

DYNAMICS OF YOUTH AND VIOLENCE
FINDINGS FROM RUBKONA COUNTY, UNITY STATE

MAY 2017

FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Qualitative field research for this study was conducted in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Protection of Civilians (POC) site, Rubkona and Bentiu towns and in the rural areas of Ding-Ding and Kaljaak (Rubkona county) as well as Nimni (Guit county) between 19 April and 5 May 2017 (see map 1). The analysis combines existing studies and reports collected in a literature review with empirical findings from 55 field interviews. The interviews were semi-structured in format, some held with key informants (30) and others with groups of people as Focus Groups Discussions (FGDs) (25), mostly with young men in the research areas although discussions were also held with young women and with elders. A total of 112 people participated in the FGDs. The report relies on extensive quotes from research informants that assist in relaying local perspectives and understandings by young people. All Informants have been anonymised; where referenced in this report, names of local informants participating in field interviews have been changed. The research team is very grateful to the South Sudanese stakeholders and international aid officials who volunteered their time and energy to meet with the Danish Demining Group (DDG) research team and discuss these issues.

The research was conducted in challenging security and political conditions with time constraints, and all findings are exploratory. Challenges include limited research time in the field to address sensitive issues around youth dynamics and violence in the UNMISS POC site that require building trust and relationships. It also included a militarized and tense environment in Bentiu and Rubkona towns (the closest DRC areas of operation outside the POC) with limited time and space for discussions; and the absence of men in rural areas due to ongoing military recruitment across Rubkona county. It was also challenging to identify and approach the core target group of this research: youth involved in organized armed violence or hard to reach young people in towns and in the POC, as it takes time to build those kinds of social networks. In rural areas, while easier to identify cattle-keepers with a history of violence, most young men were in hiding.

Research locations were selected by considering security and practical concerns as well as areas where Danish Demining Group (DDG) is interested in expanding its activities, both within the POC and the two towns. Efforts were made to gather wider youth perspectives from rural areas also of programmatic interest to DRC, with visits to Ding-Ding and Kaljaak (Rubkona county) and Nimni (Guit county) (see map1). The overall purpose of the report is to improve DRC/DDG's understanding of push and pull factors for young people's involvement in violence both within the Bentiu POC and in areas outside of the POC within Rubkona county.

The contents of this report are the ideas and opinions of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the organization or the donor agency.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ARCISS	Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan
AVR	Armed Violence Reduction
CHC	Community High Committee
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CWG	Community Watch Group
DRC/DDG	Danish Refugee Council/Danish Demining Group
FPU	Formed Police Unit (UNMISS)
FSL	Food Security and Livelihoods
IGAD	Inter-Governmental Authority for Development
IMDRM	Informal Mediation for Dispute Resolution Mechanism
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
N4/N8	Nuer 4 / Nuer 8
NCP	National Congress Party
NP	Non-Violent Peace Force
POC	Protection of Civilians (site)
RRP	Relief Reintegration and Protection (UNMISS)
SPLM/A	Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army
SPLM/A–IO	Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army–In Opposition
SSDF	South Sudan Defence Forces
SSIM/A	South Sudan Independence Movement/Army
SSP	South Sudanese Pound (currency)
SSNPS	South Sudan National Police Service
SSUM/A	South Sudan Unity Movement/Army (SSUM/A)
UNMISS	United Nations Mission in South Sudan
UNPOL	United Nations Police (UNMISS)
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VISTAS	Viable Support to Transition and Stability
WFP	World Food Programme
YTF	Youth Task Force

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The report explores some of the issues facing male youth in the United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) Bentiu Protection of Civilian (POC) site and in both urban and rural areas of Rubkona county. First, the report explores meanings of “youth” as a social category and dynamics of youth and violence in the current war. It considers ‘types’ of youth and lack of meaningful livelihoods, drawing on the different yet interrelated challenges for urban and rural youth. Second, it explores the dynamics of young men who are joining what are often referred to in South Sudan as ‘nigga’ groups in the Bentiu POC, the social meanings behind these groups and the motivations to join them, the criminalization of groups, and its tenuous connections to the wider political conflict. Third, it considers the challenges young men are facing in establishing themselves as adults with regard to marriage, cattle and bridewealth. Fourth, the report discusses voluntary and forced recruitment of young people in organized armed forces, young men’s concerns and involvement in violence. The report concludes with a discussion of existing humanitarian activities targeting youth and possible recommended activities, which could motivate changes in behaviour, before offering some recommendations to DRC/DDG youth engagement programming.

The population in the POC, towns and rural areas around Rubkona is transient and on the move between the various locations. Young people across the various areas are facing similar challenges and the report draws on commonalities, while also seeking to highlight some of the nuances between the various areas. Some key findings include:

- “Youth” as a social category is broad, wide and contested, formally ranging from 18–40 years old. “Youth” is a gendered term, more closely associated with male youth, referring to individuals from roughly early puberty, from 14 to their mid-30s, and is often connected to the role that young men are expected to play in providing for and protecting their community. For women, the division between ‘girl’ and ‘woman’ is less connected to age and more to whether she has married and had children and therefore gained some status in society. One significant challenge facing many young men is the inability to fulfil social expectations of manhood and of their roles as heads of household and provide for their families.
- There are various understandings of ‘teams’, ‘gangs’ or what are most often locally known as ‘nigga’ groups. The latter has no negative racial undertones, rather associated to American hip-hop culture and its subversive contestation.¹ ‘Nigga’ groups are composed of mostly young men (but also more fluid female members) who coalesce together as a social group with a particular type of moral order seeking to connect to a wider global culture, who sometimes also engage in criminal activities and fighting among themselves.
- Although many of the young men joining ‘nigga’ groups are not criminals, their behaviour and alternative styles are criminalized by the rest of society and even by other niggas. Rather, ‘nigga’ groups should also be understood as both a social and economic community, providing members with a sense of belonging, identity, protection, a coping mechanism and support system, and a means to make sense of their role in a militarized Nuer society as young men in the current context. The research also found that there is no institutional connection between ‘nigga’ groups in the POC and wider political dynamics in Unity state, nor are ‘nigga’ groups used as a tool for military mobilization.
- To be recognised as full adults, male and female youth in South Sudan must marry and build a family. Deprived of their livelihoods and made destitute by cattle raids over this war, many young men in Rubkona, especially those in the POC and towns, are unable to marry and thus establish themselves in the community as full adults. This issue contributes to tensions and frustration among young men and leads to alternative practices such as eloping as a means to marry with high potential to escalate to violence between families. It is also often a consideration for young men to enlist in militias and can also contribute to cattle-raiding as a means to access resources for marriage. Bridewealth has increased and is in many cases not paid in cattle, but in money.
- People in Unity state have experienced extreme circumstances of violence since the beginning of the war in 2013. On the one hand, people are reluctant to project into the future, focusing on the necessity to survive in the present. Simultaneously, life has continued with marriages and bridewealth sometimes agreed to be paid “when peace comes”. Across rural areas in Rubkona county, cattle *luaks* are being built. Such practices indicate that people are planning ahead and envisioning a future beyond the war.

¹ See explanations of the term also in McCrone, F. 2016. *Justice displaced – field notes on criminality and insecurity in South Sudan’s UN Protection of Civilian Sites*, A report by Justice Africa; Ibreck, R. and Pendle, N. 2016. *Customary Protection? Chiefs’ courts as public authority in UN Protection of Civilian sites in South Sudan*, The Justice and Security Research Programme, London: London School of Economics; Lui, M. and Pendle, N. 2015, “The ‘Niggers’ of Bentiu (western Nuer): Contesting public authority in a context of violence, uncertainty and the UN’s modernity”, Paper presented at the 6th European Conference on African Studies, 8th – 10th July 2015, Paris. Unpublished; Sommers, M and S. Schwartz, 2011, *Dowry and Division Youth and State Building in South Sudan*, United States Institute for Peace: Washington; Martin, E. and I. Mosel, 2011, *City limits: urbanisation and vulnerability in Sudan Juba case study*, Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute: London; Schomerus, M. and T. Allen, 2010. *Southern Sudan at odds with itself: Dynamics of conflict and predicaments of peace*, London School of Economics: London.

- Peace can only be achieved through a concerted national-level inclusive political process that also acknowledges people's grievances and seeks to address these. Dynamics of violence in Unity state have largely become detached from the broader dynamics of the national civil war. The war has divided young people who have been instrumentalised by military and political leaders to fight each other. Intra-Nuer violence, where youth have been as much perpetrators as victims, will need to be considered and addressed when a national level peace agreement is reached. In the meantime, young people need help in channelling their energy positively and in providing some hope and planning for the future.

SOME 'DO'S AND DONT'S' ON CONFLICT IMPACT MITIGATION

The environment in Bentiu POC and other operational areas in Rubkona is very volatile and humanitarian staff should always act in a conflict sensitive manner, considering the impact their actions and programming decisions can have on the wider conflict. Below are some suggestions on what actions youth-focused programmes should consider to be conflict sensitive:

Be mindful of gatekeepers of activities and events. Consider how individuals that the programme engages with are situated in the wider community and think about and understand their interests, priorities and concerns. Be mindful about how certain individuals can act as gatekeepers with their own interests and their community's in mind, considering elite capture and diversion of resources to particular groups.

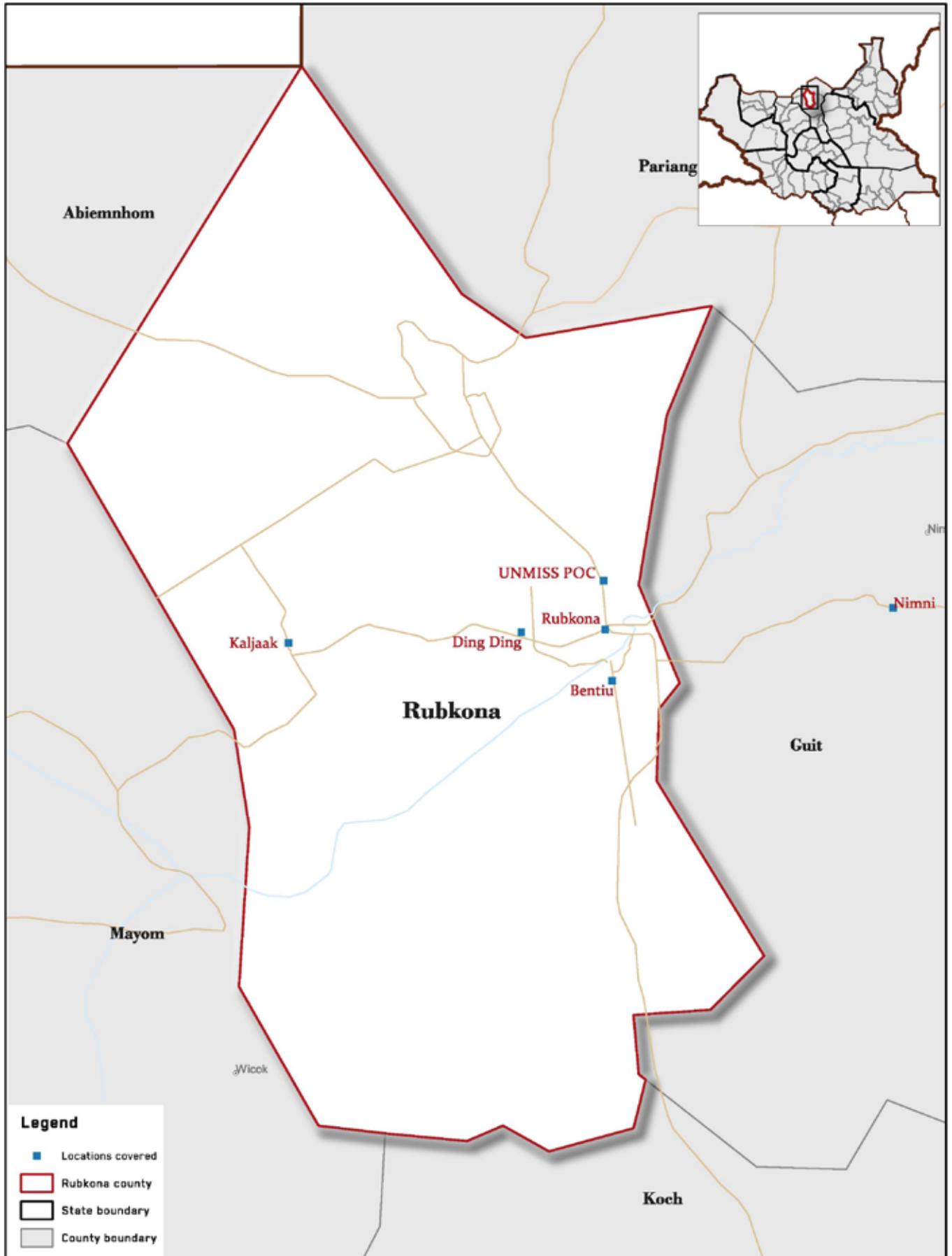
Support dialogue forums that are well prepared, inclusive and involve all relevant actors. Youth-focused programmes may want to support dialogue forums (for example between youth groups, all-women groups, or inter-generational between youth and elders). Staff must make sure that proper preparation is placed into these forums and that they are not rushed, which could otherwise lead to further tension between participants and inadvertently contribute to conflict. Dialogue forums are important, but not fruitful and can even be detrimental if they exclude key groups and individuals. Instead, poorly prepared forums can enhance grievances and lay the foundations for further conflict.

