). Most of these were part of the massive influx of 716,732 refugees who arrived in Uganda between 2016 and 2017 (OIOS 2018:1). A few South Sudanese have remained in the settlement since the previous civil war, and others continue to arrive in the constant daily flow of refugees across the border. South Sudanese are granted refugee status on prima facie basis in Uganda, which means they are provided temporary asylum on arrival, based on their nationality (UNHCR 2011:103).

⁵Land in this part of the West Nile area is held under customary tenure and owned by indigenous communities, administered through traditional governance methods and passed on by ancestral lineage (O'Callaghan 2018:20).



Hairdressers on lunch break @ Ayo Degett/DRC



The organisational actors in Rhino Camp are many and form a complex patchwork of interests, hierarchies and authorities. From the first moment of starting the ASPIRE project, it was clear that participation, decision-making and therefore issues of solving conflicts, are intimately related to issues of power, politics, and governance and control, as many scholars before us have shown (Arnstein 1969:216; Cornwall 2011:xiii; Kelty 2020:1; Cooke and Kothari 2001:13). People, organisations and institutions possessing certain positions of power, whether administrative, political or economic, are therefore central study objects of ASPIRE. An overview of the governance structure in Rhino Camp is presented in Appendix B.

In 2023, about 64 (UNHCR 2023) humanitarian organisations are registered to work with South Sudanese refugees in Uganda and most of them appear to have activities in Rhino Camp, with offices in Yoro Basecamp. As part of the ASPIRE project, we are keeping a database and a timeline of actors that facilitate small and large-scale programmes relating to peace, including UN actors, international and national NGOs, RLOs, and more informal community groups and CBOs. We are focusing on the actors operating in the five areas where ASPIRE is being implemented (Ofua, Siripi, Ocea, Eden and Tika).

Figure 4: Population numbers in research location⁶

Zone	Refugee population
Ofua	26,577
Siripi	18,998
Ocea	15,653
Eden	19,797
Tika	9,759

Over the past six years, during the implementation of the research on participation, we have traced the work and development of the RLOs in the settlement; many of these were facilitating programmes specifically on issues relating to peace. By 2018 approximately 12 formal RLOs had started operations in Rhino Camp and by 2023 the number had increased to about 34 (Degett 2023). Most of these RLOs have their offices inside the settlement near the communities where they themselves live.

We will refer to all the actors who operated out of Yoro basecamp as ‘HDP actors’. This is not to say that they were all the same. The mandate, operation and authority of Humanity & Inclusion (HI), for example, was quite different from that of the Office of the Prime Minister (Uganda) (OPM) or World Food Programme (WFP). Yet they were all engaged with implementation, management or coordination of HDP programmes, and their differences were irrelevant to the refugees in many situations. In fact, they often referred to all of them using the same umbrella term ‘Yoro’ (referring to the offices in the basecamp) or as ‘Partners’ (referring to the implementing partners for UNHCR). International and national HDP actors make basic services available in the settlement including: water supply, health services, protection, legal aid, education, cash programming, food distributions, livelihood support, coordination services and many others.

DRC has been one of the largest implementing organisations in Rhino Camp since the influx in 2016 (at least in terms of staff and portfolio) and currently has about 60 employees and 100 people on incentive agreements⁷. The scarcity of services in Rhino Camp has been aggravated by the serious funding gaps in the refugee response. The Covid-19 pandemic, high inflation and escalating global crises have only worsened the situation. One of the most critical consequences faced by the residents in Rhino Camp currently is the dramatic cuts in the food rations.

⁶ These figures are reflected in UNHCR & OPM statistics from August 2023 (UNHCR & OPM 2023).

⁷ Incentive workers (sometimes referred to as volunteers), are people living in the areas of humanitarian interventions and, typically, fulfilling long-term or short-term unskilled assignments. They are not considered to be ‘real’ staff in terms of benefits, contracts and salary. When referring to ‘staff’ in this report, we do not include incentive workers, unless specifically indicated.

3.2. Being a refugee in Rhino Camp

Uganda's refugee laws are often portrayed as progressive global ideals for supporting refugees in pursuing self-reliance and a life beyond the settlements (Kaiser 2006:597; Schiltz 2018:195; World Bank Group 2016:vii). These ideals build on the formal framework described in the 2006 Refugee Act⁸ and the 2010 Refugees Regulations⁹, which: 1) open Uganda's doors to asylum seekers irrespective of their nationality; 2) grant refugees relative freedom of movement and the right to seek employment; 3) allow each refugee family a small piece of land for their exclusive use. The situation for refugees in Uganda also includes multiple challenges, some hidden behind the inclusive approach to refugees' integration. For instance, it seems very difficult for South Sudanese to obtain formal jobs in Uganda because they are under-prioritised, even when they live up to formal requirements (Kaiser 2006:602; O'Callaghan 2018:12; Kaiser 2007). Moreover, they lack the opportunity to be naturalised as Ugandan citizens and their access to aid is for the most part anchored in isolated rural settlements which provide very limited opportunities for access to sustainable livelihoods (Ibid). In practice, these challenges mean that most refugees in Uganda live on the margins of society. They are highly dependent

on aid to cover their basic needs and therefore forced to live their lives in settlements (Degett 2018).

Because of Uganda's progressive refugee approach, and perhaps because of its accessibility, it is often selected to be the first-in-line for new global initiatives, pilot studies and policy frameworks. Uganda was for instance selected as a pilot country for the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). But, despite these efforts, the lack of progress has been strongly criticised in a number of analyses (Crawford et al. 2018; Schiltz 2018; O'Callaghan 2018; Montemurro and Wendt 2017). Here, the issues that stand out are: exclusion of key actors in the processes, such as communities and local authorities; limited engagement of the private sector; a lack of monitoring frameworks to capture change. Moreover, funding lags behind ambition. On the one hand, donors are caught between wanting to promote and support Uganda's approach to hosting refugees as a positive success that boosts western interests in containing refugees and migrants in regions of origin (O'Callaghan 2018:30); on the other hand, donors lacked the financial means to support this approach in practice. In addition, their confidence has been undermined by several serious corruption scandals in recent years¹⁰.

3.2.1. Ofua, Siripi, Ocea, Eden and Tika

Multiple ethnic groups from South Sudan inhabit Rhino Camp and because the settlement receives new arrivals on a daily basis, the composition of ethnic groups changes constantly. The largest zones are occupied by people arriving from the southern part of South Sudan, including Bari-speaking ethnic groups such as Kakwa, Mundari, Kuku, Kelico and Mundo. Rhino Camp also hosts a sub-

stantial number of refugees from the Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups, most of whom are arriving from the more northern and eastern parts of South Sudan. In ASPIRE we divide our attention between five specific zones of the settlement: Ofua, Siripi, Eden, Tika and Ocea. We decided to focus on these zones because they are inhabited by different ethnic groups with different situations

⁸ See the 2006 Refugee Act in UNHCR's overview of country-specific refugee legislation and treaties (Refworld 2006).

⁹ See the 2010 Refugees Regulations (Refworld 2010).

¹⁰ See (OIOS 2018).

and implications regarding conflict patterns and the HDP actors' interventions and engagement.

In Ofua, almost everyone originates from Central Equatoria in South Sudan, many from the same specific areas in the (then) Yei River State¹¹, and almost everyone seems to speak Kakwa. Most people who fled the urban areas in South Sudan came from the capital, Juba, and the city of Yei, closer to the border with Uganda. The population in Ofua includes people with very limited access to resources, many war orphans, female-headed households and people suffering from chronic illnesses and war-inflicted trauma. But there are individuals and families with resources and energy to cater for the most vulnerable and for developing community-driven initiatives to improve living conditions for others. Like many other accounts from these areas, their life stories include periods of stability, insecurity, hopelessness, endurance, relative improvements, fluctuating kin connections, family disputes and childhoods with overwhelming responsibilities (Mogensen 2020). In 2016, the armed conflict in South Sudan spread into Central Equatoria and was fuelled by territorial conflicts, all of which made people flee over the border into Uganda in large numbers (Justin and De Vries 2019). Prior to the war, this part of South Sudan had enjoyed development initiatives that had made service provision, infrastructure and access to education significantly better than in other and more isolated and war-torn parts of South Sudan (Harrell-Bond 1986; Hutchinson 1996; Johnson 1996; Salih 1996). Another important point is that many families in Ofua already knew each other before their arrival, and many had fled together from the same villages. All of the above issues contributed to shaping a relatively homogeneous social environment in Ofua.

