DRC | ASPIRE

Aspiring for Peace and Inclusion Research

Report on preliminary findings | Year 2, 2024

Seeking solutions:

South Sudanese refugee endeavours among multiple possibilities in Kenya and Uganda

UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN

UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency

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Refugee woman selling fried casava in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement @ Ayo Degett/DRC

The 2024 report on preliminary findings

This report is an analysis of the preliminary findings of Aspiring for Peace and Inclusion Research (ASPIRE) during the project's second year of implementation, 2024, in Uganda and Kenya. It has been written by Ayo Degett (PhD) Programme Manager (Research), Pernille Sikker Hansen, Project Officer of ASPIRE, both with the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and Susan Reynolds Whyte, Professor at the Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen. The contents and opinions expressed in this report represent the authors' views and should not be attributed to, and do not necessarily represent, the views of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) or the European Union (EU) Directorate-General for International Partnerships (INTPA).

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Women meeting for weekly VSLA group activity in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement @ Ayo Degett/DRC

Executive summary

Aspiring for Peace and Inclusion Research (ASPIRE) aims to understand young refugees' efforts to achieve peaceful coexistence and their engagement with their peers, their communities and interventions by political authorities and humanitarian, development and peace actors. The project is planned to run over a period of 15 years, during which time it will follow young refugees from South Sudan in neighbouring countries. In 2024, the second year of the project, it expanded from Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement in northern Uganda to Kalobeyei Settlement and Kakuma Refugee Camp in western Kenya.

ASPIRE works with peer researchers and refugees trained in ethnographic methods, who follow conflicts and conflict-mitigation in their own neighbourhoods. It documents the perspectives and concerns of young people themselves, as they endeavour to contain conflicts and improve their lives. The main theme of last year's report was refugee initiatives to manage incipient conflicts and prevent escalation. This year we examine the landscape of possibilities for dealing with conflicts, which we think of as constituting the conditions for action. We then discuss how young people navigate these possibilities, that is, how they engage as subjects in endeavours for peace under these conditions.

Legal pluralism characterizes the refugee settings in both Uganda and Kenya. The forums for resolving conflicts include statutory bodies like the police, local government and refugee councils, as well as informal instances like customary courts and community security-providers. This report presents these mechanisms, while noting important differences. The police play a greater role in the Kenyan settings, while the refugee councils are more established in Uganda. There are also differences in the composition of the refugee communities, which influence their respective circumstances.

The customary courts seem to be the first resort for managing conflicts that do not involve capital crimes (i.e. 'where there is blood'). While some are clearly structured, like the Nuer N4 organization, others are informal, even ad hoc meetings of clan elders or ethnic leaders. Refugees value these forums because they take relationships beyond national boundaries into account and try to restore harmony rather than pronounce winners and losers. They are particularly useful for resolving conflicts about marriage and pregnancy, where cultural expectations rather than national law are invoked. Conflicts between refugees and the host community are more likely to be handled by statutory bodies like the police. Refugees feel that they are at a disadvantage here, and they try to avoid involving the police because that usually means expenses 'for airtime [i.e. mobile-phone credit] and fuel'. However, alternatives to the police include the volunteer community-security guardians, who sometimes use violent methods in detaining and punishing suspects. Parties to conflict subjectively consider options and possible outcomes, as do the actors manning the various forums. Our data shows how customary courts and even the police do not always follow the fixed guidelines for managing conflicts. Instead they may think ahead to the consequences by considering the benefits and risks involved in different moves or actions.

The research in Kenya lasted only a few months in 2024. Next year will yield much more data and make possible more comparisons between the two national settings. The project will also extend to South Sudan itself, with a focus on returnees from Uganda and Kenya. Further research will examine the landscape of legal pluralism in all three countries, with questions about relations between the customary courts and the statutory authorities. We will ask how refugees see modes of resolving conflict in relation to gender and generation. The concern with navigation among possibilities for conflict-resolution is therefore a key object of study, as delving into these details reveals opportunities for humanitarian actors. Greater recognition of the range of forums is called for. Recognition of the key role of customary actors is important, and attention to their work, gaps and need for support is necessary. The training of community security-providers is another matter for alarm, especially in the humane treatment of suspects.

Boda boda motorcycle drivers in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement @ Ayo Degett/DRC

1. Introduction

Aspiring for Peace and Inclusion Research (ASPIRE) is a long-term ethnographic research project developed in partnership between the Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) and funded, via UNHCR, by the European Union (EU) Directorate-General for International Partnerships (INTPA). It follows a generation of young refugees in multiple countries over a period of 15 years, exploring how they perceive and pursue opportunities for peace in their communities. This report presents preliminary findings from Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement, Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Settlement primarily collected in 2024, but drawing on findings from Uganda since 2018.

Every year we zoom in on specific thematic areas based on the data that peer researchers are collecting in the field. This year's report marks the conclusion of the first phase of ASPIRE (2023-2024) and will be the foundation for defining next year's focus, when we initiate Phase 2 (2025-2028). Building on the large pool of data from Uganda and Kenya, we decided to focus on refugees' navigation and handling of conflicts with regard to the many possibilities and actors in these settings, both formal and informal. Building on our data, and in line with other recent studies (Gidron 2023; Braak 2022), we argue that refugees consider which options promise the most beneficial outcomes. Often they look for lasting arrangements or solutions in which customary actors normally play important roles.

The report first introduces the reader to the overall study, the methodological approach and the analytical framework that cuts across ASPIRE's different phases: *conditions, subjectivity* and *endeavours*. The report specifically concentrates on the 'conditions' for handling conflicts. It does so by exploring the landscape of local actors who engage in conflict-handling, both formal and informal, both statutory and community-driven. Based on this overview, and using cases from the field, we explore what people want, what they anticipate and what they hope for: their 'subjectivity'. Based on these insights, we discuss their 'endeavours'. We introduce the reader to the patterns and tendencies that we see in how refugees use these formal and informal actors. In addition, we explore the ways in which these actors, constituting both formal and informal institutions, involve themselves and understand their mandates and room for manoeuvre. Based on these discussions, we suggest that community-based actors, including the customary authorities, need to be given more recognition and to be better supported by Humanitarian, Development and Peace (HDP) actors. First, however, we want to introduce the reader to the field and the type of data we are working with.

1.1. Seeking solutions: endeavours among multiple possibilities

One hot afternoon, Nyalat, a South Sudanese woman living in Kakuma, was heading to a roadside shop owned by Gatluak. Gatluak, a young man of about 27 years, had earned his income since 2017 from charging phones and selling sodas, candy and biscuits. Over the years, he had experienced continuous problems with people claiming ownership of phones that were not theirs. He had therefore put a system in place where customers received small paper tickets upon leaving their phones for charging, which they had to use as documentation when picking them up. On this afternoon, this system was challenged. As Nyalat handed her paper ticket to Gatluak, they realized that her phone was gone. A teenage boy had picked it up earlier, claiming it was his, and he had lost his ticket. Because the young man knew all the details about the phone, Gatluak had handed it to him.

Nyalat was furious and decided to report the theft to the local customary leadership of their ethnic group. Nyalat and Gatluak explained their views in front of the committee, which decided to investigate the whereabouts of the young man with the phone. They soon identified his household, but realized he had travelled to South Sudan that same day. The 'customary court' determined that Gatluak had acted in good faith but fined him 40% of the phones' value for not involving them quickly enough. The young man's mother was requested to pay the rest.

Nyalat was not satisfied with the decision and amount of compensation she received for her phone. She therefore decided to involve the police. The police arrested Gatluak and located the mother of the young man, but because she had already paid her share (60%) up front, they did not arrest her. After some time, Gatluak was released on bail (2000 KSH) and found not guilty of the crime. The mother was then asked to pay the full market price (18,000 KSH) to compensate Nyalat, who soon received the money and bought a new phone.

ASPIRE is essentially about following, documenting and learning from the ways young South Sudanese handle conflicts and seek solutions. Sometimes they create new solutions themselves; sometimes they navigate already existing opportunities among the institutions and structures that are present in their area, such as this customary court and the police in the example of Nyalat. Our focus in this year's report is on how young people navigate (and indeed are forced to navigate) the different forums that handle the conflicts that arise in their communities. By forum, we mean a place, situation, group or institution for discussing and attempting to resolve an issue. These include community leaders, community-driven initiatives, such as the Leopards we learned about in last year's report (Degett and Whyte 2023), HDP actors, statutory actors (OPM, Refugee Welfare Committees (RWCs), DRS, the Uganda Police Force, the Kenya Police Service and the Community Peace and Protection Teams (CPPTs), as well as customary institutions and courts.

Last year, we zoomed in on the role of community-based initiatives, such as community associations, refugee-led organizations (RLOs), church groups, and the concerned parents of teenagers. These actors often handle potential or emerging low-scale conflicts, which are managed at the local level. This year, we examine conflicts that have fully erupted and often spread across geographical locations in the camps. This is where more established institutions, such as the statutory and customary actors, are brought in, as in the case of Nyalat and the stolen phone.