Consider impact of partnerships and relationships with formal and informal authorities. While it is very important to work alongside government authorities and other formal leadership, staff must consider the popular legitimacy of certain formal and informal authorities and consider how close the organization should be associated with certain parties, who may be themselves parties to a conflict. Working too closely with a party to the conflict can cause resentment and reinforce conflict actors.

Mitigate the negative impact of aid on gender relations. The challenges that men in the POC are facing in providing materially for their families is impacting gender relations. That vacuum to provide is partially being filled by humanitarian actors. This can have conflict sensitivity implications, which can be both positively and negatively channeled and should thus be considered.

Targeting and distribution of aid or of training opportunities can reinforce and create grievances. Staff should be aware that distribution of aid that reflects conflict lines can fuel tensions and increase conflict. This also applies to the selection of participants in training opportunities.

FIELD SITES VISITED IN RUBKONA AND GUIT



INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY/ YOUTH DYNAMICS AND VIOLENCE

The civil war that started on 15 December 2013 in South Sudan has led to mass displacement, high inflation, disruption of harvests and livelihoods, soaring food prices and a severe economic crisis which have severely affected South Sudan's civilian population. The extended economic crisis in the country caused an inflation of 835.7% in 2016; by February 2017, over 1.6 million South Sudanese had found refuge in neighboring countries and 1.89 million South Sudanese were internally displaced, with 224,000 of those seeking protection in POC sites located in the UNMISS peacekeeping bases.²

The POC site in Bentiu in Unity state³ remains by far the largest, currently hosting some 120,000 people, showing no signs of decreasing despite pressure from the government and efforts by humanitarian actors to roll out the ambitious 'Beyond Bentiu Strategy'.⁴ As a result of livelihoods deliberately decimated by continued conflict and escalating economic decline, with cattle raiding used as a weapon of war and crops destroyed or planting missed due to violence and displacement, by February 2017, some 4.9 million people - more than one in every three South Sudanese - were estimated to be severely food insecure across South Sudan. On 20 February 2017, a famine was declared in Leer and Mayendit counties in southern Unity state, with over 100,000 people calculated to be at risk of starvation.⁵

In a number of ways, Unity state continues to be the political and military stage of the ongoing war. But the dynamics of the current conflict in Unity are also historically entrenched and can be traced to how the second civil war was conducted. Even if and when a higher level political solution is found, the patchwork of local intra-Nuer conflicts in Unity state further encouraged and instrumentalised during this war will require specific attention, with a focus on community reconciliation and retribution. Ongoing recruitment of young men and boys especially in Guit and Rubkona remains a serious issue, currently pushing young men from rural areas to the POC. There is also active fighting in north-east Unity and in southern Unity as the government seeks to gain territory in the last weeks of the dry season. There are at least four formal military entities in Unity state: the government's SPLA, the SPLA-IO 1 aligned with former first vice-president Riek Machar, the SPLA-IO 2 aligned to current first vice-president Taban Deng Gai mostly composed of Jikany Nuer from Guit county, and the Bul Nuer militia under the leadership of Matthew Puljang, the latter three divided loosely along Nuer sub-sections and connected to different geographical areas of Unity state. There are also groups of armed cattle camp youth loosely associated with different parties. Young people have been both the greatest perpetrators and victims in this war, instrumentalised by political and military leaders to fight while also deprived of a future, of livelihoods, marriage and of establishing themselves as meaningful members of society.

Drawing from 18 days of intensive field research in April and May 2017, this report explores some of the issues facing male youth in the Bentiu POC and in both urban and rural areas of Rubkona county (see map 1). The population in the POC, towns and rural areas around Rubkona is transient and on the move between the various locations. Young people across the various areas are facing similar challenges and the report draws on commonalities, while also seeking to highlight some of the nuances between the various areas. The report begins by providing some overall context of Unity and a brief history of the second civil war in Unity state and its connections to the ongoing conflict. It also provides a basic timeline of the war in Bentiu and Rubkona towns as well as of the emergence and current dynamics of the Bentiu POC.

It then turns to the focus of the research, exploring meanings of "youth" as a social category and dynamics of youth and violence in the current war. First, the 'types' of youth and lack of meaningful livelihoods, considering the different yet interrelated challenges for urban and rural youth. The next section explores the dynamics of young men who are joining 'nigga' groups in the Bentiu POC, the social meanings behind these groups and the motivations to join them,

² UN OCHA, 2017. South Sudan Humanitarian Snapshot February 2017, UN OCHA Available at: http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/20170310_South_Sudan_Humanitarian_Snapshot_Feb%20%281%29.pdf

³ This report refers to the former Unity State, as known under the former 10 states administrative system. The government has since reorganized administrative divisions under the proposed '28 state' and '32 state' models, both of which are currently opposed by various parties across opposition factions.

⁴ International Organisation for Migration, Site Profile Bentiu PoC – 1-15 January 2017. Available at: http://iomsouthsudan.org/tracking/sites/default/publicfiles/documents/20170126%20Bentiu_Site_Profile_Jan_17.pdf

⁵ See IPC – Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, 2017. *Republic of South Sudan: Current and Projected (January-July 2017) Acute Food Insecurity Situation*, 24 January 2017. Available at: <http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipcinfo-detail-forms/ipcinfo-map-detail/en/c/471270/>; UN FAO, 2017. *Famine declared in parts of South Sudan*, 20 February 2017. Available at: <http://www.fao.org/emergencies/fao-in-action/stories/stories-detail/en/c/471297/>

the criminalization of groups, and its tenuous connections to the wider conflict.⁶ Third, it considers the challenges young men are facing in establishing themselves as adults with regard to marriage, cattle and bridewealth. Forth, the report discusses voluntary and forced recruitment of young people in organized armed forces, young men's concerns and involvement in violence. The report concludes with a discussion of existing humanitarian activities targeting youth and possible recommended activities, which could motivate changes in behaviour, before offering some recommendations to DRC/DDG youth engagement programming.

A VERY BRIEF HISTORY OF THE SECOND CIVIL WAR IN UNITY STATE: POLITICAL ORCHESTRATION, YOUTH MOBILISATION AND CATTLE RAIDING

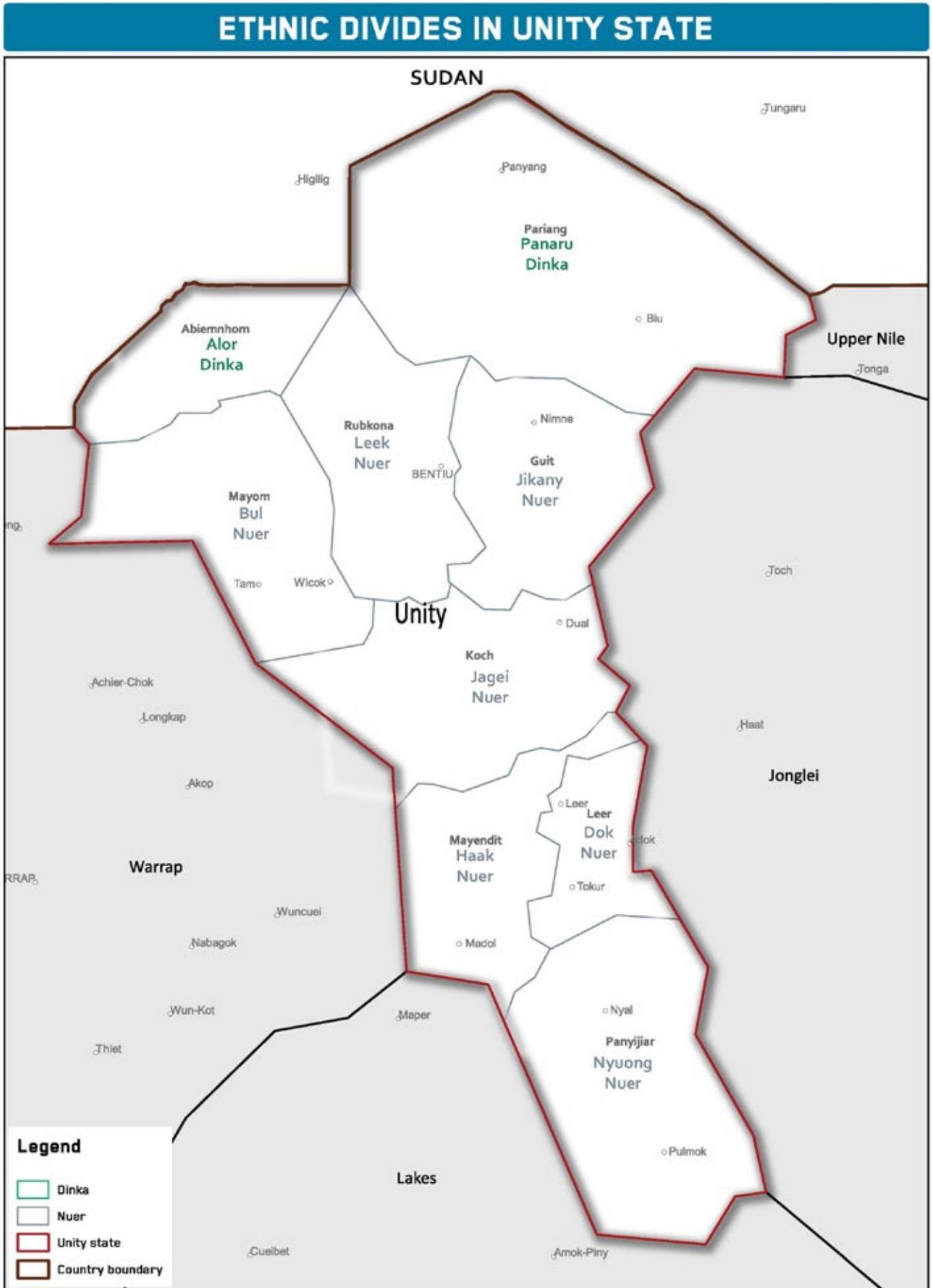
Unity state is a predominantly Nuer state, with Abiemnom and Pariang in the north of Unity as the only non-Nuer areas, with branches of the Padang Dinka living in these two counties (see map 2). The Nuer are however divided into a number of sections and sub-sections which largely coincide with how different groups have sided in the current war. Contrary to elsewhere in South Sudan where political manipulations have promoted conflict between different ethnic groups, in Unity state political instrumentalisation has largely pitted different Nuer sections against each other.