In Ocea, Siripi and Eden, the communities are more diverse, ethnically and otherwise, and hosted several families that had stayed behind since the previous wars in South Sudan. While the Kak-

wa-speaking population seemed to be in a majority, the communities included Acholi families, a large Nuer population, several Dinka families, a significant number of refugees from the Nuba communities in Sudan, and refugees from the eastern part of DR Congo. Ocea also hosts the only reception centre in the settlement. Refugees arrived here from the transit centres near the border while undergoing registration processes. Ocea is a busy, diverse and strategically important area of the settlement.

Tika is located at one of the furthest ends of the settlement and is often difficult to reach by car. Most of the people living there are from the Dinka and the Nuer ethnic groups who came from areas such as Bor, Aweil, Bentiu, Rumbek and the wider Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile in South Sudan. Some people have degrees, some have worked for humanitarian actors inside South Sudan, but many have no formal education or have arrived directly from the cattle camps. Accordingly, many have not learned Juba Arabic or English (Hutchinson 1996).

* * *

These five zones of Rhino Camp settlement are the focus of ASPIRE for several reasons. First of all, they represent the diversity in the settlement in terms of ethnic groups, new arrivals, old caseloads and different host community areas. And they represent more homogenous communities as well as more diverse. Secondly, they represent the zones where conflict often arises, because of their diversity and because they are the locations of the most important infrastructure: hospitals, schools and the reception centre. Thirdly, most of the RLOs are based in these zones and many community initiatives and important people, including the highest-ranking refugee leaders (governance, cultural, religious and ethnic) inhabit these areas. These are all people, groups and institutions that we are engaging with closely.

¹¹ After the peace agreement in South Sudan in 2020, Yei River state and the two neighbouring states were merged into one state, Central Equatoria State, which was the name of the area prior to 2015, governance changes that seemed to fuel existing divides (Justin and Verkoren 2021).

3.3. Common types of conflict

As ASPIRE is in its initial stage of implementation, we are still in the process of developing the best way of capturing, understanding, mapping and categorising the conflicts that are relevant to the study. Early on, one thing rapidly became clear: most people, staff and refugees alike, have attended endless talks, workshops and training relating to peacebuilding and conflict mitigation. In fact, one woman interviewed in June had been requested to attend peacebuilding training by three different NGOs in one week. In other words, refugees in Rhino Camp are not novices when it comes to peacebuilding, nor to the lingo used for discussing it.

3.3.1. Inter-ethnic conflicts

Notions of ethnicity and ethnic belonging among refugees in Rhino Camp can be sensitive and difficult issues. The three wars in South Sudan revealed a complex pattern of rivalry and alliances between ethnic groups. In terms of those present in Rhino Camp, the conflict dynamics of the Dinka and Nuer groups and their clans were particularly pronounced. These tied into periods before and after South Sudan's independence, and deadly clashes between these two groups in Rhino Camp in 2018 led to their physical separation at each end of the settlement (UNHCR 2018). In the recent civil war in South Sudan (2013-2018), the Dinka group had ethnic affiliation with President Kiir and his regime in Juba, while the Nuer group had ethnic affiliation with Vice President Riek Machar, whose sacking by Kiir in 2013 set off the civil war. Following these events, Machar established the armed opposition group Sudan People's Liberation Movement-in-Opposition (SPLA-IO), commonly referred to as IO, which was one of multiple opposition and rebel groups emerging over the years. The peace agreement between IO and the government, the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS), was signed in 2018, making Machar and IO a party to the government, which unfortunately did not put an end to the prevalent armed violence in the country.

This is not to say that Dinka refugees benefited from, or even sympathised with, President Kiir and

In this section, we will describe four issues that were consistently described by the residents of Rhino Camp as root causes of conflict. Although some scholars of peace and conflict studies might categorise these differently and place more emphasis on the difference between triggers and root causes, we have decided to categorise these simply as 'types of conflict'. Moreover, a clear distinction between root causes and triggers is difficult to draw; in practice, the below-mentioned conflicts overlap and influence one another.

his regime. Nor that all Nuer refugees sympathised with Machar. Some people in Rhino Camp have relatives fighting for opposition groups, formerly the IO and current groups such as National Salvation Front (NAS), or in the government forces, and some might have stakes in the conflict. More importantly, many sub-national conflicts and rivalries do not divide themselves along Dinka/Nuer ethnic lines. The point is that none of the refugees in Rhino Camp seemed to benefit from the violence in South Sudan or to strongly support the violent acts that had forced them to flee their homes. Although many issues influence how alliances are formed, ethnicity plays a central role in South Sudan and in understanding some of the conflicts, rivalries and alliances in Rhino Camp (also among staff). In practical terms, the role of ethnicity has a number of implications for the refugees' everyday lives in the settlement.

According to our findings, ethnically related conflicts often start from disagreements on small-scale issues, such as the seating arrangements on a public bench, as was the case in the deadly incident in 2018. Football games among youth are also mentioned as triggering inter-ethnic conflicts. Most often, however, refugees describe conflicts among children from diverse ethnic backgrounds as the main trigger for these conflicts. In an interview from September a refugee explains a common situation

of fighting among diverse ethnic groups in her local community with these words:

“For example, where children go and play. If they continue playing, there will be a time when they will disagree and then maybe one hits the other. The other will cry loudly... The one who was crying was a boy, so he was chased away from the group of girls. So, when the mother hears this one crying, the mother will come from there. Who hit you? Who hit you? The boy will mention that so and so hit me. Then she will come and hit this child. You see? She, as an adult, will come and hit this child, so this one will also cry. The mother of this one will say like that, why did you hit my child? [the interviewee claps] Conflict. They start to fight!”

The community members we engaged with see children’s internal conflicts or other minor issues as the source of the problem. They all categorise these types of conflict as inter-ethnic because of the way they escalate. These situations occur constantly in the settlement, but when disagreements concern members of two or more ethnic groups that endure high levels of tension with one another the conflicts are likely to escalate. Such ethnically related tension also influences other situations, such as courtship between youths from different groups, as described below.

3.3.2. Conflicts related to resource access

Another type of conflict that was often mentioned arises in situations where people compete over access to resources. As mentioned above, overall resources are scarce. As described below, the dramatic cut in food rations has hit the refugee population particularly hard, fuelling multiple disagreements. While this was the most frequently debated topic, other types of resource access also created conflict. Access to grazing pasture for cattle was a topic that came up multiple times. Whereas some refugees keep goats, which sometimes end up grazing in host community members’ gardens, some host communities keep cattle that sometimes end up in the refugees’ gardens. This latter situation led to a deadly conflict between a local Ugandan community and refugees in Tika in 2020 (UNHCR 2020).

However, the most frequent resource-related conflicts occur at water points. In some parts of the settlement, the water points work well and in other parts, they are dysfunctional creating long lines of people waiting for water. In Ocea, the conflicts around the water points became so severe that the Refugee Welfare Committee (RWC) cabinet decided to make a conflict task force and a schedule. In this way, they make sure that a member of the RWC cabinet is always present at the water point during rush hours. A person in the RWC cabinet in Ocea explained this set-up in an interview:

“We leaders came together to agree on the handling of fetching water: who can go to different tanks and when. And they respect us leaders because once you don’t follow, you’ll be punished. (...) When you are brought before the leaders and they talk to you, it is a bit of punishment. Yes.”