The field assistants are free to choose the cases they find most relevant. When we receive their reports, we categorize them into conflict themes, while also mapping the actors involved. One of the themes that cut across piles of data in Uganda and Kenya this year is 'theft', which is likely related to the dramatic cut in food assistance in both Kenya and Uganda. The other key themes of conflict that show up continuously in this year's data are issues relating to gender (marriage, courtship and pregnancies) and access to resources. The cases presented in this report concern these three themes, which were most prominent in the field assistants' reports.

1.2. The ASPIRE project

1.2.1. Objective

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

This research is being conducted among young South Sudanese in Uganda and Kenya and will be extended to refugee settings in countries neighbouring South Sudan (Ethiopia and Sudan) and among returnees inside South Sudan, conditions permitting. The research is taking place alongside the UNHCR, Regional Youth Peacebuilding Project (RYPP), a programme that is designed with the aim of empowering youth as peacebuilders and so-called 'agents of change' by training and supporting groups of youth mentors to lead peacebuilding efforts across these countries; ASPIRE will only be implemented in selected locations in these countries. The purpose of ASPIRE is not to conduct an impact analysis of RYPP, but rather to complement the RYPP by closely observing some of the same communities and young people over time, with the aim of generating valuable insights to inform and enhance the RYPP's programming and strategies.

The research is ethnographic and primarily conducted through participant observation, which means that the research team's members follow processes, people, events and initiatives by participating in and observing key interlocutors' everyday lives. They describe the conditions for peaceful coexistence, communication with HDP actors and community members and their efforts to realize ideals that matter to them, including peace in their communities. These investigations are being conducted by a comprehensively trained team of twelve grassroots anthropologists (seven refugees and one Ugandan national in Rhino Camp; three refugees and one Kenyan national in Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Settlement) technically supervised by the Programme Manager (PM), who also conducts fieldwork and interviews contributing to the data-generation. The research is guided by three overall research questions:

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

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

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

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

Three hypotheses inform the direction of the research:

Young people's engagement with peace is characterized by their aspirations for better futures, capacities and real efforts for change.

Humanitarian, legal and political conditions [1] are important for what young people hope for and how their plans unfold.

Young people draw on past experiences (from humanitarian aid and conflict) when engaging with individuals, communities and institutions on their journeys towards better futures.

1.2.2. Supporting young people on their own terms

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

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

The South Sudan conflict has produced one of the largest refugee crises in the world. Many studies and assessments highlight the multiple barriers, constraints and limitations that seem to keep future generations in the same vicious circle of poverty, resource scarcity, illiteracy, unemployment, violence and (sometimes) retaliation (Lynge 2015:8; DDG and DRC 2017; Khadka 2017:5). However, we have alarmingly little knowledge about how efforts to support peace affect the long-term prospects of young South Sudanese and how they can best be supported. ASPIRE is unique, as it seeks to put young people and their efforts for positive change at the centre of the research by exploring issues from their point of view. This approach builds on findings from a five-and-a-half-year doctoral research project on participation led by the DRC. The study shows that many young South Sudanese refugees succeed in breaking out of negative patterns of domestic and inter-ethnic violence, improving their relations with host communities, becoming self-reliant, demanding participation and accountability from humanitarian actors, and promoting peaceful coexistence (Degett 2023). Tailored, adaptable and quality support for young people's efforts to attain more stable and peaceful social environments are more relevant than ever. By discovering, examining and mapping young people's existing efforts, ASPIRE seeks to develop more solid and nuanced understandings of the existing structures and initiatives for peaceful coexistence.

1.2.3. Relevance

These research findings will appeal to a wide group of stakeholders engaged with young people, peacebuilding, the South Sudan situation and more. They will feed into many current policy agendas, global standards, priorities and commitments, including the Grand Bargain (particularly the Participation Revolution [2]); the Core Humanitarian Standards (CHS) (particularly *Commitment 1: communities and people affected by crisis and vulnerability [...] can*

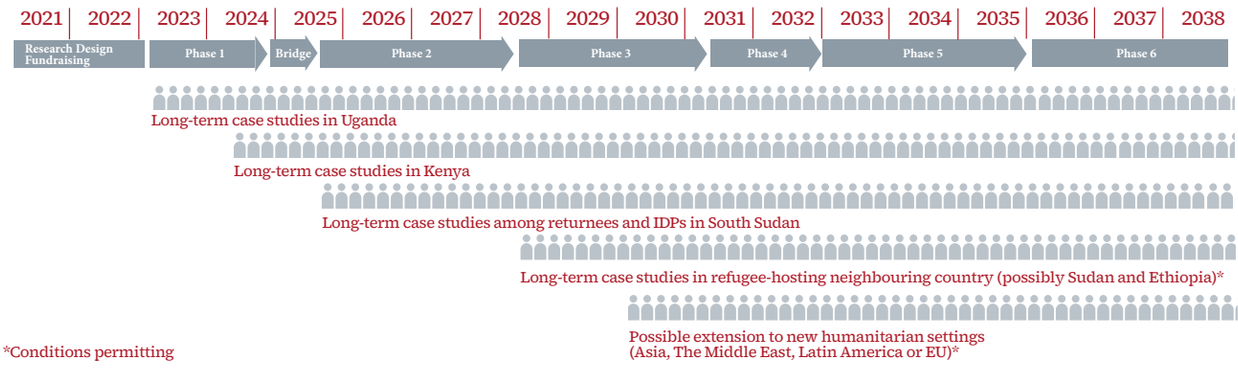
[1] These include: 1) the local humanitarian set-up, including the HDP actors, their practices, their provision of services, their access to funding and how they are able and willing to let refugees participate in the decisions that affect their lives (Degett 2018); 2) the implications of being a refugee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

[2] The Grand Bargain framework has changed several times during the past nine years. Grand Bargain 3.0 adopts participation as an Enabling Priority (Focus Area 1). The phrase 'Participation Revolution' comes from the original commitment in 2016 and is also part of version 3.0 (IASC 2023).

exercise their rights and participate in actions and decisions that affect them; and Commitment 7: access support that is continually adapted and improved based on feedback and learning) (CHS 2024); the humanitarian-development nexus, also referred to as the humanitarian-development-peace nexus (EU 2017) coming out of the New Way of Working (NWoW) (UN 2024a); the UN Resolution on Youth, Peace and Security (UN 2024b); the Peacebuilding Impact Hub (UN 2024c); UNHCR 2018 Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) (paras 13, 34, 40) (UN 2018); the 2019 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) Recommendation on the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus (OECD 2024); the OECD DAC and International Network on Conflict and Fragility (INCAF) Common Position on Addressing Forced Displacement with a Comprehensive Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus Approach (OECD DAC and INCAF 2023); A New Agenda for Peace (UN 2023); and the UN Pact for the Future (UN 2024d).

ASPIRE has synergies with the overall global agenda on localization, which is central to most of the commitments and initiatives coming out of the New York Declaration[3] and other policy commitments and practice standards. Using solid ethnographic data, the research will generate valuable knowledge about the local work of RLOs on peaceful coexistence, including their making and remaking through – and adaptation to – volatile local conditions, mobility patterns across borders, and access to funding through HDP actors, faith-based communities, small-scale local contributions and the diaspora. While running on an unprecedented time-frame, the research will generate evidence and input for decision-making as it continues (Figure 1). Participatory methodology and approaches are in the DNA of ASPIRE. This approach is not only the best way of ensuring research ethics and relevance and that the project lives up to global participation ambitions; it also feeds into the updated CHS commitments to communication and participation published in March 2024.[4]

Figure 1:
Preliminary Timeline



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

[4] Commitment one, (People and communities in situations of crisis and vulnerability…, can exercise their rights and participate in actions and decisions that affect them) under 'Requirements' 1.1, 1.4, 1.5 and 1.6: 'Ensure diversity, equity and inclusion considerations are integrated into the organisation's work with people and communities, with attention to the most marginalised. Ensure people's participation in decisions and actions is meaningful for them and corresponds to their preferred ways of engaging. Communications representing people and communities, including those used for advocacy and fundraising, have their informed consent, are accurate, respectful, ethical and preserve their dignity. Establish a coherent organisational approach to ensure transparent information-sharing, communication and meaningful participation of people and communities in the actions and decisions that affect them' (CHS 2024:6).

Boda boda motorcycle driver association receive ASPIRE flyers with their picture in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement @ Ayo Degett/DRC

2. Endeavours, Conditions and Subjectivity

People's endeavours are the central object of study for ASPIRE. We define endeavours as refugees' ways of managing their lives and improving their life situations by directing efforts towards what is important to them. But one might ask: Endeavours for what? To what ends? There are endeavours for livelihoods, for children's futures, for security and for family care. Our project is focused on endeavours for peace at the immediate level of individuals, families and communities. Some of these endeavours aim to prevent conflict from exploding by catching it early, as described in several examples in last year's report (Degett and Whyte 2023). One example was the refugee-driven rumour-tracker project that successfully prevented false rumours from spreading in Rhino Camp and put the lid on simmering conflicts before they boiled over. Others, like the customary court, described above in the case of the stolen phone, work to mediate conflicts that have already arisen.