The dynamics of the current war in Unity state – including the use of ethnic militias and the adoption of cattle-raiding as a weapon of war – can be traced to how the second civil war in Sudan played out. During the later stages of Sudan's second civil war (1983-2005) Unity state was the site of a 'Nuer civil war', as Khartoum-supported Bul Nuer forces led by Paulino Matiep from Mayom county that fought against Riek Machar's dissenting SPLA forces, also sponsored by Khartoum. These clashes were partially related to competition for the governorship of Unity state in 1997, when Matiep integrated his South Sudan Unity Movement/Army (SSUM/A) into the South Sudan Defence Forces (SSDF), an umbrella group of Khartoum-backed forces in southern Sudan that also included Machar's forces.⁷ While the National Congress Party (NCP) backed fellow Bul Nuer Joseph Nguen Monytil Wejang for the role, Machar backed Taban Deng Gai, a Jikany Nuer from Guit county, and Paulino Matiep backed another candidate. When Taban Deng got the position, Matiep decided to leave the SSDF, provoking a dispute between the Bul Nuer around Matiep and Machar's South Sudan Independence Movement/ Army (SSIM/A). Craze and Tubiana argue that this political rivalry continues to be one of the core strains behind the current conflict in Unity: "At the root of these sometimes dizzying shifts of loyalty is a basic opposition between the Bul Nuer commanders around Matiep and the politicians around Machar and Taban Deng. These two groups contest power in Unity, and while their alliances with external actors—be it Khartoum or Juba—are largely conditional, the rivalry is enduring."⁸

⁶ The report also builds from findings from a joint DRC and NP *Rapid Qualitative Assessment of Youth in Bentiu Protection of Civilians Site, Unity State, South Sudan* conducted in October 2014.

⁷ Craze, J., J. Tubiana with C. Gramizzi, 2016. *A State of Disunity: Conflict Dynamics in Unity State, South Sudan, 2013–15*, December 2016, Small Arms Survey: Geneva

⁸ Craze and Tubiana, p. 10.



THE VALUE OF CATTLE

Among the Western Nuer, cattle are not only fundamental for physical survival and livelihoods, cattle are “the principal means by which Nuer create[d] and affirm[ed] enduring bonds among themselves as well as between themselves and divinity.”⁹ Cattle are the basis of social support networks that ensure that the most vulnerable are protected in times of crisis and hardship. The links and bonds established through cattle exchanges ensures that resources are pooled together and shared acting as social insurance, ensuring social cohesion and resilience.

Cattle permeate most aspects of social, emotional, economic and political life and are much more than simply an economic asset. Cows are exchanged as gifts and fundamental in asserting links between families, including through bridewealth and marriage thus contributing to increase people’s social capital. Cattle are also important in maintaining social links between people in rural areas with those in towns as well as abroad in the diaspora. Although some people in the POC still have cattle being cared for by their relatives in rural areas, the majority have lost all their cattle and are using the POC as a last resort.¹⁰

Cycles of cattle raiding are part of the social and economic dynamics between neighbouring agro-pastoralist communities that occur outside of a political conflict setting, and are usually solved by returning stolen cattle and if someone is killed, through the payment of compensation. The last years, however, have seen cattle-raiding used as a weapon of war and as a means of making entire populations destitute.¹¹ Since the start of the war and particularly since 2015, Bul Nuer of Mayom have been allied to the government and simultaneously carrying out their own cattle-raiding agenda, thus becoming richer while Leek, Jagey and western Jikany from Rubkona, Koch and Guit – where much of the fighting has taken place – have become poorer.¹² Southern Unity has seen some of the worst abuses of the current civil war, especially during the two dry-season offensives of January to February 2014 and May to June 2015. As a result of these offensives, much of the population of southern Unity became destitute and unable to sustain itself, forcing many people to move to the Bentiu POC. Offensives have involved aggressive raiding and looting with a twofold purpose: “It destroyed the resources of the southern Nuer, ‘punishing’ them for supporting the SPLM–IO, and it also offered a means by which the raiders could accumulate resources in a war economy.”¹³ According to Craze and Tubiana, and confirmed during this field research, Leek and Dok Nuer displaced from southern and central Unity to the Bentiu POC “openly call the Bul Nuer ‘Dinka’ and talk about taking revenge once the political situation has changed”,¹⁴ blaming them for aligning with the government and raiding southern Unity. The southern offensives saw largely previously unseen intra-Nuer sectional raiding pitting different Nuer sections against each other as well as tensions within Nuer sections.

RUBKONA COUNTY AND THE BENTIU POC

Rubkona and Bentiu towns changed hands between government forces and opposition forces multiple times since the start of the conflict, until government secured the towns in May 2014 (see timeline below).¹⁵ Civilians began entering the UNMISS Bentiu base on 18 December 2013. By April 2014, after intense armed clashes and serious human rights violations, the SPLA-IO re-captured Bentiu town leading to an increase of people seeking protection in the UNMISS POC site to 40,000.¹⁶ From May 2014 to April 2015, the population of the Bentiu POC remained stable. The first POC site that was established is known as POC 1 and first accommodated Dinka civilians and military officers who went to UNMISS fearing possible Nuer revenge against the massacre of Nuer in Juba. The changing demographics of the POC reflects different stages of the war; it is simultaneously a microcosm of the external dynamics in Unity as well shielded from the wider conflict dynamics. In the early stages of the war when SPLA forces retook Bentiu on 10 January 2014, the camp hosted in roughly equal parts Dinka who had fled the initial violence, Nuer escaping the government’s recapture and foreign traders. Since then, the camp has become nearly totally Nuer as people fled the SPLA and its aligned militia forces offensives in southern Unity. With some 120,000 people, the Bentiu POC can be considered one of the largest towns in South Sudan (see figures 1 and 2).

⁹ Hutchinson, S. 1992. ‘The Cattle of Money and the Cattle of Girls among the Nuer, 1930-83’, *American Ethnologist* Vol. 19, No. 2 (May, 1992), pp. 294-316, p. 296.

¹⁰ USAID (compiled by N. Pendle). 2015. *Cattle and pastoralism in Greater Upper Nile – research report: socio-political sections of enquiry and central questions*, USAID and VSF unpublished report. On file with the author.

¹¹ See Tubiana, J. 2015. *Cattle and pastoralism in Unity state – research report*, USAID and VSF unpublished report. On file with the author; Craze and Tubiana, 2016; and Felix da Costa, D., N. Pendle and J. Tubiana, forthcoming. “*What is happening now is not raiding, it’s war*”: *Pastoralism and changing repertoires of violence among the Western Nuer and the Murle during South Sudan’s Civil Wars*.

¹² Tubiana, 2015. p. 23.

¹³ Craze and Tubiana, p. 88-91.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 14-15.

¹⁵ For a more detailed account see Craze and Tubiana, 2016.

¹⁶ For an account of the changing dynamics of the POCs see Arensen, M. 2016. ‘If we leave we are killed’: Lessons Learned from South Sudan Protection of Civilian Sites 2013–2016, IOM South Sudan: Juba.



Figure 1. Bentiu PoC, May 2017

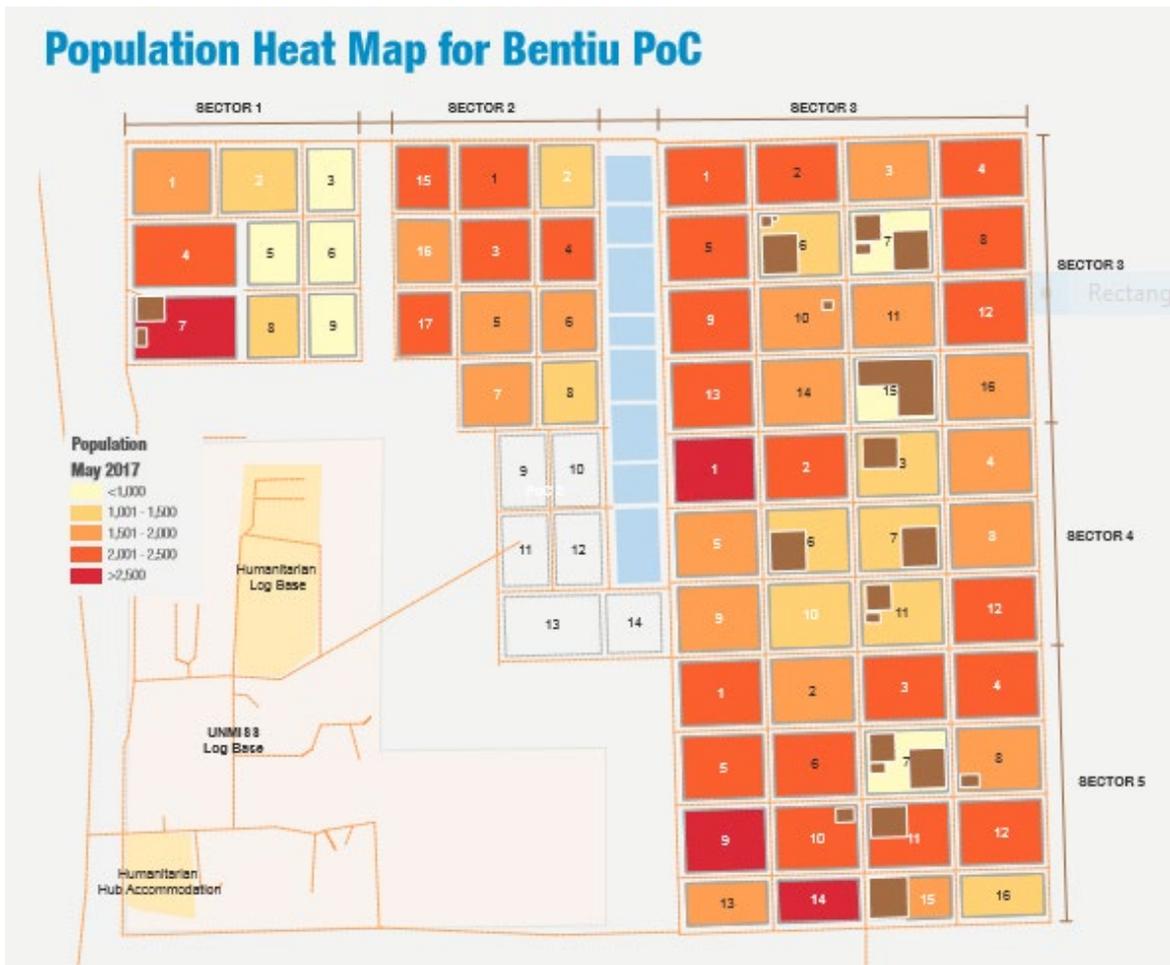


Figure 2 Population Heat Map for Bentiu PoC, 29-31 May 2017¹⁷

¹⁷ South Sudan Camp Coordination and Camp Management, Population Count Bentiu PoC 29-31 May 2017. Available at: http://iomsouthsudan.org/tracking/sites/default/publicfiles/documents/20170606%20Bentiu_Population_Count%20May_2_Infographics.pdf