3.3.3. Conflicts related to domestic violence

Domestic violence is unfortunately a continuous problem in Rhino Camp and according to the community members consulted, one of the most frequent sources of conflict. This is also confirmed by UNHCR's analysis of conflicts in 2022, which indicated that it makes up most of the incidents reported to the protection actors (UNHCR 2018) (UNHCR 2022). As mentioned earlier, domestic conflicts and violence are not in themselves the focus of ASPIRE, but because they often escalate to – and are intertwined with – community conflicts, some domestic violence cases and tendencies are centrally important for the study. As the reader will learn (in section 5) from a situation with a young couple in an inter-ethnic courtship, matters of choosing a spouse often involve opinions of extended family and clan members, and therefore the community people intervene. The same is the case when conflicts occur and need mediation. These matters are often dealt with by community structures, especially when there are serious cases. Obviously, the police are involved in grave

cases of violence, but the community structures seem pivotal for following up with the conflicting parties, for interfering physically when needed and for mitigating any acts of retaliation.

An example is an incident that happened recently in the settlement. A husband and his wife, living in an inter-ethnic marriage started to disagree. They had a small child, and the wife was about seven months pregnant when the husband started to accuse her of infidelity on the basis of his, self-declared, impotence. After having tried to kill his wife and unborn child, she was taken in by community leaders. Because the woman was living in Rhino Camp among the husband's extended family and ethnic peers, she did not feel safe. And when the man went to prison his extended family wanted revenge for what they perceived as her 'wrong-doing'. Not having any of her ethnic peers or family members to represent her in this dispute, she decided to relocate to a nearby settlement where her family lives. As one of the local leaders explained:

“Well, the husband's family are here. So, they were one time talking to the lady: ‘so now you have jailed our son’. Yeah, retaliation is here.”

As this episode shows, incidents of domestic violence relate to conflicts that cannot be detached from other sources of conflict, such as inter-ethnic tension. While these types of case are not everyday occurrences, family disputes about resources are. Many refugees experience a rise in domestic conflict and domestic violence in relation to the food cuts and scarcity of income opportunities. It

is clear from numerous episodes in the settlement that families who are suddenly left without food and income become more prone to conflict that may result in violence and/or separation. The effects of food cuts and their relation to conflict development will be discussed in further detail in section four.

3.3.4. Conflicts related to theft

According to members of all communities where ASPIRE is implemented, crime is on the rise in Rhino Camp, especially in the aftermath of the food cuts. The people we engaged with talked mostly about theft of animals (goats in particular), crops, food and mobile phones. These statements correspond well with UNHCR's overview, where theft of animals and crops is one of the main conflict sources reported. In section 5, two examples of

common situations involving theft are described.

* * *

In this section we have provided a brief overview of the study foci of ASPIRE in 2023: Rhino Camp, its inhabitants, their conditions of life and conflict dynamics. In many ways, situations such as Rhino Camp are defined by the way HDP action is im-

plemented. It is unique to these settings that HDP action influences so many critical aspects of people's practical, social and emotional lives: the water they drink, the housing they live in, the food they eat, the identity papers they carry, the way they are able to marry or divorce, the education they access, the roads they move on, the job opportunities they have, the health clinics they are born in, and the land in

which they are buried. By introducing the contextual conditions where people's lives unfold, we want to bring attention to the role of specific social forces that define these. Understanding the space for refugees' participation in interventions and efforts to improve peace is inseparable from mapping these conditions. The next section will specifically focus on the way we approach these observations analytically.



Office structure of local refugee leadership @ Ayo Degett/DRC

4. Analytical framework

The overall purpose of ASPIRE is to better understand people’s aspirations for peace and inclusion in decisions. To do this, we need one clear analytical framework since we aim to examine aspirations and practices over time and in different settings. Therefore, we employ three linked concepts from the research project on participation in Rhino Camp and East Amman (see Degett 2023). Our primary focus is people’s endeavours, that is, what they are doing – their actions and enterprises towards peace. To understand endeavours in Rhino Camp and other settings, we must also recognise the political and economic conditions in which they are living and their subjectivities, that is, their experiences, perceptions and intentions as actors.

With this framework of conditions, subjectivities and endeavours, we explore the many ways that South Sudanese are dealing with conflicts and trying to achieve peaceful coexistence. The framework will also help us understand how they relate to interventions by HDP actors on this matter. It will allow us to document and analyse changes over time and across displacement contexts (Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan etc). This report will focus primarily on what we have learned so far about endeavours and the actors who are engaged in them. But first it is necessary to mention some important changes in the conditions of life in Rhino Camp.

4.1. Conditions for peace and conflict

Conditions include power dynamics, inequalities and alliances within governance, legal, cultural, social, financial, ethnic and humanitarian organisations. While these are important overall issues for exploring people’s space for action, two particular conditions were brought forward repeatedly over

the course of the ASPIRE implementation in 2023 as root causes and drivers of current conflicts in the communities. These were the dramatic reductions in food rations and the increasing violence in the Central Equatoria area of South Sudan.

4.1.1. Food cuts

“So, you can see because of the food reduction, people are traumatised. Any slight issue, it becomes a huge issue. So, the community leaders, church leaders are really struggling. Struggling to bring peace. If we don’t struggle, war will break out in the camps.”

During an interview in September 2023, Lilian, a community leader in the settlement, expressed her concerns about the reduction in food rations. She was not alone. All communities consulted during the implementation of ASPIRE shared serious concerns about the current food reduction and its relation to increasing conflict in the communities. Because of funding cuts over the past six years, the food rations for refugees in

Uganda have been significantly reduced – from 12kg per person per month in 2018 to about 4kg per person per month in 2022 (Degett 2023). In 2023 WFP implemented a three-phase prioritisation system where refugees are provided food assistance based on household vulnerability (WFP 2023). In practice, this means that many families are entirely phased out of food assistance and some remaining families receive an amount that

has been dramatically cut. These significant cuts contribute to high levels of malnutrition in the settlement, in a situation where the food insecurity level is already classified as 'serious', with 53% of children at risk of not reaching their full mental and physical potential (WFP 2023; FEWS NET 2023). The community reported that this current situation means that most families cut their daily meals down to one meal per day and feel forced to keep children home from school. The findings from consultations with RWC chairpeople also suggest an increasing number of suicides among single mothers who feel helpless and desperate because they cannot find ways of feeding their children.

People in the communities where ASPIRE is implemented reported a rise in theft over the past year as a result, or at least simultaneously with, the food cuts. Theft is considered a serious conflict trigger, as people feel desperate and risk retaliation when losing belongings in a situation where access to income is so limited. These cases range from theft of goats, money and mobile phones to theft of small amounts of food, because people are desperately hungry. Several community members explained that it is not uncommon that young people and children keep stolen food, such as a small bag of flour, at neighbours' houses away from their own caregivers to avoid raising suspicion. They then go to the neighbours' houses to cook porridge from the stolen flour when they are very hungry. Desperate situations appear to call for desperate measures.

According to the community members, the food cuts have also resulted in envy-related conflicts. Many reported that people are not aware of the selection criteria used for determining whether people are staying on food assistance or being removed from the food assistance entirely. Most people agree that people who are living with a disability or who are very vulnerable in one way or another need to be on food assistance. But accord-

4.1.2. Escalation of violence in South Sudan

As a result of multiple factors in South Sudan, including the inflation crisis, upcoming national elections in 2024 and intensifying violence by community-based militias, violent conflicts affecting civilians are reported to have escalated during 2022 and 2023 (UNMISS 2023; UNHCR 2022). Central

ing to our findings, there are many grey-zone areas where some households are kept on the food log while neighbours who live under somewhat similar social, financial and health-related conditions are removed from it. This disparity has reportedly led to situations where people from households that receive food distributions are asked to remove themselves from the lines at the water points based on the premise that people who have been removed from the food log should have priority access to the remaining services in the settlement to ensure they can use their time for income generation.