The literature on peoples' reactions and resistance to humanitarian initiatives and rules, directions and structures is extensive (Ferguson 1994; Scott 1990; Kibreab 2004; Kaiser 2007; Allen 1996). However, not much has been written about how people living under the auspices of humanitarian actors in camps sometimes try to influence decisions proactively and improvise initiatives that run parallel to the established systems, as did the Rumour Trackers and the Leopards described in the 2023 report and the customary court mentioned above (Degett 2023; Omata 2022). By introducing endeavours, we explore this wide variety of ways in which refugees engage with conflict and institutions that handle conflict: both reactively and proactively.

These endeavours unfold under given conditions in the humanitarian space of refugee-camp settings. Conditions include the power relations of resource control, which are dominated by the authorities and humanitarian actors who set policies and structures of governance. They also include ethnic leaders who control certain arenas of power and authority, sometimes as representatives of influential persons and clans back home. Conditions and humanitarian assistance are affected by wider historical, political and financial forces. Conflicts in other parts of the world mean funding cuts in food rations for refugees in Uganda and Kenya (OCHA 2024). The violence in South Sudan, including hostilities related to the reduction in grazing areas due to climate change, can ignite conflicts among refugees in Uganda and Kenya (Bushby and Regede 2024). On top of this, the current war in Sudan is sending refugees through South Sudan to Uganda and Kenya, increasing the pressure on a system that is already overstretched. Conditions set limits and opportunities, and they provide the challenges to which refugees respond as actors.

In our report last year (which only covered Uganda), we focused on a number of specific conditions that seemed to come up again and again in the data: 1) resource scarcity fuelled by the cuts in food assistance; 2) the increase in armed violence in Central Equatoria State in South Sudan in early 2023, leading to retaliation incidents among refugees; and 3) substance abuse and rampant violence by youths arriving from the former Protection of Civilians (POCs) sites in South Sudan. This year we will still follow some of these overall dynamics, but the refugee field team found it necessary to explore the landscape of formal and informal authorities as conditions for how conflicts can be handled. We have been investigating the role and (overlapping) mandates of the many formal and semi-formal structures and institutions engaged in handling conflicts, including statutory institutions such as the police and formal security-providers, the RWC structure and the semi-formal ethnic (or customary) structures like the specific customary court in the Nuer community, N4, and other customary courts. All these actors will be described in detail in Chapter four.

In this landscape of authorities, young people navigate their options when conflicts arise. This leads us to the notion of subjectivity. Refugees are subjects in the double sense of being subject to conditions and authors of action. They are subjected to the procedures and interventions of humanitarian assistance

and authority structures in the camp for handling conflict. And they act on the basis of their concerns, capabilities, knowledge and experiences. Memories of past engagements with HDP actors, statutory actors and customary courts are particularly important for refugees from South Sudan, since many of them have fled several times before and have lived in and out of these settings their whole lives (Degett 2023). They draw on earlier experience to assess their current conditions and possibilities. Recognizing refugee endeavours requires this kind of appreciation of subjectivity: that their actions are informed by multiple considerations about past experiences, similar situations and what is possible. When we use the term navigation, it is to highlight the way subjects orient themselves within multiple possibilities and move towards the feasible and advantageous, described by others as a sea that has movements within movements or topographies of meaning (Vigh 2006; Hastrup 2009). The first case we presented is a good example of this. Nyalat first sought support through the usual channel—the customary court. But she was not satisfied with their judgement and decided to take the case to an alternative authority, the police, where she got what she needed. In these conditions of multiple possibilities, she tried one and then another.

Meeting among community security group in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement @ Ayo Degett/DRC

ASPIRE staff from Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement, Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Settlement meet for cross border training @ Ayo Degett/DRC

3. Research set-up

The ASPIRE Research Design, a 60-page document drawn up by the DRC, was endorsed by the DRC and UNHCR in December 2021 (Degett 2021). The principles, approaches and focus described therein have informed the implementation of ASPIRE since 2023 and will continue to inform its implementation in the future. While these overall key elements remain in place, the research design is adjusted to developments in the region that influence access, feasibility and new opportunities: for instance, the situation in and access to Sudan have changed significantly since the research design was adopted. Over the years, these developments have included the growing insecurity in Ethiopia and Sudan, as well as political developments, such as the introduction of new refugee legislation in Kenya. A key element of the research design, which is still highly relevant, is the need for genuine inclusion of the people who are the subjects of the research in the project's implementation and in decision-making processes. In addition, ASPIRE stands on the shoulders of analytical and practical lessons learned from an ethnographic research project on participation and community-based efforts that influence interventions implemented in Rhino Camp between 2018 and 2023.
The overall strategic decisions of ASPIRE are taken by the ASPIRE Steering Group (SG), which in 2024 consists of representatives from the two founding parties, the DRC and UNHCR, based at Head Quarter-level (HQ), regional level (Nairobi) and country level (Uganda and Kenya). The SG also includes a representative from the University of Copenhagen (UCPH) and representatives from the Community Forums in the research locations. The ASPIRE Community Forums are representatives of those at the centre of the research, explained in detail in Section 3.2.2. The SG is expected to grow alongside the expansion of ASPIRE into the planned locations, especially South Sudan, planned for 2025. In this chapter, we outline the key elements of the research set-up in Rhino Camp and Kakuma and Kalobeyei Settlements in 2024.

3.1. Field assistants

ASPIRE's current research is taking place in three camp settings: Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement in northern Uganda, and Kakuma and Kalobeyei Settlements in western Kenya. The research is being implemented as a collaboration between the Programme Manager (PM) and twelve local Field Assistants (FAs) employed by the DRC in Uganda and Kenya, who are conducting research in their own communities in the settlements. In Kenya, the FAs are hired on incentive agreements. Incentive workers (sometimes referred to as volunteers) live in the areas of humanitarian interventions and typically fulfil long- or short-term unskilled assignments. They are not considered to be 'real' staff in terms of benefits, contracts and salary.[5]

The twelve FAs have different backgrounds reflecting the diversity in the settlements. The FAs comprise ten refugees (four female and six male) who represent the most prominent South Sudanese ethnic groups in the settlements, including the Nuer, Dinka and four Equatorian tribes (Pojulu, Kuku, Mundu and Kakwa). The remaining two FAs are host-community members representing the ethnic groups of the host community, namely the Turkana in Kenya and the Lugbara in Uganda. The age of the FAs ranges from 22 to 44 years. In Uganda the FAs are permanently based in five zones of the settlement: Ofua, Siripi, Ocea, Eden and Tika, while the FAs in Kenya are permanently based in Kakuma 3 and 4, Kakuma Town and Kalobeyei Village 2.

In their communities they follow people, processes, governance structures and community initiatives. Throughout 2024, each FA has followed on average 17 cases, where people aspire to and handle issues relating to peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution. Some of these cases are

[5] When referring to 'staff' in this report, we do not include incentive workers, unless specifically indicated.

informal community groups, others are individuals who play key roles in conflict mediation between ethnic groups or families, yet others are informal

community-based organizations (CBOs) and ethnic leadership structures, or more formally registered RLOs and local authorities, while others are interventions implemented by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) or UN agencies. At the same time, the FAs are mapping community-based key actors who implement interventions relating to peace and conflict mediation in their zones. The PM herself conducts ethnographic fieldwork through about five field trips per year, following processes, people and communities.

The FAs are divided into two groups who receive comprehensive supervision from the research leads bi-weekly on their individual research projects, methodological approaches, research ethics and the opportunities and challenges they might face. This peer-support structure has proved beneficial because the FAs learn a lot from each other's cases and ways of handling their daily engagement with their research participants. Participating in peer groups has been especially useful for the new FAs in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, since they gain from the discussions with the more experienced FAs in Rhino Camp. From an analytical perspective, having peer groups 'across borders' is helpful in improving our understanding of the differences and similarities between the two countries of implementation. In addition to supervision, all FAs in Rhino Camp participated in a comprehensive ethnographic methodology training course in September 2023 with a follow-up module in December 2023. These training sessions are facilitated by the PM and a specialised training consultant. Following the extension of the project to include Kenya, the FAs in Kakuma and Kalobeyei participated in a similar ethnographic methodology course in May 2024. All FAs received additional training in September and November 2024.

3.2. Participatory and community-led focus

ASPIRE employs methods that are participatory in nature and techniques that support research participants' involvement in the research process, including determining the priorities of the study, contextualizing the information collected, and collecting data through community-based FAs. This strong focus on participatory approaches ensures ownership of the research, accountability and the meaningful implementation of global participation commitments. By its explicit focus on participatory methods, ASPIRE seeks to counter the history of colonial attitudes and extractive practices in field research that often seem to lack connection between findings and priorities in the communities studied. At the same time, these collaborative approaches give a priority to seeing and understanding the life experiences of young South Sudanese in their own right: their own expertise and their capacity to create and direct new knowledge about the central themes of the research. In practice, the participatory and community-led elements are expressed through the various approaches described below.