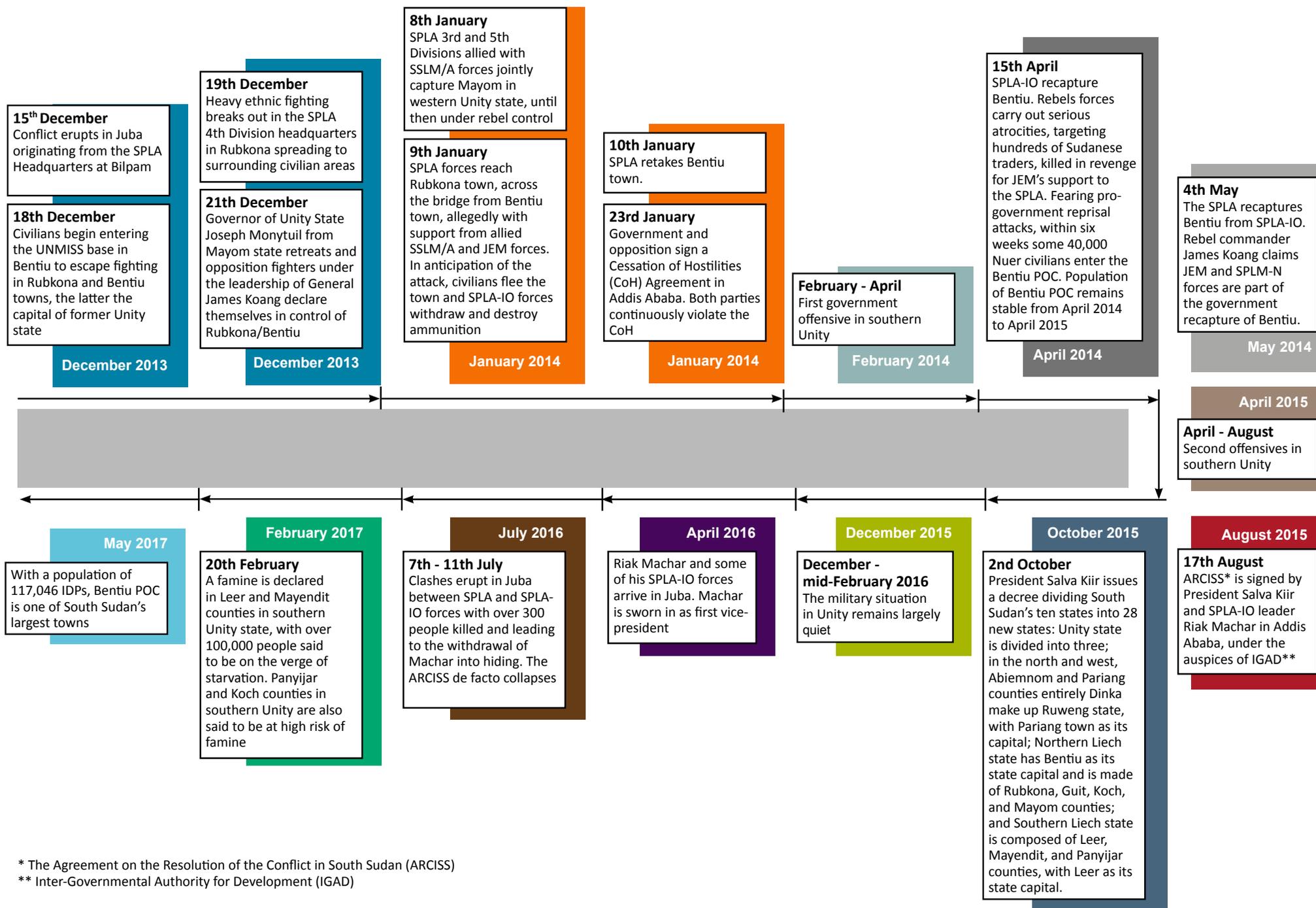
Government sees civilians in the POC as either rebels, or at the very least SPLA-IO 1 sympathisers. Civilians regard the Bentiu PoC as a safe haven, often making use of it as a last resort. For many who travel from southern Unity and who have seen their cattle taken, and for those in Rubkona who risk forced recruitment by pro-government forces, the POC represents the only option. In many cases, families split as a means to spread risks across different frontlines. Households use the PoC as a coping strategy.¹⁸ The end of the dry season coincides with the hunger gap in South Sudan; the POC is also used as a coping strategy in this regard. Considering a high level political agreement is reached and security improves across Unity, it remains uncertain how, if and when POC residents will be able to leave the camp and re-establish their lives without cattle and livestock.

During the research period in May 2017, the government, through the SPLA and its allied SPLA-IO 2 forces, was in control of Abiemnom, Pariang, Mayom and Guit counties as well as much of Rubkona. They were also in control of various garrison towns such as Pakur and Koch towns in Koch, Leer town in Leer and Mayendit and Rubkon towns in Mayendit. In turn, the SPLM-IO maintained control of most rural areas in southern Unity, including in Rubkona, Koch, Leer, Mayendit and Panyijar counties. Apart from Rubkona county largely sympathetic to IO 1 but controlled by the government, most territorial control mirrors the ethnic splits and political divisions that have characterized this war. On one side, the Dinka and Bul Nuer areas supporting the SPLA, as well as since mid-2016 the Jikany Nuer in Guit largely supporting first vice president Taban Deng allied to government; on the other side, most of southern Nuer allied to the SPLM-IO.

Due to lack of arms and ammunition and the inability to successfully recruit in Unity, SPLA-IO 1 has been almost entirely militarily defeated in the state, even though large segments of the population are sympathisers and continue to support it. According to the Small Arms Survey, neither parties have managed to secure and access supplies. Despite the SPLM/A-IO 1's close to military defeat in Unity, the Nuer population, with the exception of the Bul Nuer, remain resentful about the Nuer massacres in Juba in December 2013 and the government's southern offensives.

As in previous years, the intensity and type of warfare changes with the seasons with intense clashes diminishing with the rains due to the inability to move. With the rains, IO-1 troops stationed across the border in Sudan will be able to access water and move south engaging in tactical hit-and-run warfare. Having "survived" the predicted dry season SPLA offensives, IO 1 is likely to increase the intensity of their attacks during the coming rainy season, when the government's military superiority in terms of heavy equipment and vehicles will be less effective.

¹⁸ See Office of the Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator for South Sudan, 2016. *Crisis Impacts on households in Unity state, South Sudan 2014-2015 – Initial results of a survey*, January 2016, United Nations Office of the Deputy Humanitarian Coordinator for South Sudan: Juba



* The Agreement on the Resolution of the Conflict in South Sudan (ARCISS)

** Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD)

THE SITUATION OF YOUTH

The following research findings offer insights into the ways in which the ongoing war is affecting the lives of young men in the Bentiu POC and in urban and rural areas of Rubkona county. Although young people within and outside the POC experience the war differently, they share the same challenges and in many instances use the POC as a social safety net, moving in and out according to need. For this reason, the following sections present findings through themes, distinguishing sometimes the nuances between locations. Specific recommendations to DRC/DDG follow the discussion of findings.

UNDERSTANDING “YOUTH”: MEANINGS AND TYPOLOGIES

“Youth are the eyes of the community, they are the ones who see the challenges facing their community. Youth are the ones pushing for their rights, for example if NGOs are not providing good services. Before the war, the role of youth was to protect the community. Youth are the ones cultivating, providing for the community. Youth are strong people who can protect the land and work to provide food to their family.”¹⁹

In South Sudan, “youth” as a social category is broad, wide and contested, formally ranging from 18 – 40. In practice, “youth” is usually a gendered term, more closely associated with male youth, referring to individuals from roughly early puberty, from 14 to their mid-30s, and is often connected to the role that young men are expected to play in providing for and protecting their community. As noted by one young man in Nimni, “youth are people who are still strong, and able to do things old men can’t, and reach places women can’t.”²⁰ In this sense, there are certain responsibilities that fall neither on women nor on older men. Rather, there are certain social responsibilities attached to being considered “youth”, and within these a number of sub-categories. While there is a shared sense of provision and protection of the community, rural and urban youth have different roles in society. For a woman in a cattle camp in Nimni, “The role of youth is to go and bring resources and good income to the community. In a village it will involve constructing the home and the *luak*²¹ and cutting firewood. In town, he will look for employment.”²² In both cases, it will involve provision and protection to the family, clan and community. But this also relates to the militarization of youth in South Sudan, and as noted by Rolandsen and Breidlid in relation to Jonglei, “perceptions of youth in Jonglei encompass most able bodied boys and men.”²³ Similarly, one man in Ding-Ding connected definitions of youth with forced recruitment, suggesting that youth were all those targeted by government in their forced recruitment campaign: “If the government isn’t after us, it’s because we are no longer considered youth.”²⁴ Some informants suggested the Nuer term for youth is *nguegni*, but this term was previously used specifically in reference to scarified youth and most often when discussing youth in Nuer, the Arabic term ‘shabab’ is used.

For women, the division between ‘girl’ and ‘woman’ is less connected to age and more to whether she has married and had children and therefore gained some status in society. However, her age, possibly until late 30s will still determine if she is a married female youth or a married woman no longer considered ‘youth’.

One significant challenge facing many young men is the inability to fulfil social expectations of manhood and of their roles as heads of household and provide for their families. One elder from the Chiefs Court in Bentiu explained that “Humanitarians have become the husbands of our ladies. They’re the ones buying them food, clothes and shoes. There’s a woman whose husband lives in Sudan and called for her to go there. She told her husband she couldn’t come to Sudan because humanitarians are providing for us here. Humanitarians have become our husbands”.²⁵ These changing gender dynamics and expectations can have conflict sensitivity implications for organisations. Humanitarian actors should be mindful of how their material support inadvertently challenges manhood and how men and women relate to each other, considering ways of mitigating the negative aspects of these changes.

¹⁹ Kuol, 28 years old, Bentiu POC 20/04/2017.

²⁰ Matthew, Nimni, 01/05/2017

²¹ A *luak* is the shelter constructed to house cattle, especially in the rainy season.

²² Nyadang, 18 years old, Nimni 01/05/2017.

²³ Rolandsen, O. and I.M. Breidlid, 2013. What is Youth Violence in Jonglei, PRIO Paper, Oslo: Peace Research Institute Oslo.

²⁴ Stephen, 42 years old, Ding Ding, 26/04/2017.

²⁵ Member of the Chief’s Court Bentiu, 05/05/2017.

'TYPES' OF YOUTH AND LACK OF LIVELIHOODS

The lives of young people in South Sudan are characterized by conflict-induced displacement and movement between various locations. The 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement saw many families return to Southern Sudan with expectations for a better life in the new nation. Many of those young men of today grew up in Khartoum or in east African urban dwellings as refugees, acquired an education and exposure, and partially by consequence also alternative political and moral codes. Making sense of life in Bentiu town, and since the crisis of December 2013, life in the Bentiu POC is a constant negotiation with their age-mates from rural areas and elders. As explained by one young man, "Rural youth are different from urban youth. We speak a different language even if it's the same mother tongue. I cannot just go to the cattle camp and dance their songs. We have our own style."²⁶

The mix of urban and rural youth in the POC has also made these differences more prominent. One young woman who had spent time in the POC but left and returned to her home area of Kaljaak offered insights into the distinctions between urban and rural youth: "When I was in POC, the youth have groups and are fighting with each group every day and they are calling us primitive. But it was our first time to see such a thing in our life. And we were told that those days in Bentiu and Rubkona they were doing the same. But for us, we only love to go after the cattle and have nothing to do with fighting."²⁷

Indeed, the POC has become home for young people from all counties of Unity state, both urban and rural, with different journeys, livelihoods, experiences and expectations, which are also being negotiated in the POC. In this sense, young men and women are also moving across 'categories' of youth, as well as geographical locations.

Relations between young men in the POC are partially shaped by the wider political dynamics of the current conflict which have used cattle keepers for military advancements, allowing them to loot and raid cattle and other belongings of different communities. Pro-government militias of Bul Nuer of Mayom and since mid-2016 of Jikany Nuer of Guit have benefited from government offensives in southern Unity. As cattle guards lose their cattle and become destitute, they have few options than move to the POC and mingle with urban youth.

Young men who have deliberately chosen to remain inside the POC are also taking a stance in this conflict, actively choosing not to fight. But in a militarized society where masculinity and status are in great part proven through one's ability to protect the community and provide for the family and household, young men in the POC are struggling to establish what kind of contribution they can make to protect their communities, provide for the family and most importantly assert their position in society. Young people in the POC and those outside are exposed and attracted to different types of violence. The POC hosts both rural and urban youth but 'nigga' groups discussed below are mostly from a broadly urban background and tend to get involved in competition fighting between youth groups and petty criminal acts. Rural youth in the POC in most cases chose to move after losing their cattle and possibly having temporarily joined IO as soldiers. At the moment, young men from Rubkona county are also moving to the POC to escape military recruitment. Outside the POC, young men are at risk of enlisting with armed groups, being forcefully recruited and exposed to cattle raids. In this context, the lack of opportunities for young men to assert their masculinity can also act as a driver for violence.