Comments such as this, directed at people on food assistance, have been reported at water points: Are you also going to restrain us from finding income by making us wait in line for water? As mentioned earlier, conflicts at water points, especially when involving different ethnic groups, have the potential to escalate and lead to violence. In addition, people have been reported to put themselves in potential situations of conflict or in harm's way in their efforts to be categorised as a vulnerable person needing food assistance.

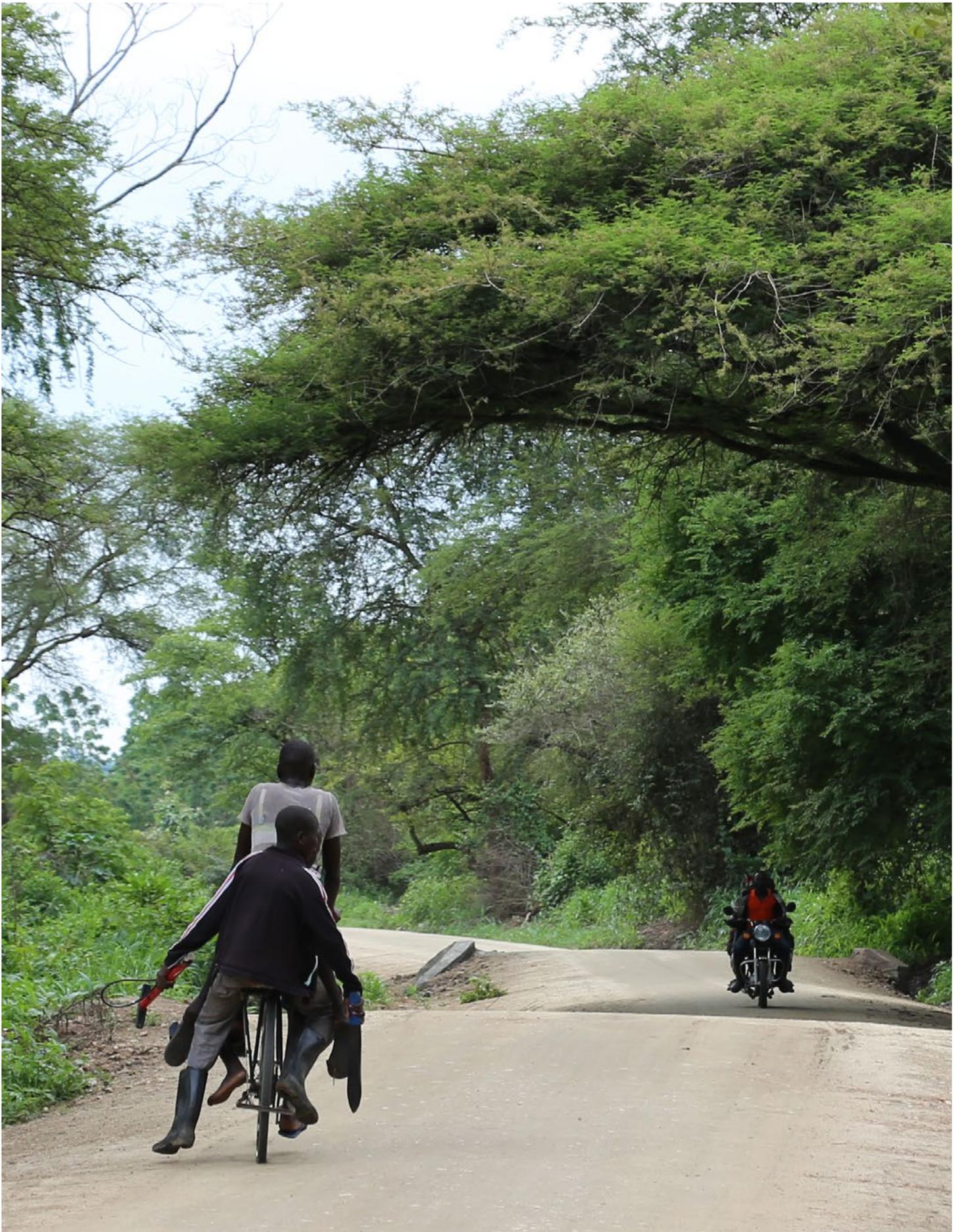
All in all, the dramatic food cuts affecting the refugee community in Rhino Camp seem to be a centrally important element for exploring how conflicts arise and how they are addressed. As mentioned by a female participant in one of the settlement-based launches of ASPIRE, it is difficult to solve conflicts or even participate in peacebuilding activities if you are hungry or your family is starving. By bringing this issue to the centre of attention in this report, we are not suggesting that all conflicts will be solved by attaining better access to food or income. Our point is that the current serious food insecurity plays a central role in the conflict dynamics and that current conflicts cannot be understood without taking into account the effects of food cuts.

Equatoria has been hit particularly hard because of the clashing of militia and the expansion of new grazing routes for nomadic pastoralists who move with weapons on their route to pasture. Because many refugees from Rhino Camp are originally from Central Equatoria, the conflicts and violence

are severely affecting people in the settlement. In some parts of Rhino Camp, funeral ceremonies for relatives who have died in Central Equatoria take place almost weekly. This affects the emotional state of many inhabitants and sometimes it may trigger a desire for retaliation. According to the community members' statements, most killings in this part of South Sudan are conducted by so-called 'unknown gunmen'. Yet in a few instances, relatives of the perpetrator and the victim all live within Rhino Camp.

All in all, the findings from this first year of ASPIRE suggest that the tensions and violence in South Sudan are critically affecting the social and emotional lives of people in Rhino Camp, and in a year where hostilities have escalated, it has become increasingly clear that the developments in South Sudan are intimately linked

to the conditions for peace and conflict in the settlement. We do not suggest that all conflicts spill over into the settlement, nor that all killings are retaliated. Rather, by highlighting this issue we want to emphasise that inhabitants follow the conflict dynamics in South Sudan closely and that this aspect needs to be thoroughly embedded in the analysis of conflict dynamics in the settlement. The findings also suggest that the refugee communities in Rhino Camp are aware of the interconnection between the two conflict dynamics and the potential violence that may arise locally because of retaliation. Some community-driven initiatives are therefore engaging specifically with these risks, setting up innovative modalities to catch these conflicts early and mitigate their escalation, as the reader will learn in the next section.



On the road between Imvepi Refugee Settlement and Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement @ Ayo Degett/DRC



5. Endeavours for Peace

Efforts towards peace take several forms. Some endeavours aim to promote peaceful coexistence so that conflicts do not arise. Others attempt to deal with conflicts that have fully erupted. Those we focus on here lie in between. They are endeavours to catch potential conflicts before they become dangerous eruptions – to grasp incipient conflicts on the rise and de-escalate them. De-escalation as an overall type of endeavour stood out in our growing data pool. It became clear that many initiatives ultimately had the common focus of handling conflicts – or conflict patterns – as they started to emerge in the communities and making sure that they did not escalate into violence.

Some endeavours are undertaken by individual actors with particular experiences, intentions and subjectivities. We begin with two examples of such efforts; both are endeavours by women to intervene in conflicts between young people. Other peace initiatives are taken on by groups, examples of which will be presented thereafter. The means used in these endeavours for peace comprise a combination of advice and counselling, on the one hand, and dialogue and mediation on the other.

Counselling, in the sense of listening to people and encouraging them to reflect on their situation, has become a valued practice in East Africa. It was an

important part of the response to the AIDS epidemic and is emphasised in many Christian churches and it was used as part of the humanitarian response to the Lord's Resistance Army war in Northern Uganda (Annan, Amuge and Angwaro 2003). In principle, counselling can be offered by peers as well as by people trained to help others develop insight into their social and emotional situations. Providing advice is more common; people tell each other what they should do – what would be logical, pragmatic or morally good. Often the advisor speaks from a position of greater authority on the basis of seniority or experience. In practice, in Rhino Camp, advising and counselling tend to overlap.