3.2.1. Ownership of local research priorities

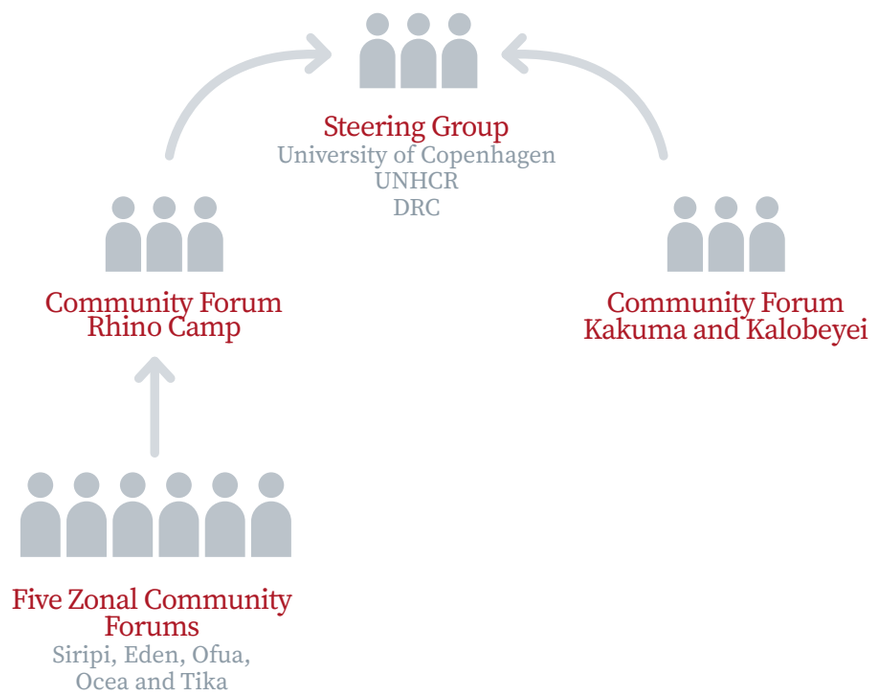
Inhabitants of Rhino Camp have been involved in the programme from the time of drawing up the research design in 2021. At that stage, a workshop was conducted to ensure refugee consultation and inputs on all the key elements of the research. Because people are experts in their own lives, the suggestions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

From the outset of the implementation in 2023, the approach has been to let the FAs themselves choose the initiatives, cases and research locations they feel are most relevant to ASPIRE's overall research focus. This approach gives a significant amount of ownership to the FAs and by extension to members of the communities that are subjects of the study. At the same time, it is exploratory because the FAs have chosen quite diverse initiatives and groups to study, which makes it challenging but interesting to identify patterns that are relevant at an overall level. In practice, the FAs design their own 14-day workplans by sketching out their planned participant observation and interviews, as well as the events, activities and meetings they aim to attend. Each week the FAs hand in one field report based on the fieldnotes they have made during observations and interviews. The field reports and workplans are then discussed with the PM in the bi-weekly supervision meetings. The peer group and the PM discuss the opportunities and challenges with the suggested activities listed, and the PM guides the individual FAs according to his or her needs. The obligatory supervision sessions are followed by bi-weekly preliminary supervision sessions in peer groups or, in some situations, individually to address specific topics. This set-up ensures that the FAs are supported when they encounter methodological challenges or need help in improving their ethnographic writing skills.

3.2.2. ASPIRE Community Forum(s)

A central part of the ASPIRE participatory approach is the Community Forum modality (see Figure 2). When the project was launched in 2023, inhabitants of Rhino Camp were asked for their input on the process of establishing the ASPIRE Community Forums. Based on their suggestions, it was decided that there would be five zonal Community Forums, who would then elect 1–2 members for the settlement-wide Community Forum. The FAs have facilitated the selection of the Community Forum in their respective zones, employing the age, gender and diversity (AGD) principle. Similarly, all zonal Community Forums are required to elect a male and a female representative to the overall settlement-based Community Forum. Otherwise, the process for electing Community Forum

Figure 2:
Governance structure



members has been managed by the community members themselves to adhere to participatory methodology. The five zones of Rhino Camp where ASPIRE is implemented all defined their individual processes for choosing representatives, who were elected in October and November 2023. Since the research component in Kakuma and Kalobeyei is smaller compared to Rhino Camp, the set-up of the Community Forums differs. In Kakuma and Kalobeyei, one Community Forum has been selected to represent the different areas of the settlements. The selection of the Community Forum has been facilitated by the FAs while adhering to the AGD principle. The process of selecting the Community Forum members unfolded during August 2024 and was completed by the first week of September. The Community Forums in both countries meet at a minimum every quarter, but to avoid top-down decision-making, they are encouraged to develop their own meeting structure within this framework. The Community Forum modality has been advantageous to the project, since the members operate as representatives who receive information about the implementation of ASPIRE to be shared locally. The Forum members are equipped with key information on the project, enabling them to act as ambassadors for the project and answer questions from the inhabitants in the settlements (for instance, regarding data-management and confidentiality).

The overall research process is that data from the implementation area of the research (Kakuma and Kalobeyei Settlements and Ofua, Siripi, Ocea, Eden and Tika in Rhino Camp) is collected by the FAs and the PM. The data is then analysed and used to inform an annual report of findings, such as this report. These findings are shared annually and discussed with the four boards (two Community Forums, the Steering Group and the Academic Advisory Board). Based on the feedback from the boards, the findings are adjusted and adopted into a plan for the focus of the research the following year. The Community Forums at settlement level help the research team to include community members' questions, input and suggestions by acting as focal points in the areas of implementation. They are the key audience for receiving the findings of the project once a year and providing feedback to ensure the validity of the data. The findings from this report were presented to Community Forum members at settlement-level in Rhino Camp in September and in Kakuma and Kalobeyei in November 2024.

3.3. Methodology and data

The research design primarily builds on in-depth qualitative ethnographic methods such as participant observation and interviews. However, one of the advantages of ASPIRE is that it approaches the research questions from a mixed-methods perspective and seeks to employ the methods that are most suitable for addressing the question at hand. While ethnographic methodology is central, we plan to test and track a few themes through quantitative data, when relevant. For instance, we keep a database of peacebuilding activities implemented by various stakeholders such as RLOs and NGOs. We update this database on a weekly basis using data from a simple questionnaire. The participatory and exploratory methodological approach is one of the primary strengths of ASPIRE's research design, which, along with the numerous research locations and extremely long-term implementation period, will contribute unique new knowledge to existing debates in peace, development and humanitarian practice communities, policy communities and academia. The second year of the study has been focused on developing further the anthropological skills of the FAs in Uganda, as well as training the new FAs in Kenya in basic ethnographic methodology and gaining an understanding of their capacities, strengths and methodological challenges. All research staff in Kakuma and Kalobeyei were recruited and trained in anthropological methodology when ASPIRE was extended to Kenya in May 2024, and this report was written during October and November 2024. Accordingly, this report builds on relatively limited data from Kakuma and Kalobeyei compared to the great amount of ethnographic data that will inform the project over the coming years.

3.3.1. Participant observation of endeavours

A central element in ASPIRE is to examine and understand the choice of action by young people and the central actors in their life-worlds over time. The research project seeks to understand 'what people do' in addition to 'what they say' and 'what they say they do'. Qualitative methods widely used in anthro-pological research, such as participant observation, life-course interviews and focus-group discussions, are particularly suitable for this focus on words and action. Through participant observation, research-ers follow situations and interactions over time by being present while they unfold and observing the statements, actions and reactions that constitute them. For instance, the field researchers follow the development of ideas for peaceful coexistence, such as a community-driven night patrols to reduce cases of theft, a group of young people organizing a storytelling event to address the consequences of spreading rumours, or conflict-mediation sessions between conflicting community members. This happens through the planning, potential raising of funds, use of social connections and networks, and the execution, adaptation or dismissal of the idea or plan. The field researchers document their participant observation in systematic and comprehensive notes, which the researcher reviews together with them at the bi-weekly supervision sessions. The research methods are therefore iterative; interviews, conversations and observations are only structured in that they follow and build on the findings of the previous interactions.

By following the same processes and people contin-ually over many years, explanations, patterns and nuances will appear, which can rarely be observed through short-term interactions or interviews alone. This long-term engagement with the same (types of) actors over fifteen years will build trust, which usually allows people to be more open about their plans, challenges and concerns. In this way, patterns of efforts, or endeavours, to handle the limitations of the humanitarian arrangements appear in the data and inform the findings about how young people handle humanitarian decisions. Concretely, the FAs follow interventions and ini-tiatives, also referred to as 'cases' or 'case stories', which are often undertaken by groups but also in some cases by individuals. The cases they have decided to follow are very diverse, and we have been reminded increasingly of the high relevance of the FAs' own positions in their communities and the networks that they are able to draw on. For some of the youngest FAs, who are not necessarily well connected to people of power and seniority in their community, we have stressed the importance of following groups and initiatives among their peers. Gaining access to conflict-resolution meetings held by local clan leaders might be difficult and irrelevant for now. At the same time, some FAs who are older and better connected to informal and formal refugee leaders follow clan leaders and their ways of handling conflicts and approaching peace. The FAs' positionality is therefore key to their access and focus areas, and therefore ultimately for the data we gather in ASPIRE.