RURAL YOUTH, CATTLE AND THE TAKING OF LIVELIHOODS

The accumulation of cattle has both driven and been driven by the recruitment of young men or cattle guards on all sides of the conflict, motivated by aspirations to increase their herds. Young men in rural areas can be easily and quickly mobilized for community defence, to raid cattle and recover cattle raided, as well as retaliatory attacks. These fluid groups are loose and opportunistic structures with a particular purpose and goal that often disperse afterwards. In 2014, youth in pro-SPLA-IO areas in southern Unity adopted the name 'Gojam', borrowing from the name given by SPLA leader William Nyuon to his bodyguards during the second civil war.²⁸ One young man explained Gojam did not refer to soldiers nor to looting, rather it was about protection: "So for youth to protect [themselves] they need a gun, they are holding a gun to protect their family."²⁹ Another woman explained: "Before gojam were just cattle keepers, but then [after the 2014 raids] they became soldiers with IO [1]. Then when IO weakened they came out to the POC. They sometimes go out to visit family and then come back. They are the ones bringing weapons into the POC, they hide them under the earth outside the POC. They are not criminals [in the POC] but they have crime in their heart".³⁰

²⁶ Latjor, Bentiu POC 02/05/2017.

²⁷ Kuol, Kaljaak, 03/05/2017.

²⁸ According to Craze and Tubiana, p.89, William Nyuon took the term from Ethiopia's Gojam province, home of some of the Ethiopian SPLA trainers renowned for their bravery. In the current war, "'Gojam' was sometimes turned into Gokjamb (from gok for 'knock' in Nuer, and jamb for 'near' in Arabic) and then into Gokjieng ('knock the Dinka')."

²⁹ Reath, POC 20/04/2017.

³⁰ Mary, 24 years old, Bentiu POC 21/04/2017.

In areas now under government forces in Rubkona such as Kaljaak, youth who previously identified with gojam have morphed back into their cattle-keeping roles: “Our side, we as youth are looking after the cattle, we can only be [say that we are] cattlekeepers.”³¹ Those remaining in rural areas in Rubkona that align themselves with IO-1 face challenges protecting their cattle from pro-government youth militias and cattlekeepers. In this regard, there is also an important distinction between *pei*, as an act of war against enemy communities, where large herds of cattle are taken often during the day, and *kwal*, as ‘stealing’, as the opportunistic taking of a few cows often at night. In addition to raiding by neighbouring Bul, one of the prime concerns for cattle-keeping youth in Rubkona is the health of their cattle.

Rural youth in Rubkona are divided between those that have remained in rural areas and continue to have some cattle and those that have either lost all their cattle and livelihoods and moved to the POC or are otherwise temporarily seeking refuge there due to recruitment. As will be discussed further below in the report, recruitment in Rubkona has caused most young men to go into hiding and the villages visited were largely deserted of men. As noted by one young man in Kaljaak, “Three days ago they came and took my two brothers and the rest run away to the bush. Right now most the boys are in the bush hiding.”³² Nyagai also alluded to the protection afforded by the presence of NGOs in an area.

In turn, cattle guards aligned with Bul Nuer militias from Mayom county supporting government forces have become known as ‘Terchuong’, literally meaning ‘fighting for rights’. It was the Terchuong who captured large numbers of cattle from southern Unity during 2014 and 2015 and have continued to conduct similar activities areas in Rubkona.

Cattle keeping youth are above all mobilized and encouraged to join fighting by the promise of increasing their herds, but in most cases their association is opportunistic rather than politically and ideologically driven. Still, military commanders have also language and terminology to mobilise young cattle keepers by associating fighting with moral justice and community protection and rights. The terms ‘Gojam’ and ‘Terchuong’ reveal how language plays a part in mobilization. As one young man in the POC explained in relation to cattle-keepers involvement in the war, “convince them government is with you, through words of encouragement, by giving you money, a new phone and heavy weapons”. Military commanders are also known to establish military loyalty by contributing to the bridewealth of their soldiers, who have in many cases lost all their cattle and are unable to marry.³³

In the militarized context of South Sudan, boys become “youth” as soon as they are able to carry a gun. Manhood, especially in rural areas, is largely connected to the ability of carrying a weapon and thus responsibility to protect family cattle and the community. As observed by Gatkuoth in Nimni, “the only boys who cannot afford to use an AK-47 are those who are below ten years, but those above are capable of using even though they look very weak but they know it very well. They have not attained proper training but they learn from the adults who are around in the community.”³⁴ The account below by Gatwech and Thuch in Kaljaak (Box 1) also illustrates some of the challenges faced by young men and boys in rural areas:

BOX 1. GATWECH AND THUCH, KALJAAK

*“Life, life has totally changed. Even your own brother can kill you.”*³⁵

Kaljaak village in Rubkona has changed hands several times and was under IO control until 15 October 2016 when it was taken by government, who also took the chance to loot and raid cattle. For Gatwech, under IO-1 Kaljaak had a much larger population that had since fled the area to the forest.

Gatwech and Thuch are step-brothers looking after their father’s cattle in Kaljaak. Although they sporadically attend the primary school in Kaljaak, they are responsible for ensuring their family’s cattle is taken for grazing and kept safe. For that, they have three days looking after cattle and three days off when they attend school and other brothers look after cattle. Although Thuch was only 12 years old, he proudly shared he had been marked in the previous rainy season and was ready to become a man and have his own weapon: *“Everyone is entitled to be given a gun, but my father hasn’t gone to buy me one yet so I take someone’s. But I’ll have my own one day.”*³⁶

³¹ Samuel, 35 years old, Kaljaak 03/05/2017.

³² Nyagai, Kaljaak 03/05/2017.

³³ Clemence Pinaud also refers to these practices during the Sudanese second civil war. See Pinaud, C. 2014, “South Sudan: Civil War, Predation and the Making of a Military Aristocracy”, in *African Affairs*, 113/451, pp. 192–211.

³⁴ Gatkuoch, Nimni 01/05/2017.

³⁵ Thuch, 12 years old, Kaljaak 03/05/2017.

³⁶ Thuch, 12 years old, Kaljaak 03/05/2017.

As cattle keepers, life can only make sense with cattle. Referring to their experiences of the conflict and the ways in which cattle-raiding has been used as a weapon of war, Gatwech shared “some of our people lost their cattle and couldn’t stay in the rural areas anymore. If we lose our cattle we will also not be able to stay here. Our cattle was also taken by Bul, but after raiding we started stealing two, three at a time until we had a herd again. When you go steal, you don’t consult with your father, otherwise he may stop you. But when you return with cattle, he will be happy.”

URBAN YOUTH: EDUCATED AND UNEMPLOYED

The situation for youth in the POC has improved since 2014 with humanitarian efforts to curb youth idleness and lack of opportunity by establishing organized sports activities and designated youth centres where boys and young men can meet, sit together, play board games and other organized activities. But there are limitations in these efforts as most young men aspire for further education or employment which can validate their sense of worth. There are large number of formally educated youth in the POC, with many having completed secondary school, many others with university degrees and still many others whose studies were disrupted by the crisis. With limited job possibilities, the expectations of these young men are to find salaried employment with the UN or an NGO. Employment with the UN and NGOs was unrealistically pointed out by many informants as the best way to reduce violent conflict between youth and clashes between ‘nigga’ groups.

The POC remains a frustrating enclosed space for many of these youth who still find it unsafe to leave to the towns which they regard as also lacking opportunities. Still, some are choosing to venture out and start small businesses. Young men in town interviewed were bread-makers, barbers and traders. One young man explained: “In 2016 I left the POC because here [in Bentiu town] I can get a business. In the POC I had nothing, but here I can contribute to my family.”³⁷ In turn, many youth from rural areas were also seeking protection from forced recruitment in Bentiu and Rubkona, which they deemed less threatening than rural areas (box 2).

BOX 2. RIAK, 23 YEARS OLD, RECENTLY RETURNED TO BENTIU TOWN FROM NHIALDU WHERE HE HAD FLED TO AT THE BEGINNING OF THE WAR:

“I came back to town to start a business, I sold a cow to buy my goods [for a small shop]. My brother is still keeping our cattle in Nhialdu with my father, but he’s hiding himself [from forced recruitment]. The situation is OK here in town now but there are many robberies. There is serious recruitment in rural areas but in town only few. Boys from 14 up to 40 years old are being recruited.”

Considering the POC is a relatively large city in the context of South Sudan, and its enclosed and thus frustrating environment, crime is not high. According to one UNPOL source, UNPOL makes an average of two arrests a day, often of juveniles, sometimes involving several individuals in each arrest. The crimes committed by juveniles are usually petty and minor leading to a couple of days in the UN Holding Facility. Crimes and youth violence in the POC are most often associated to what are commonly known as ‘nigga’ groups.

‘NIGGAS’ IN THE BENTIU POC

There are various local understandings of ‘nigga’ groups. Sometimes called ‘teams’, ‘gangs’ or ‘niggas’, language plays a role in shaping the narrative around boys and young people who coalesce together as a social group with a particular type of moral order and code seeking to connect to a wider global culture, who sometimes also engage in criminal activities and fighting among themselves. As noted by Luoi and Pendle, in South Sudan the term ‘Nigga’ has no “negative racial connotations, but its use references a ‘mobile, fluid, adaptable, postmodern, urban’ blackness that resonates with the organization of transnational capitalism.”³⁸

Although the environment of the POC as a congested urban-type area with large numbers of idle youth is conducive to the establishment of these groups, ‘niggas’ are not a new phenomenon that emerged out of the POCs. Instead, many of the ‘nigga’ groups in the Bentiu POC were established in Bentiu town by post-CPA returnee youth as they returned from abroad. Nigga groups are also not an exclusive phenomenon of Bentiu and of the Bentiu POC. Rather, niggas were prevalent across urban areas of South Sudan pre-crisis and also exist in the Juba and Malakal POCs.³⁹

³⁷ Stephen, Bentiu Town 27/04/2017.

³⁸ Luoi, M. and Pendle, N. 2015, “The ‘Niggers’ of Bentiu (western Nuer): Contesting public authority in a context of violence, uncertainty and the UN’s modernity”, Paper presented at the 6th European Conference on African Studies, 8th – 10th July 2015, Paris. Page 3. Unpublished.

³⁹ See Sommers, M and S. Schwartz, 2011, *Dowry and Division Youth and State Building in South Sudan*, United States Institute for Peace: Washington; Martin, E. and I. Mosel, 2011, *City limits: urbanisation and vulnerability in Sudan Juba case study*, Humanitarian Policy Group, Overseas Development Institute: London; Schomerus, M. and T. Allen, 2010. *Southern Sudan at odds with itself: Dynamics of conflict and predicaments of peace*, London School of Economics: London.

Many of the 'nigga' groups in the Bentiu POC were established in Bentiu town by post-CPA returnee youth as they returned from abroad. As noted by one elder: "It is youth coming from different countries who are bringing this culture from abroad, they're bringing the culture they found there."⁴⁰ For instance, Holy star, D-Black, Jamaica Boys and West Coast 'nigga' groups are said to have existed in Bentiu town previous to the crisis, having shifted to the POC.