While advice and counselling are often provided to one party in a possible conflict, dialogue and mediation are tools for bringing two or more potential opponents together. The principle is restoration of harmony rather than retribution. There should not be winners and losers. All are encouraged to present their points of view and to listen to others. Sometimes a fine is imposed, but more in the spirit of restoration than punishment. These two modes of mitigating conflict may overlap: mediation may involve advice, and counselling may also entail dialogue. But in most cases, action involves more than words, as we shall see. Individuals step in physically. Groups find goats and transport corpses.

5.1. Individuals stepping in

Throughout the months of the research, some patterns started to emerge in the ways parents or parental figures engaged with conflict among children or young people. Since the launch of the research on participation in 2018, interlocutors, interviewees and focus-group participants have continuously pointed out that quarrels between

children and youths can escalate to violent conflicts when parents take sides. At the same time, it was clear that parents and parental figures also played a central role in de-escalating conflicts among youths and children that could otherwise trigger violence and retaliation.

5.1.1. Parents and the dangers of mob justice

The critical role of parents, and mothers in particular, became clear in an episode that unfolded in September 2023. This situation involved Kate, a church leader and the mother of several teenagers. Kate is an important and trusted female leader in her local community and having followed her engagement with the community over the past six years in the research on participation, it is clear that she plays a central role in mediating and trying to mitigate conflicts as they arise in her community. This was also the case during an episode in September. Kate was contacted immediately because a young boy, Stephen, was thought to have stolen a mobile phone or the money to purchase it. Stephen was only 10 years old; he was caught with a phone by an adult female family member, his 'auntie'. Fearing punishment, he told the 'auntie' that the phone belonged to a friend from school, Simon.

At this point, Kate was called to attend to the situation. She confiscated the phone and arranged for a meeting with Simon and his mother. Simon denied any knowledge of the phone and after discussing the matter, they concluded that the phone did not belong to Simon, but rather Stephen who was caught with it. Kate then decided to consult Stephen's family. On the way, she took a shortcut. Halfway there, she noticed a large crowd of about 40 teenage boys with sticks. She immediately recognised Stephen, who was being escorted by Simon and his friends towards the outskirts of the settlement. She became worried – not only because of the immediate danger that Stephen was in, but also because she was acutely aware that these two boys belonged to different ethnic groups, which could trigger conflict in the larger community if the boy was severely beaten. As Kate recounted:

“I don't know what they were planning to do with him. So, I try to stop them. They didn't want that. So I told them to release the boy for me. Then I told them that it is okay. You might just know me as a church leader... But I am also a teacher and I have the number for the police. I hold the child rights in my hand and I will call police. This is mob justice [it is illegal].’ So, I pretended that I am calling. They start running. Seeing the heart [intention] of our younger boys trying to take law in their hand, trying to organise the forces to go and bring somebody's child into harm. These boys are not taught well. They know retaliation. They are experts. They are experienced. They are practicing how people revenge, like back home.”

The above-mentioned episode is not unique. Many similar episodes of teenagers and children stealing and fighting have been described by concerned community members in all the zones where ASPIRE is implemented. As mentioned by many and indicated by Kate above, these episodes risk escalating into violent community conflicts if they are not handled well by the community and parents. This is particularly alarming if they involve people

from different ethnic groups, such as Stephen and Simon. Luckily, Kate was in the right place at the right time and decided to interfere. Concerned parents who are attentive and engaged in the lives and conflicts of teenagers in the settlement seem to be an invaluable resource for mitigating conflict, ensuring de-escalation and promoting peaceful coexistence.

5.1.2. Parents, neighbours and the dangers of courtship

In a different part of the settlement, a conflict situation unfolded simultaneously but with young peoples' love at the centre of attention, not theft. This event involved Elisabeth, a single mother of four teenagers and a well-trusted female leader in her local community. Elisabeth's neighbour had a teenage boy, Maku, of about 18–19 years of age. Maku and his family are from an ethnic group in South Sudan belonging to the western part of the country. Elisabeth had noticed that Maku was courting a girl, Nyabeel, from an ethnic group originating from a different part of South Sudan, which, according to Elisabeth and others, is known to practise relatively firm decision-making on the

choice of spouses. Elisabeth therefore contacted Maku and asked him to be careful. As time passed, the relationship became known in the community and eventually also to the family of Nyabeel. They had other plans for her and had already lined up a potential partner from her own ethnic group.

Finally, one night, Elisabeth and her neighbours heard a scream and saw Maku run off bleeding. Afterwards a group of young men from Nyabeel's ethnic group and armed with sticks came to the entrance of Elisabeth's neighbours' compound and wanted to enter. Elisabeth quickly mobilised the refugee leaders and convinced them to go home:

“What happened is that we mobilise. You know, most of our RWC cabinet here are all women. So, we stood very firm. We say ‘you people, what are you doing? What you are doing is bad, you stop it, stop it. Bring any challenge to the leaders.’ But these are refugees who arrived recently, and they do not know what the law says. When they learned that this group of women were very serious, they started walking away.”

Eventually, Maku sought protection with the police and relocated to another settlement. The group of young men eventually also caught Nyabeel, who turned out to be pregnant. She turned to Elisabeth and some of the other parental figures in the neighbourhood for advice as she did not feel safe. Elisabeth and her neighbours therefore arranged a meeting with Nyabeel's family and one of the female leaders in the community. In this meeting they agreed that Nyabeel would stay with the female leader and that the community would stop disturbing her.

This episode with Maku and Nyabeel has similarities with the one involving Simon and Stephen.

In both situations, young people were caught by their community members doing something that is unacceptable in their eyes: theft and inter-ethnic courtship/teenage pregnancy. In both situations young people mobilised to take the law into their own hands by organising the punishment one of their peers. In both situations the conflict involved people from diverse ethnic backgrounds which makes them sensitive as they can trigger larger ethnic conflicts between ethnic groups in the settlement. Yet, in both cases, parents and parental figures such as Kate and Elisabeth were attentive to the potential conflict and helped de-escalate it through guidance of the young people and consultations with their families.

5.1.3. Religious leaders

Church leaders, church groups and fellowship groups appear to be very important players in de-escalating conflict and violence in the settlement. Peacebuilding and conflict mediation are the main activities of several of the CBOs and RLOs in the settlement and these activities are often based on what community members describe as counselling, trying to understand the problem and provide advice based on religious messages and stories from the bible. Elisabeth and Kate are both religious

leaders and part of women's groups that provide counselling to parents, youth and other women. They see this work as an important component of their Christian communities, and visiting the homes of people who are struggling or in conflict takes up much of their time. This was also the case for Kate when she visited the home of Simon's mother to learn about the supposedly stolen phone and the difficulties the family was suffering:

“When I arrived, the woman was crying. She told me that she has been phased out of the food rations. She decided to tell the children that the little they have would only cover for them to eat once in a day. You know... counselling takes time. From 4pm up to 6pm I stayed with her. Then she even told me that she thought of committing suicide. So, when I talked, I talked, I talked, talked a lot. So, she released all the anger in her heart. We prayed. I told her: this is not the way to go with life. If Simon grows up with this [anger] in his mind, he will even rebel against you, the mother. You try to teach him the Godly way. That we should not revenge. Revenging belongs to Jesus, so peace came in that.”

People like Elisabeth and Kate acted as individuals, but part of their authority and confidence came from their membership in church groups. The distinction between individual and group endeavours is not so clear, in their cases. Their subjectivities

were shaped by their social positions in congregations. As members of Christian women's groups, they had a vocabulary of emotions and reflections. And they had experience in offering advice and counselling to people in difficult situations.