While some cases follow short-term conflicts which are triggered and handled relatively quickly, other cases unfold, escalate and are handled over the course of several months. One type of case that typically extends over a longer period is conflicts related to courtship and marriage. For instance, one FA in Rhino Camp followed a case of intermarriage, which we will introduce in detail later. This inter-marriage caused some conflict and tensions in the community, since several different ethnic groups were involved, each with different marriage cus-toms, alliances and attitudes towards intermarriage. The case lasted several months, during which it was followed by the same FA. In practice, following this case meant participating in several mediation meet-ings with the families and the customary councils, elders and church leaders, observing ceremonies and dowry negotiations, and interviewing different family and community members from each side of the conflict. Through this approach, one gains nuanced and detailed insights into the nature of a conflict and its resolution, as well as the key actors involved over the course of the case. As cases accumulate, we gain more information on specific types of conflict – for instance, conflicts related to theft, courtship, or access to land – allowing us to compare the patterns of actors involved and judge how a conflict is triggered, escalates and is handled both within each settlement and across its borders.

Many of the short-term cases that have been followed in 2024 are related to the specific groups with whom the FAs have engaged throughout longer time periods. For instance, one FA in Rhino

Camp has followed a group of *boda-boda* riders (motorcycle taxis) called the Leopards for over a year since the launch of the project. In addition to their daily activities, which do not necessarily relate to peace, the Leopards are deeply involved in resolving various conflicts in their community when needed. For instance, they intervene in incidents of domestic violence, take initiatives to prevent theft, and facilitate transportation to police stations and health-care centres in cases of emergency. When the FAs follow groups and initiatives over a long period of time, this allows us to track how these initiatives and the activities of the groups evolve and change through the years. Moreover, it gives us a better understanding of how various conflicts are handled and the patterns of who is involved, depending on the nature of the conflict.

3.3.2. Mapping of Stakeholders

A central part of the ASPIRE project is the mapping of stakeholders working with peacebuilding and conflict resolution in the settlements. The FAs keep track of all relevant community-driven initiatives and stakeholders operating in their respective zones. The stakeholders include international and national NGOs, RLOs, CBOs and informal groups. While some stakeholders implement interventions relating to peace, others are not formally recognized by either themselves or the community as implementors of peace initiatives. For instance, the primary purpose of the Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs) is for the members to save money collectively and take out small loans when needed. However, these groups often step in when conflicts erupt in the community: they counsel those involved, attend mediations and/or provide financial support for members in emergency situations. Thus, they contribute to peaceful coexistence in the community, despite having a different purpose. The long-term implementation period allows ASPIRE to follow key stakeholders over a long period of time, tracking how their initiatives and operational status may evolve over the years, for instance, as a result of changing external conditions such as funding or internal conditions in the settlements such as community needs. At the time of writing this report (November 2024) the stakeholder map includes 88 stakeholders in Rhino Camp and 73 in Kakuma and Kalobeyei. In addition to the overall mapping of stakeholders, the FAs conduct specific mapping exercises when needed. In connection with the writing of this report the FAs, have been instructed to map the traditional structures – such as councils of elders and customary courts – in the settlements. Having an overview of the traditional authorities who govern the resolution of conflicts in the settlement and how these intersect with formal authorities such as the police or the elected refugee leaders allows us to improve the understanding of these structures and to compare them across Kenya and Uganda. In terms of customary institutions, we have currently tracked 32 customary courts, councils and groups of elders in Rhino Camp, 13 in Kakuma and 17 in Kalobeyei.

Figure 3:
Thematic areas

Themes
Theft
Food security
Taboo (cultural)
Domestic violence
Retaliation (in camp and across the border)
Suicide
Gender and identity
Governance
Ethnically fuelled conflict/ethnic discrimination
Host–refugee conflict
Romantic relationships/marriage
Religious/moral
Community policing/safety
Economic recovery/livelihoods
Plot allocation/access
Sport and games
Children/young people
Water/access
Legislation
Fraud and irregular use of funds
Trauma
Witchcraft
Sexual exploitation/rape
Transactional sex
Aid envy/resettlement-related
Health-care conflict
Farming/crops

3.3.3. Data and data-management

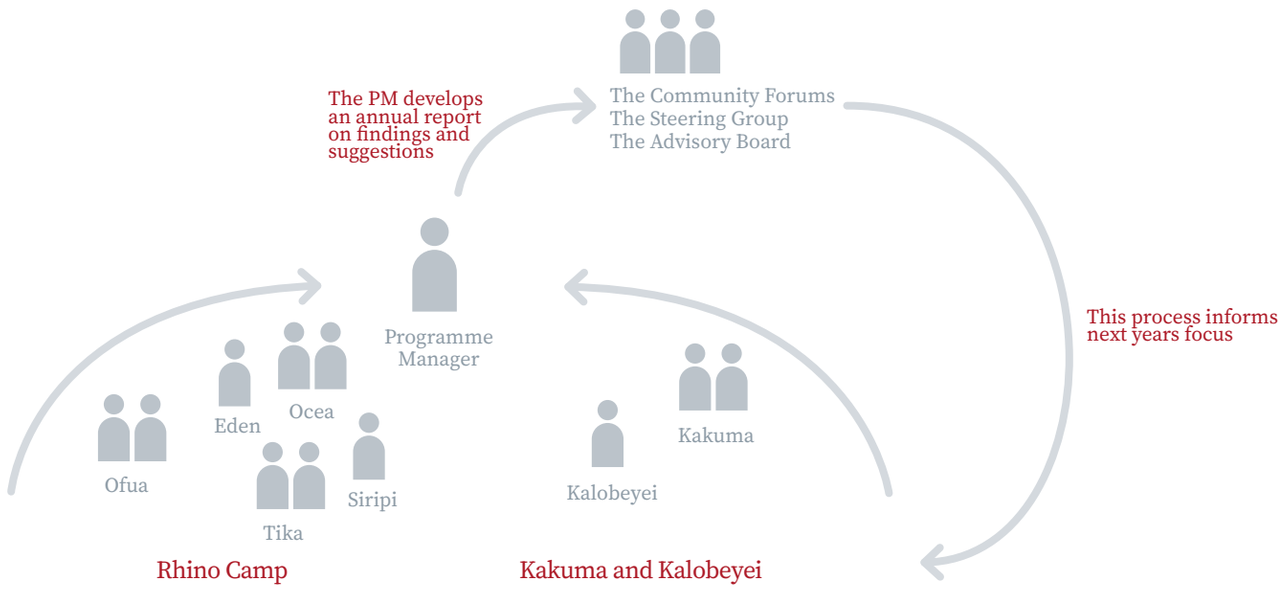
Having a participatory approach and implementing a project with FAs who have very different positions in their local communities and differing interests, access, skills and capacities means that the data we collected are very diverse. Due to time limitations, this report builds on minimal data from Kenya, but it is sufficient to identify emerging patterns and themes that can be compared to the data from Uganda. Over time, it is our plan that the ASPIRE team will work with more specific thematic areas according to which themes are found to be more relevant. The FAs will fit these thematic areas into their priorities and engagements at the local level, depending on the contextual conditions in the research locations. Because ASPIRE is exploratory in nature, a wide variety of data will be collected throughout the research period to ensure that findings provide nuanced and satisfying answers to the research questions. In practice, the data will include:

1. Field notes from participant observation, conversations and informal interviews conducted at the research locations that are developed into field reports.
2. Interview transcripts from the recorded interviews.
3. Stakeholder databases of key actors, initiatives and structures in the settlements.
4. Quantitative data from surveys, some of which will be rolled out later to test the scale and translatability of the findings across borders.
5. Results of exercises: alternative methods will be useful, such as photo elicitation, drawing maps, or exercises where refugees are asked to show their trust in certain processes or actors.
6. Reports, assessments and minutes from consultations with the Community Forums, the FAs, the community and local actors, and HDP communities.
7. Review of literature, including studies conducted by other actors operating in the context and the monitoring and progress reporting of the RYPP implementation.

On a weekly basis, FAs hand in one field report of a case they are following, which is then coded according to the thematic areas, the key actors involved and the location. The field reports are currently coded according to 27 thematic topics and 35 categories of key actors (Figure 3). Since ASPIRE takes an exploratory approach, additional themes and relevant actors will be added to the list as they are discovered. The key actors include broad categories such as NGOs, RLOs, Church groups, the RWC, tribal councils, the DRS, police and safety groups, as well as the prominent ethnic groups and nationalities in the settlements. At the time of writing the report (November 2024), there are a total of 250 field reports from 2024 following 230 cases across all themes.

The data are collected and stored in a responsible manner, in line with existing guidelines on confidentiality in humanitarian action and research ethics. The project follows the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity and the International Committee of the Red Cross' (ICRC) standards for data-protection in humanitarian settings (ALLEA 2023; Marelli 2024). All individuals and actors are given pseudonyms from the first point of noting down their statements and actions, and the project does not store any data that could identify them. In this report, such data have been removed to ensure anonymity.

Figure 4:
Research setup



ASPIRE staff conducting field research in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement @ Ayo Degett/DRC

Market street in Kakuma Refugee Camp @ Ayo Degett/DRC

4. Conditions

4.1 Displacement of South Sudanese

For the past half-century, most people in what is now South Sudan have suffered from drought, floods, famine and war. The many periods of armed conflict have left few lives untouched, and in addition to the massive death tolls, millions of people have been displaced into neighbouring countries. As of November 2024, approximately 4.53 million people have been displaced from their homes in South Sudan, and ca. 2.28 million of these have sought refuge in neighbouring countries. Out of these, 41 percent (1,006,000) are being hosted in Uganda and 8 percent (196,000) in Kenya (UNHCR 2024e:6).