Composed in large part by post-CPA urban young male returnees from peri-urban areas in Khartoum and large peri-urban-type refugee camps as Kakuma with alternative moral codes, 'Nigga' groups are both a social and economic community, providing members with a sense of belonging, identity, protection, a coping mechanism and support system, and a means to make sense of their role in a militarized Nuer society as young men in the current context. Yet, Luoi and Pendle observe that "not all 'Niggers' were returnees, nor all returnees 'Niggers'",⁴¹ with many returnees adopting traditional Nuer values as a means to resettle back into South Sudan. Simultaneously, many boys and young men who had not left Bentiu town and even youth from rural areas are seeking membership in 'Nigga' groups as a means to access to an alternative largely western culture, identity and social world and the privileges associated to it.⁴² As explained by one young man in the POC, "so many people are joining [nigga groups] because they aspire to look good and dress in nice clothes, like this [photograph of a] Ghanaian football player on my chain, I don't know him but I have him on my chain."⁴³

In some ways, 'Niggas' are an urban sub-culture, redefining being Nuer in the current context and challenging traditional Nuer norms and values. In this sense, 'Nigga' groups are challenging authority and the traditional and established way of being young and Nuer, and in this context criminalized by other members of the community and even by nigga boys themselves. As explained by Snoop-Dog:

"For our team, we have no guys from rural areas, we are all urban boys. If you're coming from the village you have to learn the ways of the town. Old men ask us: why are you bringing us this new culture? I tell them you were used to dance in traditional ways in the village. We don't even know how to use those drums of yours. Just allow us to do things our own ways, listen to our own music and dance our own ways. We do things our own ways."⁴⁴

As noted by McCrone, "Not all of the 'niggers' are criminals, and not all of the criminals are 'niggers.'"⁴⁵ But although many of the young men joining nigga groups are not criminals, their behaviour and alternative styles and approach are criminalized by the rest of society and even by other niggas. One member of Jamaica who insisted Jamaica Boys were not 'niggas' (although they would certainly be classified as niggas by others), thought that "Niggas differ from us. They drink a lot, they create trouble and they steal."⁴⁶ For another man, "Niggas are the youth whose mothers are not around, maybe they're in Khartoum or in Juba. So they get their own shelter, engage the ladies, they steal and have very nice clothes. But we can stop them and correct their ways back to Nuer culture."⁴⁷ Elders in the Bentiu Chief's Court defined niggas as "someone who isn't respecting his mother and father. For girls, they're street ladies, with no respect for the community; they're criminals with no fear of government."⁴⁸

One youth representative of the CHC saw the ills of youth exposure to a global culture: "Nuer culture has become affected by international culture. Now the international community gives rights to criminals, because somebody will threaten you and if you report it there is no solution. Only if there's physical violence and this encourages criminals in the POC. If someone takes the wife of someone, in Bentiu he'd be put into prison and pay seven cows but now [UNMISS] Human Rights and UNPOL just say they [both] agreed to do it, so there are no consequences."⁴⁹

According to interviews, team membership tends to be mostly urban. Partially as a result of this urban background, many members are practicing Christians who attend church regularly (see figure 3). Notably, one of the largest nigga groups is called Holy Star and were said to be found by one of the Catholic churches in the POC. These ties to the church may also offer space to involve the churches and Christian leaders in bringing nigga groups together, and when and if necessary mediate between them.

⁴⁰ Member of chief's court Bentiu, 05/05/2017.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Grabska, K. 2014. Gender, Home and Identity: Nuer repatriation to Southern Sudan. Suffolk: Currey

⁴³ David, 26 years old, Bentiu POC, 02/05/2017.

⁴⁴ Snoop-Dog, 19 years old, Bentiu POC, 22/04/2017

⁴⁵ McCrone, F. 2016. Justice displaced – field notes on criminality and insecurity in South Sudan's UN Protection of Civilian Sites, A report by Justice Africa, p. 53. Available at: <http://justiceafrica.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Justice-displaced-EDITED.pdf>

⁴⁶ DJ, 19 years old, Bentiu POC, 21/04/2017.

⁴⁷ James, Bentiu POC, 21/04/2017.

⁴⁸ Member of the Chief's Court Bentiu, 05/05/2017.

⁴⁹ Gatluak, Bentiu POC 21/04/2017.



Figure 3. Drawing by one member of a nigga group hung in his shelter.

Also due to this urban edge, groups tend to be less divided along Nuer section lines. Although members from different teams reported that ‘teams’ tend to be mixed with people from across counties in Unity state, other interviews reported that there was a regional and sectional divide among teams, with for instance, Holy star, Rebel Squad and Good Life composed mostly by youth from southern Unity, while the majority of D-Black members are from Mayom, Rubkona and Guit counties although there are still members from other counties. While interviews reported that ‘nigga’ membership is both male and female, most teams are composed by mostly boys and young men, with women more loosely affiliated, and able to join activities of different groups, although this is also one of the prime sources of tension between groups (see boxes 3 and 4).

BOX 3. CASE STUDY/PROFILES OF ‘NIGGA’ GROUPS

Jamaica Boys: According to informants, Jamaica was formed in the neighbourhood of Ingas in Bentiu town before the December 2013 crisis under a former leader who has since moved to Khartoum. Its current members report there are currently 41 male and 28 female members, although female membership is more fluid and less recognized. Alluding to notion of the ‘team’ as group identity, support system and coping mechanism, its members report they do various activities: “First when there is a celebration, like Christmas, we dress with the same type of clothes all men and ladies in the team, so we can be seen and recognised by other teams. So that the rest of the community knows we are one team, so that we are known. We also encourage ourselves to forget the crisis of South Sudan, by chatting and spending time together. And we do disco parties, we rent a space and put some music, but we finish it all peacefully.”

D-Black: The origins of the name ‘D-Black’ are explained by reversing ‘Black Day’ and being able to take control of one’s future. It draws inspiration from the music of American hip hop artist Ja Rule. According to its leadership, D-Black has over 100 male members between the ages of 15/16 to 25 years old, although this may not be totally accurate. It may be they have some 40-50 actual members with the younger brothers of members also maintaining some kind of loose affiliation to the group. Established in 2006 in Bentiu and transitioning into the POC in 2014, D-Black was pointed out by some informants as one of the most active teams. According to one of its leaders, “In 2015 we stopped fighting. Two years ago we were facing many challenges from our elders, but in 2016 we invited them to come to our dance hall, those from the CHC, even UNHCR and they saw that can we can do things peacefully.”⁵⁰ Since then, D-Black members have received various trainings ranging from conflict management to SGBV by humanitarian partners working with youth.

Like other groups, D-Black activities focus on organizing disco parties, which was also explained to be the ways in which more members join the team: “if there are many parties, the number of members increase”. For the leadership of D-Black, “There are many types of niggas; some go to steal and harass, others to promote peace. We are niggas, but the good kind. In 2015, the POC was very congested and there were not enough jobs, but in 2016 things improved.” For them, they admitted to engage in fights with other teams, but added that “we are defending ourselves, not attacking.”

⁵⁰ M-16, 25/04/2017.

Names of nigga groups as well as the nicknames of members allude to a largely western culture of dissent, with many hip-hop references. At the moment, the main 'nigga' groups reported to be active in the Bentiu POC seem to be Holy Star; Jamaica Boys; D-Black; Good Life; West Coast; YMCMB (Young Money Cash Money Bank); Clean Boys and DMX (former Rough Riders), but other interviews suggested that only D-Black, Jamaica and West Coast were present, with others recently expelled.⁵¹ Within each group, members are chosen a nick-name by their friends alluding to a particular personality trait. Names of members of different teams include Snoop-Dog, Slim Shady, Dr Dre, P-Diddy, MC, Kendrick Lamar, among others that allude to a wider global western urban culture, often of subversive 'coolness' and wealth. The leaders of the 'teams' are known as 'bosses' and they are chosen due to their charisma and respect afforded by other young men in the team. For Snoop-Dog, the boss of Jamaica, "I was chosen because they see my behaviour as loyal to them, before I became the boss, I was a member only". Snoop-Dog was born in Khartoum where he spent most of his life until he permanently moved to Bentiu with his parents in 2011 to participate and vote in the 2011 referendum for independence. Speaking about nigga groups in Bentiu town pre-crisis, Luoi and Pendle suggest that nigga bosses were selected also on the basis of their ability to encourage alternative cultures and identities due to their connections to politico-military elites, but in the context of the POC this may have changed.⁵²

According to interviews, male members contribute money to a joint pot that is used to fund group activities, such as renting a sound system or a shelter for disco parties. There are allegiances between different teams which tend to reflect regional divisions within Unity, and which participate in the same parties. Accordingly, one informant reported that Holy Star and Good Life were allies and both from southern Unity, while D-Black and Jamaica were allies and mostly from Mayom, Rubkona and Guit. According to interviews, teams tend to have a well-defined organizational structure. For instance, Jamaica Boys have a designated person for external affairs responsible for engagement with other teams, including "taking concerns to the other teams" as well as extending invitations to disco parties to some of the teams. Members of D-Black also reported a similar structure with a designated 'Boss', an official spokesperson and what was termed a 'defender', "like a Minister of Defense". According to the D-Black Defender "my role in the team is if there are any fights with another team, I'm the one advising, like a mediator. There's also a protocol, I'm the deputy to the Boss."⁵³ There is a reoccurring misconception about youth gangs that they are unorganized and composed of 'lost' young people. In fact, gangs offer young people that feel they have been traditionally excluded from society a sense of order and potential for growth because the roles and the path to achieve a sense of inclusion and belonging are usually better defined than the existing alternatives.

By remaining in the POC, people in the POC, and youth in particular, have made a choice and are actively resisting mobilisation. By being in the POC, young men are choosing not to fight and proactively opting out of the armed conflict. Yet in a highly militarized society, they still need to prove to themselves and to their peers they are men and aligning themselves to a nigga group may be one such way to do so.

There are a number of motivations to join teams. As age-sets become less meaningful in Nuer society, it could be that 'teams' are playing the social role that age-sets used to. Among the Western Nuer, age-sets have become largely ceremonial, no longer acting as cohesive structures in society that are able to organize and mobilise young men. In the enclosed context of the POC, 'teams' could potentially fill this social role. Teams can also be understood as a coping mechanism to address the crisis and its devastating consequences. For one member of Jamaica in Bentiu town who had left the POC in 2016, "the reason I joined the team was because of this crisis. I can forget some of the bad things that have happened here. If I'm with my friends I can forget."⁵⁴ In this context, joining a nigga group is also about asserting one's hopes, dreams and expectations to an alternative moral and political culture. The impact of the war has also imposed limitations on young men's ability to marry and become a man, as will be discussed further below. Being part of a team may diminish the frustrations of this scarcity, and most individuals in teams are unmarried.

Nigga groups organized activities revolve around disco parties where young people are able to socialize, usually on Fridays and Saturdays. These parties are also an opportunity to engage with girls and several informants reported they joined a team to "show off to the girls". Fighting between different 'niggas' is one of the main security concerns in the Bentiu POC, often connected to disputes over women (box 4). Criminality and violence between teams in the POC is often explained through the lens of youth idleness. Young men interviewed for this study complained that the war and the move to the POC had forced them to put their lives on hold: "we are just wasting our time". While lack of recreational activities for young people, the unavailability of further education and a secondary school, meaningful livelihoods and employment opportunities all play a part, 'niggas', or 'teams', in the POC should be approached as

⁵¹ This is not a comprehensive list. There may be more 'nigga' groups in the Bentiu POC but these were said by various informants to be the most active ones, while other informants suggested otherwise.

⁵² Luoi and Pendle, 2015.

⁵³ M-16, 23 years old, Bentiu POC 25/04/2017.

⁵⁴ Stephen, 23 years old, Bentiu town, 27/04/2017.

socially meaningful entities playing a part in identity and community, and as social support networks and coping mechanisms in the ongoing war, rather than solely as criminal structures.

BOX 4. YOUTH GROUP VIOLENT CLASHES IN THE POC 29 APRIL TO 1 MAY 2017

Violence between Holy Star and West Coast against D-Black and Jamaica youth groups erupted on the 29 April 2017 in the POC affecting especially Sector 2, lasting until the 1 May. One account pointed at an event that took place over two months ago when the sister of a member of Holy Star was invited to and attended a disco party organized by Jamaica Boys. The sister was found in the party, leading to ongoing and unresolved tensions between the groups.

UNPOLs and the Ghanaian Formed Police Units (FPUs) intervened and used tear gas to disperse the groups. Because the fighting took place in a highly congested area, tear gas affected the broader population in Sector 2. The clashes led to the creation of a community safety structure called N8, replicating an existing community policing mechanism (which can also be confused with a vigilante unit) in the Juba POC called N4. The term N8 refers to Nuer from the seven counties in Unity state plus other Nuer from Upper Nile and Jonglei, and is composed of men selected from the community that are expected to patrol overnight and curb crime (see below).