5.2. Groups working for de-escalation

Multiple groups, associations, CBOs and informal constellations in the settlement work proactively to ensure that issues that might lead to conflict, or have led to conflict in the past, are handled and mitigated proactively. While some of these initiatives are more formal and receive funding or other resources for support, others are more informal and consist of a group of people with

a specific agenda or interest in common. Some initiatives deal actively with specific conflict triggers, while others are looking more at the root causes of specific potential conflicts. Some of the groups are formed specifically to mitigate conflict, while some have additional functions.

5.2.1. Goat Group

A community-driven initiative that we call Goat Group is an association of people who are living in a particular area of the settlement. The group consists of members from the host community villages and members from the refugee community. They define themselves as ‘retired thieves’ and their approach is to find ways of solving issues relating to the theft or loss of goats. Their intention is to prevent these cases from escalating into larger conflicts, violence or retaliation. As mentioned in Section 3, theft has been on the rise as food rations have been cut over the past years. During this time, the Goat Group has emerged and coordinates with relevant local councils (LCs) and RWCs when goats go missing.

In some cases, goats are stolen from the compounds in the settlement and transported out of the settlement on motorcycles in the dark hours of night. To mitigate these thefts and as a preventive

action, the Goat Group has set up a registration modality where motorcycles leaving the settlement at specific exits at night are registered. This has been an effective way of collecting evidence of goat theft, and according to them it limited these occurrences. In other cases, goats have gone missing and been found eating vegetables in other peoples’ kitchen gardens. These situations have in the past led to heated conflicts, especially between host communities and refugees. In these cases, the owner of the kitchen garden would often refuse to give the goats back to the owner because of the losses he or she had incurred in the garden. As a preventative action, the Goat Group identifies these situations early and serves as a mediator for releasing the goats, often against a small fee paid by the goat owner to the kitchen garden owner.

5.2.2. The Leopards

The Leopards is a group of boda-boda riders (motorcycle taxis) who decided to join forces in 2018. Together they formulated a guiding principle for working together where they agreed to take care of one another, develop a Village Saving and Loan Association that allows them to lend money for purchasing their own motorcycles with low interest, and engage in community initiatives. Over the years, the Leopards have supported the construction of shelters for the

elderly and helped people living with disabilities to reach food distributions on time. Because of their connections throughout the settlement and the nature of their job, they played an important role in the de-escalation of a recent situation that could have easily resulted in violence. This situation unfolded during the first months of the ASPIRE research.

Late at night during the rainy season, in a dark

corner of a main path leading into a zone in Rhino Camp, two motorcycle drivers collided by accident. This caused the death of one of the drivers, a young man based in the part of the settlement where the collision happened. Fearing retaliation, the surviving driver ran off. Soon after, people started running to the scene and it did not take long for people to connect the dots and learn who the surviving driver was. The family of the deceased was heartbroken and wanted to retaliate for the death. The Leopards were also at the scene and arranged for the dead body to be transported to the family home for burial. At this point the surviving motorcycle driver had been arrested by the police. Realising the risk of retaliation against someone else from his family, the Leopards requested a meeting with the family and clan members of

the deceased, convincing them to let the police take care of the incident. At the same time, some members of the Leopards had travelled across the settlement to the home of the surviving driver. After having met with his family and clan members, they decided to contribute to the funeral with food and two goats. The Leopards delivered the contribution to the family home of the deceased who welcomed the contributions. They also transported some of the family members of the surviving driver to the funeral who were welcomed by the family of the deceased. The two families took time to talk and agreed that the tragic death of the young driver was an accident and not an intentional action of bad faith that would call for retaliation. After that the family of the deceased decided not to press charges.

5.2.3. Rumours from Home

As mentioned in section 4, news about violence, murders and hostilities in South Sudan can trigger conflict escalation and retaliation in the settlement. In light of this problem, a Refugee-led Organisation (RLO) we call Rumours from Home, has developed and fine-tuned a modality to mitigate this danger. Refugees can contact the RLO with news of incidents happening in South Sudan (or other parts of the settlement or Uganda). This incident will then be investigated by staff and volunteers in South Sudan (or other parts of Uganda) and assessed as true or untrue information. Most of these incidents are confirmed as untrue and this is communicated to the people who could be affected by the rumour, supporting the de-escalation of a potential conflict and retalia-

tion. Sometimes, however, news about a horrific event is confirmed true. This was the case with a dreadful event where a rebel group burned down the houses in a village in the Equatorial region and killed many inhabitants. In this case, the extended families of the victims and the extended family of the rebel leader of the massacre all lived in the settlement. When the RLO learned about this, they called the two communities for a dialogue meeting instead of disseminating the validity of the reported incident. In this meeting the two communities found a way to communicate in a constructive way and agree to not let the conflict escalate into retaliation and violence. As mentioned by a member of the RLO who took part in these talks:

“We will do our best in these situations, you know. The two families also did their own things, they also showed concern. And then they apologised. And they also took their own steps and said they would make sure that their son [the perpetrator] would be brought into their control. So, I think that calmed the situation and then the people were not able to take it in a different way and fight.”

5.2.4. Tribal Talks

A group we call Tribal Talks is one of several community groups based on ethnicity that the ASPIRE team is following over the years. Tribal Talks includes people who identify as informal and formal clan leaders and youth representatives. They have an informal office where they conduct meetings and provide advice and counselling for members of their ethnic community. When conflicts arise within their own ethnic group or with others, they play a central role in dialogue and mediation for de-escalation. Because their office is centrally placed in the zone and because they are known and respected by their community members, they often arrive immediately in situations where conflicts are escalating – or in high risk of escalating - into violence. Because the group consists of important clan leaders, their advice and decisions are usually respected. Tribal Talks often succeed in ensuring that conflicting parties solve their issues in dialogue meetings and through counselling. For instance, they played a central part in the dialogues that calmed down the conflicting communities in the case of Maku and Nyabeel.

The Goat Group, the Leopards, the Rumours from Home and Tribal Talks are all community-driven groups that play an important role in ensuring that conflicts are handled before they escalate. While the Goat Group, Tribal Talks and the Rumours from Home were developed by concerned community members for the purpose of mitigating conflicts and potential conflicts, the Leopards had another purpose originally. The Leopards found themselves in a privileged position to help mitigate escalating conflicts because of their means of transport and information advantage. As taxis, they were quick to hear news from different parts of the settlement. In a sense, they were part of the media infrastructure of Rhino Camp.

It is evident from the data assembled so far that individual and group endeavours may overlap and may be activated in connection with the same emerging conflicts. We can also see that advising, counselling, dialogue and mediation may all be brought to bear on the same issues.

Female refugee in her garden @ Ayo Degett/DRC



6. Questions for continuing research

We find that the conceptual framework of conditions, subjectivities and endeavours has served us well in this initial phase of the ASPIRE project. The endeavours to contain conflict were undertaken by actors with experiences and social positions that formed their subjectivities – their intentions and capabilities. The actors include groups based on occupation (the motorcycle taxi drivers), ethnicity (the elders of Tribal Talks), and religion (the church women’s groups). They are also individuals, like the strong women who intervened when boys in the neighbourhood got themselves in trouble. They acted as mothers of a generation, not just of their own biological children. If we think of them in terms of subjectivity, we can say they were active subjects because they were experienced, they could foresee trouble and tried to avert it.

In this initial phase of the project, we have emphasised the current conditions that promote the conflicts people are endeavouring to contain. Food and money are scarce in Rhino Camp; refugees remember a time not long ago when rations were more generous. Fighting in South Sudan can cause ethnic tension to flare up in Uganda; we have seen how the potential for conflict on ethnic lines figures in people’s awareness. We are making a good start in addressing our second research question: ‘How do contextual conditions and shared memories of a humanitarian past influence these efforts?’ Going forward, we may need to explore further how memories of a humanitarian past play into people’s endeavours.