In May 2024, ASPIRE was extended from Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement in northern Uganda to include Kalobeyei Refugee Settlement and Kakuma Refugee Camp in northwest Kenya. Rhino Camp and Kalobeyei are formally defined as 'settlements' where inhabitants enjoy a greater degree of freedom than more traditional 'camps'. Despite the difference in terminology, all three locations share characteristics that would be defined as 'camps' (Gidron 2022:8) in the literature on humanitarian spaces. This is also the term used by people inhabiting these places, which is why we will refer to all three locations as 'camps' henceforward.

4.2. Governing refugees

A complex patchwork of actors makes up the institutions governing, administering and keeping order in the three camps. These include formal authorities and security-providers, the elected refugee-leadership structure, the 'customary' or 'ethnic' leaders and courts, the local churches, refugee associations and organizations, UNHCR and NGOs.

To survive in these settings, one must constantly navigate these structures and institutions, including the opportunities, challenges and restrictions they provide. People do their best to find pragmatic solutions to the hardships and limited access to resources that the camps offer. Conflicts and disputes are common. Because ASPIRE is exploratory, participatory and refugee-driven, we follow the conflicts that the field assistants, who themselves are inhabitants of the camps, find most interesting, relevant or representative of the current dynamics in their communities. While mapping all occurring conflicts and disputes would be an impossible task, we are able to cover a wide variety of different conflicts and ways of handling them (see Figure 3). People draw on whatever economic and cultural networks are available to them to make ends meet and to generate a sense of dignity and predictability (Gidron 2022:4). These networks, the refugees' ability to navigate them, and their sense of social and cultural connection inside and outside the camp are therefore necessary for understanding how they prefer to – and are forced to – settle their conflicts. This chapter briefly introduces key contextual conditions in these camps that influence how refugees handle conflicts and engage in peaceful coexistence. It focuses on the role of the institutions and structures that play key parts in conflict management.

4.3. Refugee conditions in Uganda

Uganda's refugee laws are often portrayed as progressive global ideals for supporting refugees in pursuing self-reliance and a life beyond the settlements (Degett 2018). These ideals build on the formal framework described in the 2006 Refugee Act [6] and the 2010 Refugees Regulations, [7] which: 1) open Uganda's doors to asylum-seekers irrespective of their nationality; 2) grant refugees relative freedom of movement and the right to seek employment; and 3) allow each refugee family a small piece of land for their exclusive use. The situation for refugees in Uganda also includes multiple challenges, some hidden behind the inclusive approach to refugees' integration. For instance, it seems very difficult for South Sudanese to obtain formal jobs in Uganda, as they are under-prioritized, even when they live up to formal requirements (Kaiser 2006:602; O'Callaghan 2018:12; Kaiser 2007). Moreover, they lack the opportunity to be naturalized as Ugandan citizens, and their access to aid is for the most part anchored in isolated rural settlements that provide very limited access to sustainable livelihoods (ibid.). In practice, these challenges mean that most refugees in Uganda live on the margins of society. Being highly dependent on aid to cover their basic needs, they are forced to live their lives in settlements (Degett 2018).

Because of Uganda's progressive approach to refugees, and perhaps because of its accessibility, it is often selected to be the first in line for new global initiatives, pilot studies and policy frameworks. For instance, Uganda was selected as a pilot country for the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). But despite these efforts, the lack of progress has been strongly criticized in a number of analyses (Crawford et al. 2019; Schiltz et al. 2018; O'Callaghan 2018; Montemurro and Wendt 2017). Here, the issues that stand out are: exclusion of key actors from different processes, such as communities and local authorities; limited engagement by the private sector; and a lack of monitoring frameworks to capture change. Moreover, funding lags behind ambition. On the one hand, donors want to promote and support Uganda's approach to hosting refugees as a positive success that boosts Western interests in containing refugees and migrants in regions of origin (O'Callaghan 2018:30). On the other hand, donors lack the financial means to support this approach in practice. In addition, their confidence has been undermined by several serious corruption scandals in recent years.[8]

4.3.1. Rhino Camp

Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement has hosted refugees since 1980. The settlement is located on clan-owned land,[9] and it stretches about 85km in rocky or swampy areas, making farming difficult (Degett 2023; Degett and Whyte 2023). It takes about two and a half hours' drive on dirt roads to reach the nearest town, Arua, on a dry day, in a suitable vehicle. As of October 2024, 167,125 refugees and asylum-seekers live in Rhino Camp, of whom 95.28% are South Sudanese; others are from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DR Congo), Sudan and Rwanda, with a handful from Burundi and Eritrea (UNHCR and OPM 2024a). Most of the South Sudanese arrived as part of the massive influx of 716,732 refugees who fled South Sudan between 2016 and 2017 (OIOS 2018:1). A few South Sudanese have remained in the settlement since the previous armed conflicts leading up to independence in 2011. Others continue to arrive in the constant daily flow of refugees across the border, including refugees fleeing the hostilities in Sudan who arrive in Uganda via South Sudan. South Sudanese are granted refugee status on a prima facie basis in Uganda, which means they are provided asylum on arrival based on their nationality (UNHCR 2011:103).

[6] See the 2006 Refugee Act in the UNHCR's overview of country-specific refugee legislation and treaties (Refworld 2006).
[7] See the 2010 Refugee Regulations (Refworld 2010).
[8] See (OIOS 2018).
[9] Land in this part of the West Nile area is held under customary tenure and owned by indigenous communities, administered through traditional governance methods, and passed on through ancestral lineages (O'Callaghan 2018:20).

4.3.2. Ofua, Siripi, Ocea, Eden and Tika

For now (2023 and 2024), we have focused our research efforts on five areas, also referred to as zones, of Rhino Camp, where our field assistants are based.

Figure 5: Population numbers in research location[10]

Zone	Refugee population
Ofua	27,081
Siripi	25,753
Ocea	16,072
Eden	18,570
Tika	12,226
Total	99,702

Multiple ethnic groups from South Sudan inhabit Rhino Camp, and because the settlement receives new arrivals daily, their composition changes constantly. The largest zones are occupied by people arriving from the southern part of South Sudan, Bari-speaking ethnic groups such as the Kakwa, Mundari, Kuku, Kelico and Mundo. Rhino Camp also hosts a substantial number of refugees from the Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups, most of whom come from the more northern and eastern parts of South Sudan; the Nuer population in particular has grown in recent years.

In Ofua, almost everyone originates from Central Equatoria in South Sudan, many from the same specific areas in the (then) Yei River State,[11] and almost everyone seems familiar with Kakwa, the main language spoken. Most people in Ofua who fled the urban areas in South Sudan came from the capital Juba and the city of Yei, closer to the border with Uganda. The population in Ofua includes people with very limited access to resources, many war orphans, female-headed households, and people suffering from chronic illnesses and war-inflicted trauma. But there are individuals and families with the resources and energy to cater for the most vulnerable and for developing community-driven initiatives to improve living conditions for others. Like many other accounts from these areas, their life stories involved periods of stability, insecurity, hopelessness, endurance, relative improvements, fluctuating kin connections, family disputes, and childhoods with overwhelming responsibilities. In 2016, the armed conflict in South Sudan spread into Central Equatoria and was fuelled by territorial conflicts, all of which made people flee over the border into Uganda in large numbers (Justin and De Vries 2019). Prior to the war, this part of South Sudan had enjoyed development initiatives that had made service provision, infrastructure and access to education significantly better than in other and more isolated and war-torn parts of South Sudan (Harrell-Bond 1986; Hutchinson 1996; Johnson 1996; Salih 1996) (Harrell-Bond 1986; Hutchinson 1996; Johnson 1996; Salih 1996). Another important point is that many families in Ofua already knew each other before their arrival, and many fled together from the same villages. All these issues contributed to shaping a relatively homogeneous social environment in Ofua.

In Ocea, Siripi and Eden the communities are more diverse, ethnically and otherwise, and include several families that had stayed behind since the previous wars in South Sudan. While the Bari-speaking population seemed to be in the majority, the communities included Acholi families, a large Nuer population, several Dinka families, a significant number of refugees from the Nuba communities in Sudan, and refugees from the east of the DR Congo. Ocea also hosts the only reception centre in the settlement. Refugees arrive here from the transit centres near the border while undergoing registration processes. Ocea is a busy, diverse and strategically important area of the settlement. Tika is located at one of the furthest ends of the settlement and is often difficult to reach by car. Most of the people living there are from the Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups, who came from areas such as Bor, Aweil, Bentiu, Rumbek, the wider Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile in South Sudan. Some people had acquired degrees, and some had worked for

[10] These figures are reflected in UNHCR and OPM statistics from October 2024 (UNHCR and OPM 2024a) except for the figures for Tika zone, where the most recent statistics are from September 2024 (UNHCR and OPM 2024b).
[11] After the peace agreement in South Sudan in 2020, Yei River state and the two neighbouring states were merged into one, Central Equatoria State, which was the name of the area prior to 2015. These changes in governance seemed to fuel existing divides (Justin and Verkoren 2021).

humanitarian actors inside South Sudan, but many had no formal education or had arrived directly from the cattle camps. Accordingly, many had not learned Juba Arabic or English (Hutchinson 1996). These five zones of Rhino Camp settlement are ASPIRE's focus for several reasons. First of all, they represent the diversity in the settlement in terms of ethnic groups, new arrivals, old caseloads and different host-community areas. They also represent more homogenous communities, as well as being more diverse. Secondly, they represent the zones where conflict often arises because most important infrastructure is located here (hospitals, schools and the reception centre). Thirdly, most of the RLOs are based in these zones, and many community initiatives and important people, including the highest-ranking refugee leaders (based on governance and cultural, religious and ethnic identities) inhabit these areas. These are all people, groups and institutions that we are engaging with closely. Accordingly, these zones represent different types of conflict and conflict-management processes.