Disco parties are often pointed out as the greatest issue and trigger leading to clashes between teams. For the chief of the UNPOL in Bentiu, many of those arrested for criminal activities in the POC are associated with 'nigga' groups, often caused by rivalry over women. One young woman also blamed women for the fighting between teams and pointed at women who attended these disco parties as the root cause of much of the fighting. UNPOL made reference to a case in late February 2017 when a disco party in Sector 2 escalated into violent clashes between various teams using spears and pangas (machetes), which lasted for three days.

According to interviews, there is no institutional connection between nigga groups in the POC and wider political dynamics in Unity state, nor are nigga groups used as a tool for military mobilization. This may be because the profiles of niggas are urban and uninterested in fighting. The chief of UNPOL recalled an incident in 2015 where Rough Riders and Best Boys teams in the POC clashed continuously with pangas and spears for two days. After these were confiscated, one of the parties who had personal connections in Bentiu tried to get weapons, but there were no formal institutional political affiliations.

Most informants denied there were currently any 'nigga' groups in Bentiu town due to fear of movement and forced recruitment by pro-government forces. However, as the security situation in Bentiu and Rubkona towns improves and more and more people return to the towns, groups of 'niggas' are likely to emerge, as the pre-war situation. At the moment, there are allegedly two teams of 'niggas' in town. Jamaica (allegedly not affiliated with the Jamaica Boys of the POC) is a smaller team with some 25 members; while Rough Riders, who are said to have been expelled from the POC in 2015 or 2016, has a larger number of members. According to the 'boss' of Jamaica in Bentiu town, the motivations and activities of the teams in Bentiu resemble those in the POC, essentially acting as a social support network and as a forum to organize disco parties and engage with girls. As in the POC, the teams also act as a coping mechanism, with the boss of Jamaica in town comparing their team activities to soothing: "When people are very stressed it can help if they go to church or sing songs, you feel better and more relaxed. It is the same for us, when we spend time together and do disco parties, we also relax and feel better".⁵⁵

AMBIGUOUS LAW ENFORCEMENT IN THE BENTIU POC AND BEYOND

According to one UNPOL, 90% of arrests of juveniles currently made in the POC are for petty crimes, mostly opportunistic and for one UN police officer interviewed, most juveniles were "not criminals at heart". He also explained that the main reasons for arrests are assault, fighting over girls and women, robbery of money and of personal belongings, with none connected to alcohol or drugs.

United Nations Police are responsible for maintaining law and order in the Bentiu POC. The UN's ambiguous jurisdiction means there is no proper judicial process.⁵⁶ The chief of UNPOL explained that UNPOL's "main concern is to minimise the threat of violence, and that's when we act to isolate a threat. If you kill in the POC we don't hold you for murder, we hold you for the conduct of killing. For the safety of other POC residents, when we feel the threat no longer exists then we release the person, if people have reformed under detention."⁵⁷ For that reason, the de facto prison is not called a prison, but a Holding Facility, which takes up to 40 people and is usually at full capacity. Individuals kept in the Holding Facility are released to the CHC leadership, but there is no follow-up on each case.

⁵⁵ Method, Jamaica Bentiu Town, 25/04/2017.

⁵⁶ For a detailed discussion on this see McCrone, F. 2016.

⁵⁷ UNPOL, Bentiu POC 24/04/2017.

There are 90 UNPOLs in the Bentiu POC who work with some 700 volunteers from the Community Watch Group (CWG). UNPOLs rarely leave their vehicles while on patrol and rely overwhelmingly on the CWG volunteers for community relations and engagement.

Since the clashes between youth groups in late April (see box 4), the CHC is discussing replicating the N4 community-based security force of the Juba POC. The N8 is a proposed community based initiative composed of abled men selected from each of the seven Nuer counties in Unity state plus one referring to all other Nuer from other areas outside Unity. Replicating the N4 of Juba, the N8 has a community mandate to promote security in the POC, mobilized by the Community High Committee (CHC), appointed by and embedded in the customary system.⁵⁸ While the CWG was set up by UNPOL, the N8 is appointed by customary authorities and is expected to respond to emergencies and stop fighting. For one Nuer NGO worker in Bentiu, “when the N8 are established, Niggas will be much more careful.” They will receive contributions from the community, whereas CWGs and the CHC receive a percentage of payments and fines. While the community-based initiative has worked relatively well in Juba, there are many risks involved to avoid it becomes a vigilante group operating outside the law.⁵⁹

Outside the POC in the towns and rural areas, government is responsible for law enforcement through its South Sudan National Police Service (SSNPS) and the SPLA. Leaving aside the insecure dynamics of rural areas discussed throughout this report, the two towns of Bentiu and Rubkona remain highly insecure and uncertain. Residents complained of high crime and robbery.

MARRIAGE, CATTLE AND BRIDEWEALTH

To be recognised as full adults, male and female youth in South Sudan must marry and build a family. As noted by Grabska, “*The marriage process for Nuer women and men represents a rite of passage into adulthood, access to rights and a status within the household and community. Marriage is a lengthy process of negotiations and exchanges of bridewealth, becoming more secure with each transfer of payments and each ceremony. It is a pivotal point in inter-generational relations as a mechanism of handing over resources from fathers to sons, building alliances between families and exchanging cattle for both productive and reproductive labour.*”⁶⁰ Deprived of their livelihoods and made destitute by cattle raids over this war, many young men in Rubkona, especially those in the POC and towns, are unable to marry and thus establish themselves in the community as full adults. This issue contributes to tensions and frustration among young men and leads to alternative practices such as eloping as a means to marry with high potential to escalate to violence between families. It is also often a consideration for young men to enlist in militias and can also contribute to cattle-raiding as a means to access resources for marriage.

Before the crisis, bridewealth in Rubkona county was said to be at around 40 cows. Surprisingly, the current war has increased the price of bridewealth, with some informants suggesting it is now above 50 and can be as high as 100 cattle. Families are seeing their daughters as the only income and resource available to them, even though young men are lacking cattle and money. Thus, despite the context of scarcity, male youth are under severe pressure to meet escalating bridewealth costs. Still, bridewealth can vary and poorer households may agree to marry their daughter for less or alternatively on ‘credit’; while paying a high bridewealth continues to afford a man with status and respect: “VIPs, like those military commanders can pay up to 100-150 cattle for status, you pay more to show your name”.⁶¹

In Nuer society, bridewealth is traditionally paid in cattle that is then shared between the bride’s father and mother as well as her paternal and maternal relatives thus asserting social networks of mutual support and commitment between relatives. Because of the context of the POC and the absence of cattle, for those who still have resources, bridewealth is being converted from cattle to money. In those cases, the amount in South Sudanese Pounds (SSP) is calculated through the expected number of cattle. According to one informant, in some cases, in-laws, aware of the constant devaluation of the South Sudanese Pound, are not even accepting SSP, but are instead demanding bridewealth paid in US dollars.

But unlike cattle, money has ‘no blood’ and is therefore not seen as being able to ensure the strength of marriage bonds between families.⁶² The social repercussions of this shift from cattle to money are significant. On the one hand, social networks and enduring bonds cemented within and between families through the exchange of cattle are lost, with money lacking the spiritual authority of cattle. On the other hand, the loyalty and therefore respect that a young

⁵⁸ See Ibreck, R. and Pendle, N. 2016. *Customary Protection? Chiefs’ courts as public authority in UN Protection of Civilian sites in South Sudan*, The Justice and Security Research Programme, London: London School of Economics

⁵⁹ Ibreck, R. and Pendle, N. 2016.

⁶⁰ Grabska, K. 2012. ‘Marrying on credit: the burden of bridewealth on refugee youth’, *Forced Migration Review Issue 40*, p. 7.

⁶¹ Rout, 33 years old. Bentiu Market 25/04/2017.

⁶² Hutchinson, S. 1996. *Nuer dilemmas: coping with money, war and the State*, University of California Press: Berkeley

man has towards his family because various members of his family have contributed with cattle to his ability to marry and bridewealth is shifting to loyalty to his age-mates and friends who are able to support his marriage, therefore shifting the equilibrium in family dynamics and respect to elders.

Despite the challenges to marriage, many young men are still finding ways to marry in most cases by agreeing with in-laws for the bridewealth to be paid in stages and in 'credit'. The coping strategy for those with no cattle but still willing to marry their daughters has been to agree on credit, paying a small share of the total bridewealth and agreeing to pay the remaining later. One young man in Bentiu town explained he had paid 15 cattle to his in-laws and had agreed he would pay the remaining 15 after the crisis. In this way, families are also ensuring that when they will have some financial support if and when "peace arrives" and are able to re-establish their lives post-crisis, they will have some support from bridewealth to be paid later. Other accounts of these practices:

*"It's very difficult to marry now because all our cattle was taken. The elders say if you don't marry now, you'll never marry. We stole some cattle that had been raided from us, came back and exchanged them. I paid 25 cattle to my in-laws, but still 15 to go. Anytime I can find a cow I will give it to my in-laws."*⁶³

*"My in-laws were our neighbours. When they knew our cattle was taken and they knew our behavior and that their daughter was getting older, so they agreed to our marriage. I paid 6 cattle then, and 24 to be paid later when I have the chance."*⁶⁴

WOMEN, ELOPEMENT AND RAPE

Another common strategy used by young people to marry is through elopement, which is also one of the greatest sources and triggers of fighting between families and can escalate fast into large scale violence. If a case of elopement is dealt with quickly by the family of the young man and compensation agreed and paid to the family of the girl, then violence can be avoided. One man in Kaljaak explained: "youth is marrying through elopement. You'll steal someone's daughter then you'll go to the chief's court. The chief and the family of the girl agree for the marriage but that cattle is paid later since there is no cattle now. That's the only way to marry now."⁶⁵

Elopement is recognized as a dangerous practice for the man. The boss of one of the nigga groups in the POC connected nigga disco parties with elopement: "When we go for parties, if someone's daughter gets impregnated, if I'm lucky then she'll tell me first and I can go inform my parents and family and they deal with the girl's parents. If I'm unlucky then her family will be told first and then her brothers will come find and beat me. Then it's risky."⁶⁶ If the case is mediated between the two families, it is usually brought to the CHC who will determine the fine and compensation to be paid by the young man's family to the girl's family. According to interviews, 20,000 SSP is to be paid if no marriage is arranged and the child born out of wedlock will remain with the family of the young man. If the couple and their families agree to a marriage then the equivalent money of 40 cattle will be paid to the girl's family.

It is important to recognize the ways and context in which certain terms and language are used in Nuer. The difference between elopement and rape can be sometimes based on language and context and will also depend on the interlocutor, in both instances indicating consensual relations by both parties but connected to the wider context. Elopement [*ca kual: literally 'to steal'*] is different from rape [*ca kan ke buom: literally sex that is forced*], but it also has to be seen contextually. For instance, one woman in the Bentiu POC explained that "If a girl [and a boy] run for one day, the parents will say she was raped, but if she runs for longer, then they will call it elopement (...). There is no difference in the way it is treated in the court, but if no agreement is reached by the families, then rape leads to greater fighting."⁶⁷ The distinction between elopement and rape can be nuanced and not necessarily indicating sexual violence, but rather pointing to the lack of wider social and family consent. Among other factors, if a man is accused of elopement then he is able to refuse to marry the girl; but if he is accused of rape then he is socially bound to marry to avoid social dishonor and embarrassment by the wider community. In that sense, the term rape can be used strategically by the family of the girl to force a man to marry. Importantly, as noted by Luoi and Pendle with relation to nigga behaviour in the POC, "To express the severity of moral illegitimacy of 'nigger' behaviour in translation to English, the evocative criminal term 'rape' is often used. This is despite 'nigger' behavior in relationships usually including consent of both parties. It may, however, lack the consent of the families of the parties."⁶⁸

⁶³ Riak, 20 years old. Rubkona town, 27/04/2017

⁶⁴ James, Rubkona town 27/04/2017.

⁶⁵ Samuel, 35 years old, Kaljaak 03/05/2017.

⁶⁶ Snoop-Dog, Jamaica Bentiu POC 22/04/2017.

⁶⁷ Marta, NGO worker Bentiu POC 06/05/2017.