ASPIRE aims to understand young people’s efforts for peace and how they engage, and are included in, interventions by political authorities and HDP actors (our third research question). Yet the endeavours we have examined so far were not all undertaken by youth. Some actors were middle-aged or even older. But all involved youth

in one or another way. While the motorcycle taxi drivers were young men, the Tribal Talks organisation consisted of elders, with youth representatives. The mothers who intervened in children’s conflicts were more middle-aged than young. This raises the question of whether future research should focus exclusively on endeavours undertaken by young people or whether the challenge is to examine the ways in which youth fit into the larger picture of peace endeavours, as we have been doing in this initial phase.

In favour of this latter, more-holistic approach is the reality that neither conflicts nor their mitigation are limited to one age group. When young people endeavour to de-escalate conflict, they must engage with older men and women. The Rumours from Home group includes youth who are ICT savvy, but their work is only effective if they can win the confidence of all age groups. When mothers step in to stop simmering violence, young people learn through experience how such situations can be controlled. Generally, there has been an upsurge in research on youth in Africa, but there is also increasing recognition that youth must be understood in relation to other generations (Whyte, Geest and Alber 2008). Thus, an important research theme going forward will be the issue of generational engagement. With only a few months of field research completed, we are just beginning to address our first research question: ‘How do young people’s plans and efforts for peaceful coexistence take shape and unfold into action over time?’ In the coming years, it will be possible to follow endeavours we have now identified and see how they play out. The fact that ASPIRE has such a long time frame gives us the opportunity to explore changes in conditions and how they affect subjectivities and endeavours.

7. Reflections on opportunities

The findings from this initial phase of ASPIRE suggest some opportunities for improvement that might be relevant for actors operating in the context and beyond.

An overall observation is that the changing conditions, especially the funding gaps, are increasing the potential for conflict as services are cut. Refugees were unclear about the selection criteria used for determining people's eligibility for food assistance. No one argued against supporting the extremely vulnerable households and individuals, but there were many grey-zone areas. This created suspicion, jealousy and, sometimes, conflict. People did not recall ever having been informed about the criteria, much less included in the discussions on how they should be formed (which would be ideal from a participation point of view). Some of these conflict potentials could be mitigated by involving the residents, especially the young people, in communication about food assistance.

The conflict dynamics in South Sudan appeared to affect ethnic tension and the potential for violence in the settlement. The RLO Rumours from Home is well aware of this danger and is already endeavouring to trace and verify news about happenings north of the border. Supporting their work and facilitating more systematic approaches to this kind of communication could be an opportunity for HDP actors.

In general, it is important to recognise existing large-scale and small-scale endeavours that catch simmering conflicts and prevent their escalation. Young people must be supported in these initiatives to promote peace, recognising the intertwining of generations. Refugees are experts in their own reality and many of the initiatives already identified are excellent and bear the potential for expansion, if promoted and supported.

8. Feedback on findings

The findings in this report have been presented to multiple stakeholders for their feedback, input and suggestions. These consultations were put in place to include the stakeholders' views on the questions we address and topics that would be relevant and necessary in year 2 (2024) and beyond. The consultation meetings were also a chance for the communities in which we carry out the research to let us know if we, in the report, have misrepresented contextual aspects or unintentionally left out important nuances. These consultations included feedback from:

- The Academic Advisory Board (on the 15th of November 2023, Copenhagen)
- Representatives of the RYPP programme including refugee peacebuilding mentors from Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Kenya in a UNHCR-led regional workshop (28th of November 2023 in Kampala)
- Kampala-based stakeholders including UNHCR, OPM, EU representatives, Embassy representatives, NGOs and research institutions (30th of November in Kampala)
- Arua-based stakeholders including: RLOs, UNHCR, NGOs, CSOs and local government (5th of December in Arua)
- Settlement-based stakeholders in Rhino Camp including: OPM, NGOs, RLOs, members of the RWC, representatives from the district government and the ASPIRE user boards (8th of December in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement).

As this list shows, the people, stakeholders and institutions that have provided feedback are from very diverse backgrounds and hold different interests and positions in relation to the research. While some are experts on the methodology used, others are funding the project and some are the focus of the research themselves, including key interlocutors

and respondents. Despite the differences in their positionality, some feedback was cross-cutting. In this section, we will bring forward the key cross-cutting elements and those we find most relevant to the future developments of ASPIRE in terms of research setup and thematic areas to cover.

- Across all of these consultations, there seemed to be a high level of appreciation of the findings and people based in Rhino Camp recognised the conflict patterns and efforts for peace that the report describes. In addition, in all of the consultations, the participants continuously shared their excitement about a research project that engages with the same populations and refugee-led initiatives over more than a decade with a participatory approach and research focus. It is clear from these consultations that the long-term element makes ASPIRE unique and highly appreciated across the board. At the same time stakeholders in all consultations agreed with the argument that is put forward in the report: that it is necessary to explore how young refugees are placed in and interact with larger (cross-generational) patterns of conflict and peace rather than looking at them in isolation only.
- The importance of a cross-border element was highlighted by many stakeholders including ECHO, OPM, RLOs and refugees. The refugees and RLOs pointed out the strong flow of people, ideas, narratives and conflict dynamics between South Sudan and the refugee settlements. They found that it would be highly relevant to follow how peacebuilding approaches, tools and messages from life in displacement influence efforts for peaceful coexistence in South Sudan.
- The movements within the local area were also highlighted as an important theme for further investigation, especially by RLOs and refugees. These actors pointed out that the many new arrivals in the settlement strongly influenced the conflict dynamics. Moreover, they stressed

that increasing movement of refugees into towns, including Arua, is very relevant to investigate further as the conflict patterns and peacebuilding structures among these refugees are different from the settlements. Concretely, it was suggested by the RLOs and UNHCR Sub Office that it would add very interesting perspectives to include data from urban areas, e.g. by having a RA based in Arua.

- Many participants pointed out that it would be interesting to explore further the authorities' role(s) in local conflicts and peace endeavours. Questions such as these were raised: When and how are formal authorities involved? In which situations are they contacted? What is their role in informal conflict mediation? And, more broadly, how do the changing development policies and authorities in the rural areas figure into peacebuilding and conflict patterns?
- The potential negative and unintended effects of peacebuilding efforts by implementing organisations, community-driven initiatives and local structures and stakeholders (such as clan leaders, elders and parents) were also mentioned and highlighted as an important point for further investigation. As a refugee mentioned: 'Where do some of these approaches sometimes go wrong? And how can we learn from them?'
- Many participants also mentioned the impact of increasing livelihood precarity as an important factor for conflicts within the refugee community and with host communities. This points to a need to investigate further the effect of livelihood programming, policy and general food (in)security upon conflict patterns and peacebuilding.
- Refugees from specific areas of the settlement pointed out the connection between violence in their home areas and the increasing influx of child soldiers and families with strong links to people who are active in the armed groups in South Sudan, and that this needs further attention to better understand the current conflict triggers.
- Several refugees emphasized the importance of implementing education initiatives for youth and children in order to break the cycle of conflict and violence. While such initiatives are beyond the scope of the ASPIRE project, it should be noted that there is a strong demand for such initiatives among refugees.
- Many participants across the consultations mentioned the need for clearer action points on how the ASPIRE findings should be used in general and how stakeholders in this setting should use them.
- On a different note, the newly elected 'user board' decided to steer clear of the 'user board' term and instead refer to themselves as the ASPIRE Community Forum. In the spirit of participation and community-led decision-making the former term 'user board' will be changed to 'ASPIRE Community Forum'.

In conclusion, the consultations conducted in November and December 2023, after the final draft of the report was written, proved very useful for developments and adjustments of ASPIRE in 2024 and going forward. While some suggestions and feedback will be relevant for the immediate steps of the research in 2024, other suggestions might be brought into the more long-term strategic development of the research project, such as the need to include urban refugees in the research.

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Appendix A.