4.3.3. Humanitarian, Peace and Development actors

From the start of the ASPIRE project, it was clear that participation in decision-making, including decisions in conflict-handling, is intimately related to issues of power, politics, governance and control, as many scholars before us have shown (Degett 2023; Arnstein 1969:216; Cornwall 2011:xiii; Kelty 2020:1; Cooke and Kothari 2001:13). People, organizations and institutions in positions of power, whether administrative, political or economic, are therefore central study objects for ASPIRE. In 2024, about 90 (UNHCR 2024e:6) humanitarian organisations were registered to work with South Sudanese refugees in Uganda, and most of them appear to have activities in Rhino Camp. As part of the ASPIRE project, we are keeping a database and a timeline of actors that facilitate small- and large-scale programmes relating to peace, including UN actors, international and national NGOs, RLOs and more informal community groups, faith-based groups and CBOs. We mainly focus on the actors working in the five zones where ASPIRE is being implemented.

We will refer to all the actors who operate out of Yoro Basecamp, the formal office area of Rhino Camp, as Humanitarian, Development and Peace Actors 'HDP actors'. This is not to say that they were all the same. The mandate, operation and authority of Humanity & Inclusion (HI), for example, is quite different from that of the OPM or the World Food Programme (WFP). Yet they are all engaged in the implementation, management or coordination of HDP programmes, and their differences were, in many situations, irrelevant to the refugees. In fact, refugees often refer to all of them using the same umbrella term 'Yoro' (referring to the offices in the basecamp) or as 'Partners' (referring to UNHCR's implementing partners). International and national HDP actors make basic services available in the settlement, including water supplies, health services, protection, legal aid, education, cash-programming, food distribution, livelihood support, coordination services and many others.

In January 2024, 187 community-based organizations, led by forcibly displaced and stateless people, self-registered across Uganda (UNHCR 2024e:14). Over the past six years, during the implementation of the research project on participation (2018-2023), we have traced the work and development of the RLOs in the settlement, which we define in accordance with a recent analysis by Oxford University as refugee-governed and refugee-initiated not-for-profit organizations (Gitahi 2023:7). Many of the ones we have traced have specialized in programmes specifically on peace-building, addressing the root causes of conflict, de-escalation of conflict, and mediation. By 2018 approximately 12 formal RLOs were active in Rhino Camp, and by the end of 2023 the number had increased to about 34 (Degett 2023).

Most of these RLOs have their offices in the communities within the settlement where they themselves live. Over these years, three of the largest and best known RLOs working with peace in the research setting have been the CDC (Community Development Center), CTEN (Community Technology Empowerment Network) and YSAT (Youth Social Advocacy Team), which all receive funding from institutional donors. Over the years, the increasing numbers of RLOs have worked to organize themselves better both locally in the settlement and nationally. In this process, the RLON (Refugee-Led Organisation Network) was set up and is also represented in Rhino Camp. Given their presence, thematic focus on peace, extended knowledge of the local communities, and keen interest in improving the conditions of their peers in the set-

tlement, the RLOs in Rhino Camp are a key pillar in discussing, validating and challenging our findings.

Obviously the RYPP initiative described in Chapter 1 is also being followed closely by the ASPIRE team. In Rhino Camp, RYPP consists of a group of young refugee Peace Mentors who have trained community groups with the purpose of addressing the root causes of conflict and mitigating the escalation of conflict (UNHCR RYPP 2024). The DRC has been one of the largest implementing organizations in Rhino Camp since the influx in 2016 (at least in terms of staff and portfolios) and currently has about 58 employees and 42 people working on incentive agreements. The scarcity of existing services in Rhino Camp has been aggravated by the serious funding gaps in the refugee response. The Covid-19 pandemic, high inflation and escalating global crises have only worsened the situation. One of the most critical consequences faced by the residents in Rhino Camp currently is the dramatic cuts to the food rations.

4.3.4. Government authorities, security providers and the justice system

The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) manages the coordination of core services in Rhino Camp together with UNHCR. As the name indicates, OPM is managed centrally out of the Prime Minister's Office in Kampala. This is the Ugandan government body that handles all matters relating to refugees, including the determination of refugee status, allocations of land for the refugees and the coordination and management of refugee settlements. The OPM is also responsible for issuing Refugee Family Attestations, often referred to as the 'attestation card', to refugees upon arrival in Uganda.[12] Rhino Camp Settlement is led by the OPM's Settlement Commandant and his office, which includes a range of OPM programme staff corresponding to the relevant sectors of the humanitarian operations.

The Ugandan Police Force is the formal security-provider in the settlement and provides formal access to the justice system. Its main base is in Yoro, with smaller police posts, with one or two officers, centrally located in the largest zones of the settlement. The '*police to population ratio*' in the settlements is normally low compared to ordinary urban areas (Braak 2022:226). In Rhino Camp the total number of police officers is 32, making the police to population ratio about 1:5000. As we shall see later, this ratio is also very low compared to how the camps in Kenya are governed. While the refugees generally seem to respect and appreciate the presence of the Ugandan police, the scarcity of manpower means that many disputes are, in practice, handled by other mechanisms, as we shall see in the next chapter. As mentioned continuously by the refugees, the police were mostly involved in cases 'when there is blood' which is also a common understanding in various other settlements in northern Uganda (Gidron 2022:26).

In fact, many of the cases we have followed over the past year in Rhino Camp that have reached the police have been referred back to the community for 'mediation'. One exception is conflicts between refugees and host communities, which seem to be handled by the police more often. Another reason why refugees sometimes hesitate to contact the police are the demands for phone credit (airtime) and fuel associated with referring a case to the police. Sometimes these fees are small, but in some cases they are costly, especially for the person or persons who are defined as 'guilty of a crime'.

The cases that are not referred back to the community are transferred to police stations outside the settlement. The accused are detained there until being sent to prison on remand to await their trial. Some cases are brought to a court in Omugo, and some are handled by the mobile courts that come to the settlement from time to time, while more serious cases are handled by the Arua Chief Magistrate Court (The Judiciary of the Republic of Uganda 2024), except for capital offences, which are handled by the High Court (Gidron 2022). It is a common understanding in the settlement that court cases end up being extremely costly for everyone involved (because of fees, the cost of transport to Arua, etc.) and can drag on for years for various reasons, including a lack of resources for the court, and lack of formal interpreters (Gidron 2022:27) and, according to the refugees themselves, a failure to prioritize cases between refugees. The OPM and the police work alongside each other, and the police often escort the Settlement Commandant and his staff when

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

they need to go into the settlement to resolve or cool down erupting conflicts. With a few exceptions, there seem to be a positive relationship and good communications between the refugees, the local police and the OPM in the settlement, refugees being appreciative of their efforts and also understanding the lack of resources they have to work with (Degett 2023). When asked, the OPM and the police also value and appreciate the work of and collaboration with the refugee leadership in the settlement.

The local community governance structure in Uganda is divided into Local Councils (LCs) with a cabinet and a chairperson at each of five levels from village to district. The LCs are elected by their communities to represent their interests formally. Politically and otherwise, the LCI and LCII members are important figures in the areas around Rhino Camp, not least because they belong to the clans who own the land where the settlement is located. [13]The LCs often play an important role in handling conflicts when these appear between the refugees and members of the host community. These conflicts often relate to access to natural resources, including the grazing of cattle, and to water and farmland, but also, as we have seen with the rise of financial instability in Uganda, thefts of goats and crops. We also see several cases of conflict relating to courtships, inter-ethnic marriages and affairs. In all these conflicts, the LCs have taken part in mitigation and management.

4.3.5. Refugee Welfare Councils

The RWCs' governance structures, and their chairpersons in particular, are centrally important elements in the power dynamics in Rhino Camp, and therefore pivotal for refugees' participation in decision-making and modalities for conflict prevention, mediation and mitigation. The RWCs comprise elected refugee leaders who serve as the formal intermediaries between the refugee community on the one hand and the Ugandan authorities and humanitarian actors on the other. On several occasions during the research, RWCs explained their role as like a field extension of OPM, representing the authorities. This puzzled us, as their role could also be seen as somewhat the opposite, namely to represent the refugees' point of view. Nevertheless, this is a clear indication that the relationship between the OPM and the RWCs was multi-faceted and acknowledged the interests of both parties. The RWC structure was also key to the interactions between refugees and humanitarian actors. For example, RWC members were typically those who were invited for the coordination meetings, conflict mediation meetings, etc. This division of governance seems to work effectively compared to other camp-settings in the world, where refugees are not able or allowed to create forms of representation. However, the situation for refugees in Uganda is not always conflict-free, and sometimes alliances and rivalries exist across these institutions.