⁶⁸ Luoi and Pendle, 2015.

It can be challenging therefore to grasp the difference between rape that is actually with the consent of the two parties involved and rape as sexual violence. Pendle reports that in the 1980s Riek Machar established that the bridewealth of eloped girls should be lower than those married from the home. Thus, raped girls are treated the same as those who eloped since both have had pre-marital sex, making it irrelevant if there was consent or not. Chiefs tend to settle cases of rape and elopement hastily to avoid escalation to violence and therefore usually with a reduced bride price. These factors discourage girls that have been raped from coming forward.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ USAID (compiled by N. Pendle). 2015. *Cattle and pastoralism in Greater Upper Nile*.

EXISTING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The Youth Task Force (YTF) was created in 2014 in response to the increase in fighting between ‘nigga’ groups and criminal activities by youth in the POC during 2014-2015. The YTF was formalized into its current structure in 2016 and established to advocate for, mobilise, coordinate and inform youth specific programming and led to the creation of a number of successful youth activities and initiatives, including sports clubs and youth centres around the POC.

The YTF’s core objective as framed in its Terms of Reference is to “Develop a strategic and coordinating platform to implement and advocate for youth and adolescent-friendly services and interventions as part of the Beyond Bentiu Response and inside the Bentiu POC site”.⁷⁰ Some humanitarians argued that fighting between ‘gangs’ in the POC had decreased substantially and was no longer a concern. According to one NGO staff, activities targeting youth have been successful in reducing criminal activities and dispersing the so called ‘gangs’ in the POC, and the focus should now be on developing income-generating activities for young people stranded and growing increasingly frustrated in the POC.⁷¹ For this reason, this humanitarian argued that the focus of the YTF should therefore be on youth outside the POC (part of the ‘Beyond Bentiu’ strategy).⁷² However, during the research period serious fighting broke out between various nigga groups revealing violence between ‘teams’ remains a concern. Part of a broader agenda, the YTF is currently re-shifting its focus from the POC to consider youth outside the POC. Perhaps the greatest challenge here is to ensure that its agenda and priorities are not coopted by gatekeepers and self-proclaimed youth leaders in Bentiu and Rubkona towns, and that humanitarian actors are able to identify and work with the ‘right’ young people and those most at risk of engaging in and falling into violence.

At the moment, the YTF is said to meet once a month under the co-leadership of Mercy Corps and DRC. There are a number of organizations that report to be working in youth specific programming. These include INTERSOS, the USAID-funded VISTAS programme, Mercy Corps, Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) and IOM, UNICEF, possibly among others. Others that attend seem to include UNMISS Civil Affairs and Child Protection. Activities are said to include vocational training, sports and other recreational activities such as drama clubs and games.

⁷⁰ Terms of Reference, Youth Task Force Rubkona County May 2016.

⁷¹ Interview NGO worker Bentiu, 22/04/2017.

⁷² Interview NGO worker Bentiu, 22/04/2017.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

People in Unity state have experienced extreme circumstances of violence since the beginning of the war in 2013. On the one hand, people are reluctant to project into the future, focusing on the necessity to survive in the present. Simultaneously, life has continued with weddings celebrated and families establishing bonds and relationships, with bridewealth agreed to be paid “when peace comes”, revealing some planning for the future. Also, across rural areas in Rubkona county, cattle luaks are being built suggesting that there is some cattle around and that people are planning to be in rural areas with their cattle over the rainy season.

Peace can only be achieved through a concerted national-level inclusive political process that also acknowledges people’s grievances and seeks to address these. For 35 year old Santino in Kaljaak, “Peace among our youth will happen when those at the top make peace, we don’t have problems amongst ourselves.”⁷³ But this may not reveal the full picture. As during the second civil war in Sudan, dynamics of violence in Unity state have largely become detached from the broader dynamics of the national civil war. The war has divided young people who have been instrumentalised by military and political leaders to fight each other. Intra-Nuer violence, where youth have been as much perpetrators as victims, will need to be considered and addressed when a national level peace agreement is reached. In the meantime, young people need help in channelling their energy positively and in providing some hope and planning for the future. Some broad recommendations:

Involve young people since the beginning of programming. Support more youth-oriented programming where young people develop their priority activities. There are some clear feelings of exclusion and disenfranchisement. Having more participatory and inclusive programming practices can be an empowering experience on its own.

Recognise and support the mediating role that the church can have among urban youth. Especially in the POC and in towns, recognise that urban youth maintain some affiliation with the church, and consider how the church can act as positive forces in young people’s lives, and may also have a role in mediation between competing ‘nigga’ groups.

IN THE POC

Formal education and skills development. The crisis has put the future and aspirations of many young people in the POC on hold, in many cases interrupting their primary, secondary and university education. Young people in the POC called for more vocational trainings, job trainings and income-generating activities. There are already youth centres located around the POC. It could be useful to consider establishing a youth multi-use centre with a library and with computer training courses.

Cooperate more closely with UNPOL. UNPOL is the actor that most closely engages with young people that have committed crimes, yet they do not appear to be actively part of the Youth Task Force, nor does it appear to be any regular information-sharing and coordination mechanism between UNPOL and humanitarian actors engaged with youth involved in armed violence or criminality. In other contexts, DDG has successfully supported and facilitated Security Provider Dialogue and Cooperation Forums, which allow different stakeholders to build trust and understanding. This approach could be appropriate to the Bentiu POC context.

- Support greater collaboration between UNPOL and other humanitarians, possibly into the Youth Task Force, as a mechanism for regular information-sharing and coordination. There should be weekly structured information sharing between UNPOL and humanitarians. Case-work requires careful follow-up and redirecting to community structures and leadership that can provide mentoring to problematic juveniles.
- Engagement with UNPOL may also involve mediation and relationship building between UNPOL and the leadership of ‘teams’.
- Transitional justice formats could be used to engage young people and promote punishments that are age-appropriate and provide a sense of justice to all parties.

Support and facilitate weekly meetings and dialogue between leadership members of the various teams. In the past, it appears that DRC and NP (and possibly UNPOL) were having regular weekly meetings with all teams to promote dialogue and a safe space for discussion, and were a successful means to lowering incidents of violence in the POC. These meetings seemed to have stopped. It would be worth reigniting these meetings, initially liaising individually with key actors and eventually bringing youth together.

⁷³ Santino, 35 years old, Kaljaak 03/05/2017.

Encourage Artwork and youth creativity. Several members of groups met were proud to share their artwork, which was both notably symbolic and healing. Art may be a positive angle to approach hard to reach youth, as a means to express emotions, frustrations and deal with stress. Art also does not require any level of literacy. Consider supporting the establishment of art classes, where young people can come together to draw, express creativity, dialogue and build relations.

Work with partners in the YTF to support inter-generational dialogue between youth in ‘nigga’ groups and elders.

Revisit regulation of Disco Parties organised by teams (see annex 2). In the past, NP and DRC supported the regulation of Disco Parties in the POC. However, disco parties continue to be a common trigger for fighting in the POC. Consider revisiting regulations and working more closely with the CHC, the IMDRM, UNPOL and the ‘teams’ to secure designated safe spaces for disco parties.

IN THE TOWNS

The two towns are extremely politicised and divided and in that context hard to operate. Staff should be mindful of gatekeepers in town that can co-opt youth programming for their own purposes and benefit.

All engagement with youth (including in sports activities and youth centres) should include a short training on principles of conflict management. Contextualised Conflict Management Education (CME) trainings.

Focus efforts in key mediation training and youth-youth dialogue processes. DDG has developed mediation trainings which can be adapted to the Bentiu context.

Support to sports activities, including some training on conflict management. The security environment in the POC has significantly improved since DRC and NP among other humanitarian partners supported the establishment of structured sports events, especially football. According to discussions in town, there is a self-organised football league in town (apparently called Premier League and Champions League).

Livelihoods and employment. In order to encourage youth to be self-sufficient and independent support the creation of employment in towns, through cash for work programmes and micro-credit opportunities. This may also encourage young people to leave the POC and return to the towns.

IN RURAL AREAS

The volatile social and political context in rural areas across Rubkona make it extremely challenging to engage meaningfully with youth, in relation to DDG’s AVR tools and methodologies. Although beyond the scope of AVR, findings from the field research suggested that there are important aspects of engaging with rural youth which can contribute to minimise violence:

Support cash programming that allows young people to maintain some sense of independence and ability to invest in their own businesses and livelihoods.

Invest in vigorous veterinary services (prevention/vaccination and treatment), both in rural and urban areas. By improving livestock health, young people may be less inclined to engage in cattle raiding from neighbouring communities.

Invest in locally informed and owned veterinary capacity, such as Community Animal Health Workers, to ensure surveillance and delivery of animal healthcare, including during periods of active conflict.

ANNEXES

ANNEX 1 / OVERARCHING RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To be considered in/adapted to POC and outside the POC:

Social profiles of young people engaging in acts of violence / deconstructing and disaggregating “youth”

- What is locally understood as “youth” in Rubkona?
- Is there a certain profile for young people joining groups who engage in violence? Do they differ according to the type of group (eg. gangs, militias, armed opposition groups)?
- How significant are Nuer age-sets in mobilizing young men into groups?

Understanding ‘Gangs’ in the POC

- What are the dynamics of the ‘gangs’/‘teams’/‘niggas’ in the POC? (criminal-economic/social/ political/both – who/where/what)
- What kind of criminal activities and acts of violence do young people in gangs commit?
- How do ‘gangs’/‘teams’/‘niggas’ in the POC connect to the broader dynamics of the ongoing political conflict?
- What is the relationship between POC gangs and external armed groups?
- What kind of issues lead to violent competition between ‘gangs’/‘teams’/‘niggas’?
- What is the relationship between criminal acts of violence committed by young people and political violence?
- Are youth ‘teams’ politically affiliated and if so, how significant are these affiliations?
- Are group affiliation overwhelmingly geographically focused?
- Is there a hierarchy within the gangs? Leadership/authority structures

Motivations to engage in acts of violence

- What are the motivations for young men to engage in acts of violence?
- Do motivations to engage in acts of violence differ for young people living in the POC and those living in other areas?
- What are the main drivers encouraging young people to join ‘gangs’/‘teams’/‘niggas’?
- Why do young people leave the POC to join the armed groups?
- What activities were youth previously involved in before the current crisis?

Deterrents / Influencing factors

- How do other segments of society perceive youth who engage in acts of violence?
- What other segments of society have the ability to influence young people’s behaviour?
- What would be effective entry points to identify and work with youth at risk of engaging in violent acts? In the POC / outside the POC
- What kind of activities are young people interested in?
- What kind of livelihood and recreational activities are present in the camp?
- What activities are young people interested in being available in the camp?

ANNEX 2 / RULES OF MUSIC HALL (ESTABLISHED BY NP AND DRC – DATE UNKNOWN)

1. No weapons allowed in the music hall and in the surrounding areas.
2. No violence allowed.
3. No alcohol allowed. Persons under the influence of alcohol will not be permitted entrance to the music hall.
4. Respect towards youth and all members of the community.
5. Community Leaders will be informed of activities taking place.
6. Teams must respect the rules and bookings of the music hall.
7. Youth must respect all security forces working to protect civilians in the POC site.
8. UNPOL and leaders of each team will work together to solve criminal issues. In case of arrest, please contact the teams' adminis
9. Tration.
10. The teams will settle their conflict peacefully. If unable, they can ask for help from the humanitarians and community leadership to facilitate a resolution.
11. Community Leaders will ensure that CWGs are not targeting youth who are not violating any of the rules of the POC.
12. Respect of the music hall timetable by all.
13. Teams will meet weekly with NP and DRC.
14. No other private tukul will be used as music halls.
15. Only daytime activities: 7am-6pm
16. Respect of the music hall infrastructure. If damages occur, DRC will not replace it nor repair it.
17. The music hall is a safe zone for all participants, girls and boys.
18. Community leaders, UNPOL and community members are allowed to check on the progress of the activities, respectfully.
19. Any breach of these rules will lead to reconsideration of the operations of the music hall.