Organisational structure of ASPIRE

The overall strategic decisions of ASPIRE are taken by the ASPIRE Steering Group (SG), which in 2023 consists of representatives from the two founding parties, DRC and UNHCR, based at HQ-level, regional-level (Nairobi) and country-level (Uganda). The steering group also includes a representative from the University of Copenhagen (UCPH) and representatives from the user boards in the research locations. The ASPIRE User Boards are representatives of the people at the centre of the research, explained in detail below. The SG is expected to grow alongside the expansion of ASPIRE into the planned locations, especially Kenya and South Sudan which are planned for 2024.

ASPIRE is implemented by DRC and managed out of the Global Protection Unit (GPU) in DRC headquarters in Copenhagen under the overall management of the Head of GPU. The PM is the daily manager of the project and the research lead; she has the overall responsibility for the research quality, project deliverables and budget. From August 2023 the ASPIRE team employed a Programme Grants and Finance Officer to support the daily operational and grants management of the project. From October 2023, the team employed a Student Assistant, who supported data-related processes including interview transcribing and mapping exercises implemented at field level. The collaboration

with UCPH means that the research is developed in partnership with a senior academic advisor who follows the data collection closely and provides inputs to the analysis process and research products.

The PM provides technical supervision to a monitoring evaluation accountability and learning (MEAL) officer who is based in Rhino Camp and supports the mapping of stakeholders and facilitates the RA's access to stakeholders and important meetings and events. The MEAL officer also supports the operational management of the project, including internet access, updating equipment, and training on data management. The entire team in Rhino Camp is supported by DRC's MEAL Manager based in DRC's Area Office in Arua, who is the locally based representative of ASPIRE. The daily implementation is also supported by the DRC team in Arua and Rhino Camp, especially the Basecamp Manager and the Area Manager. At country level, ASPIRE is anchored with the DRC's Head of Programme based in Kampala with frequent travel to the field. At regional level, the project is anchored with the Regional Peacebuilding Advisor at DRC's Regional Office in Nairobi, who provides advice on synergies with DRC's regional portfolio and relevant initiatives by other actors in the region.

Appendix B.

Governance structures in Rhino Camp

In 2023, about 64 humanitarian organisations are registered to work with South Sudanese refugees in Uganda (UNHCR 2023) and most of them appear to have activities in Rhino Camp. As in many camp-like refugee settings in this part of the world, most basic infrastructure and services are delivered by humanitarian actors including UN organisations such as UNHCR and WFP. The OPM manages the coordination of core services together with UNHCR. OPM is the Ugandan government body handling all matters relating to refugees, including the determination of refugee status, allocation of land for the refugees, and coordination and management of refugee settlements. OPM is also responsible for issuing Refugee Family Attestation, often referred to as the ‘attestation card’, to refugees upon arrival in Uganda¹².

The differences, and relationships, between four governing institutions in Rhino Camp are critical for understanding the governance of the settlement and the ways decision-making and power relations unfold in practice: the local authorities, the locally elected community leaders, the refugee representatives, and the humanitarian coordination (the latter includes representatives from the other structures) (Degett 2023). The settlement is led by the OPM Settlement Commandant and his office, which includes a range of OPM programme staff corresponding to the relevant sectors of the humanitarian operations. As the name indicates, OPM is managed centrally out of the Prime Minister’s Office in Kampala.

The local community governance structure in Uganda is divided into LCs with a cabinet and a

chairperson at each of five levels from village to district. The LCs are elected by their communities to formally represent their interests. Politically and otherwise, the LCI and LCII members are important figures in the areas around Rhino Camp, not least because they belong to the clans who own the land where the settlement is located¹³. The governance structure in refugee settlements in Uganda mirrors this local governance setup. The equivalent of the LCs are the Refugee Welfare Committees (RWCs), but they only reach the third level (RWCIII), representing an entire refugee settlement. The settlement is divided into seven geographical and administrative zones (Ocea, Siripi, Eden, Tika, Odobu, Ofua, Omugo), each represented by an RWCII cabinet. These are further divided into several clusters, such as Ofua I, Ofua II and Ofua III, each of which is represented by RWCs. These are then divided into blocks represented by Block Leaders. The RWC cabinets consist of roles such as: Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson, Women’s Representative, Representative for the Elderly and People Living with Disability, and other titles, such as security representative and information representative, which are less formal.

* * *

The RWCs’ governance structures, and the chairperson in particular, are centrally important elements of the power dynamics in Rhino Camp, and therefore pivotal for refugees’ participation in decision-making and modalities for conflict prevention, mediation and mitigation. The RWCs serve as the formal intermediaries between the refugee commu-

¹² The more permanent Refugee Identification Card will be used instead of the attestation card once issued (Ryan 2018:9).

¹³ It is not always the case that clan leaders are elected onto the local councils in Uganda, in contrast to South Sudan where chiefs are recognised by national law councils (Leonardi and Santschi 2016:15).

nity on the one hand and the Ugandan authorities and humanitarian actors, on the other. On several occasions during the research RWCs explained their role as like a field extension of OPM, representing the authorities. This puzzled us, as their role could also be seen as somewhat opposite – to represent the refugees’ point of view. Nevertheless, this is a clear indication that the relationship between OPM and the RWC was multi-faceted and involved interests in both directions. The RWC structure was

also key in the interaction between refugees and humanitarian actors, and RWC members were typically the ones invited for the coordination meetings, conflict mediation meetings, etc. This division of governance seems to work effectively, as compared to other camp-settings in the world where refugees are not able or allowed to form representation; but it is not always conflict-free and sometimes fuelled alliances and rivalries across these institutions.

Humanitarian, development and peace (HDP) actors

Yoro Basecamp is the office compound in Rhino Camp. Centrally located in the basecamp is a hexagonal concrete building where the Settlement Commandant and most other OPM staff have their offices. Across from the OPM offices is a line of NGO offices and behind that, a settlement-based police station. DRC and many other international and national NGOs work out of the basecamp, including: Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Save the Children, Humanity and Inclusion (HI), Plan International, World Vision, Oxfam, Zoa, CARE International,

Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation (TPO) and Associazione Centro Aiuti Volontari (ACAV). A few national NGOs, including Rural Initiative for Community Empowerment (RICE) West Nile, have representation in (or nearby) the basecamp. In addition, several large international humanitarian research institutions¹⁴ have research activities in the settlement and often work out of the basecamp. Many of the above NGOs have activities focusing on peacebuilding, peaceful coexistence, mediation and root causes of conflict.

¹⁴ These included large international actors such as: IMPACT Initiatives and Ground Truth Solutions.

Abbreviations and acronyms

ACAV	Associazione Centro Aiuti Volontari
AGD	Age, Gender and Diversity
AGDM	Age, Gender and Diversity Mainstreaming
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ASPIRE	Aspiring for Peace and Inclusion Research
CARE	Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere
CBO	Community-based Organisation
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standards
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
DR Congo	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
EU	European Union
EU INTPA	EU International Partnerships
FEWS NET	Famine Early Warning System Network
HDP	Humanitarian Development and Peace (actors or interventions)
HI	Humanity & Inclusion
HQ	Headquarters
IRC	International Rescue Committee
LC	Local Council (local governance structure in Uganda)
MEAL	Monitoring Evaluation Accountability and Learning
NAS	National Salvation Front (South Sudan)
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NWoW	New Way of Working
OECD DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister (Uganda)
PM	Programme Manager
R-ARCSS	Revitalised Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in the Republic of South Sudan
RA	Research Assistant
ReDSS	Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat
RICE	Rural Initiative for Community Empowerment
RLO	Refugee-led Organisation
RWC	Refugee Welfare Committee (Uganda)
RYPP	Regional Youth Peacebuilding Project
SG	Steering Group
SPLA-IO	Sudan People's Liberation Army-in-Opposition (sometimes referred to as IO)
TPO	Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation
UCPH	University of Copenhagen
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UNMISS	UN Mission in South Sudan
WFP	World Food Programme



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