No formal written regulations pertain to the RWCs' mandate (Gidron 2023). In several interviews it was stated that the RWC structure had changed because of the extended mandate that was introduced by the OPM around 2016-2017. From July to October 2016, 40,503 refugees from South Sudan arrived in Rhino Camp, which led to some changes in the settlement and an expansion of the number of villages from 13 to 25 (UNHCR 2016:2). Due to this significant rise in the population in Rhino Camp, there was a need for additional actors to govern and coordinate the inhabitants, which led to the extension of the RWC structure's mandate. This 'extra' mandate to handle internal conflicts was, according to our sources, a shared interest of the OPM and the refugee community and was put in place in 2016 by OPM as a verbal agreement that the camps' inhabitants all seem to be aware of. We see many examples of the RWCs' mediation of conflicts in the settlement. The RWC structure was involved in around 50 percent of the cases followed by ASPIRE's field assistants in Rhino Camp in 2024. Clearly, they perceive themselves, and are perceived, as having a mandate to resolve conflicts. They are often among the first actors to be notified when conflict is threatened or has fully erupted. The RWCs handle a wide range of conflicts, including theft, fights between children and domestic violence, as well as conflicts related to resource access, as the following case illustrates.

One morning, Mary tethered her goats to graze on a small plot of uncultivated land close to her neighbour Ayen's garden. While Mary was gone, one goat freed itself from its rope and destroyed the maize in Ayen's

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

garden. The two women were from different tribes, and their families had a history of conflict, which had so far been resolved by the RWC and the Women's Representative alone. When Mary was walking back home to pick up her goats, Ayen was already waiting for her. She picked up a big stick and abused Mary for letting the goats destroy her crops. A fight erupted between them and quickly escalated, as their respective children and family members heard the noise and became involved themselves. One community member witnessed the fight and alerted the RWC, who arrived twenty minutes later, shouting, 'Can all of you stop all this stupid act? Why have you people failed to learn from your past? Why are you people allergic to peace?' This brought the fight to a halt.

The next day, a mediation meeting took place under the shade of a big tree. Since conflicts between these two women and their families were constantly re-curring, many local leaders attended. The mediation committee comprised the RWC chair, the Women's Representative, the RWC vice-chair, the secretary for security, a religious leader and community leaders from both Acholi and Nuer communities.

After each of the women had explained their views, it was decided that Mary should pay 90,000 UGX to Ayen to cover the costs of buying new seeds and paying some-one to plant them. When Ayen was asked whether she was satisfied with their decision, she pulled out a knife, threatening to use it if Mary did not keep her goats away from her garden. The Women's Representative yelled, 'Where is the peace we are preaching to you Ayen?! Must you come for mediation with [a] knife? This is a police case, I think.' When the Women's Representative threat-ened to report her to the police, Ayen threw herself on the ground, begging the leaders not to take her to the po-lice. She asked Mary for forgiveness, and the mediation was concluded without the involvement of the police.

This type of conflict, where crops are destroyed by loose farm animals, is very common. Usually the RWC handles such conflicts alone, since these can generally be resolved by agreeing on an appropriate compensation. In cases like this, where conflicts are recurring, other stakeholders, such as community elders, may be brought in. The RWC used the threat of calling in the police as a tool of power. In reality, the police may not even take a case such as this one, but the threat was effective. We have seen similar cases in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, where community leaders and elders threaten to involve the police in cases where the participants in the mediation are not cooperating.

4.3.6. Customary and ethnic institutions

Rhino Camp is also governed by 'customary' or 'ethnic' institutions, sometimes referred to with the broader terms 'elders', 'opinion leaders' or simply 'tribal leaders'. Among the cases we have observed across the zones in ASPIRE, these are some of the most important authorities for handling conflicts, maintaining peace, and minimizing petty crime and theft. As opposed to the RWC structure and the for-mal Ugandan authorities, these ethnic institutions are considered 'extra-territorial and transnational' (Gidron 2022:22). Put differently, whereas the police, OPM staff and RWCs are responsible for their own geographical zones in the camp, the ethnic institutions are often involved in handling conflicts for members who belong to their own ethnicity and clan, irrespective of where they live.

With more than 60 ethnic groups inhabiting South Sudan, their presence, structure, mandate and outreach obviously vary. Broadly speaking, structures of authority in each ethnic community in the Ugandan settlements correspond to those in place in South Sudan (Gidron 2022:23). This does not mean that the actual leaders reside in the camp, but rather that some people are appointed as the 'custo-dians' of these authorities (Braak and Kenyi 2018).

Usually, larger communities are divided into sub-sections according to their administrative division in South Sudan (ibid.). For larger groups the representation often takes place down to payam-level. A payam is the second lowest admin-istrative level and corresponds to the sub-counties of Uganda and therefore to the LCIII. In South Sudan, 'ethnic leaders' or 'chiefs' are considered the formal administrative leaders of geographical areas, as opposed to Uganda, where the LC structure works independently from any 'ethnic leadership', although overlaps exist (Leonardi and Santschi 2016; Degett 2023). This formal administrative role of 'ethnic leaders' in South Sudan might explain their continuing authority in Uganda. It might also explain why these leaders have continuous contact with ethnic leaders back in South Sudan and frequently consult them on conflict-resolution issues. As we shall learn in the next chapter, the

division of authority between the camps and the leaders in South Sudan is under constant negotiation, and we have reports of several cases where ethnic leaders in Uganda have disagreed with decisions by leaders at home and countered them in local conflict-resolution meetings.

Ethnic communities are differently constituted. For instance, among the Dinka in Rhino Camp, many are from Warrap State and the greater Bahr el Ghazal. These groups are therefore well represented in terms of 'ethnic leaders', as opposed to the smaller group of Dinka from Aweil, who only count a few households. Although the latter group have their own 'ethnic leadership', they see themselves as belonging to the broader Dinka ethnic leadership. The Nuer community is among the largest of the South Sudanese groups in both Kakuma and Rhino Camp, and their governance structure seems well developed and fine-tuned for settling conflicts. The leadership calls itself 'N4', referring to the four areas of South Sudan known as Nuerland. Certain leaders only sit for a limited amount of time, and key roles in these ethnic institutions are subject to a 'rotation' scheme, decided in part by the members in Rhino Camp and in part by ethnic leaders in their areas of origin.

The Nuer's strong governance structure is also mentioned in other studies of refugee settlements in Uganda, where some other ethnic groups even admire the Nuer's efficiency in conflict resolution processes (Braak and Kenyi 2018). The Bari-speaking ethnic groups in Rhino Camp that make up the majority appear to have governance structures that are more related to a clan organization, especially when it comes to conflict-handling. Normally, 'elders', who are not necessarily old, but rather have an influential position in the community, come together to solve conflicts. This underlines Gidron's point that for many South Sudanese groups customary law is a 'system of arbitration', where the 'trustworthy' members of a conflict-resolution process are decided by the parties to the conflict, depending on the case and its situational circumstances (Gidron 2022:23).

This is also the picture emerging in our growing data-pool of conflicts handled at the community level. In most cases, among the Bari-speaking population, conflicts are mediated and resolved in a 'sit-down' where the group of 'elders' representing the parties to the conflict are selected based on the nature of the conflict. Clan leaders or someone representing the clan or the family would usually be present, as well as a so-called 'community intellectual' (a person with a certain educational level, who can note down the decisions and action points). Normally someone from the RWC structure participates (often the Women's Representative if the case concerns a young woman), together with a Church leader, which is '*a must*', as one refugee phrased it. Depending on the conflict and its gravity, the refugee leadership could be represented through the block leader or the women's representative. For high-level conflicts the RWCIII would be present. There seems to be a formal ethnic leader for most of the Equatorian ethnic groups (Bari, Baka, Kuku, Mundari, Nyangwara, Pojulu, Mundu, Balanda, Zande and Avukaya), but their governance structures and mandates are quite different from those of their Nuer and Dinka neighbours. When it comes to conflict-resolution, the heads of families and clans seem to be much more involved, according to our records and the refugees' own statements. In other words, their process for implementing customary law is more arbitrary, more bound to the geographical location of the settlement and the governance structures in place there, and based more on family and clan connections and networks.

4.3.7. Community security-providers

As a result of growing thefts and other crime in the settlement, the N4 community in Ocea came up with a 'night-watch' group at the beginning of 2023. Because it was developed during the project's implementation, we closely followed the growth of this group, whose activities were warmly welcomed by the OPM and the overstretched police force in Rhino Camp. Shortly after they were formalized, they received reflective vests from an NGO and raincoats and torches from UNHCR. They were given light training by the police and asked to improve their coordination of night-patrolling and arrests with the local police post. In late July, they were called for a meeting with the OPM and were persuaded to change their name to 'Security Vigilance Group' and to include participants from non-Nuer groups, reducing, at least on paper, their strong affiliation with the N4 structure. However, recruiting members from other ethnic groups proved difficult, as few wanted

to take part in the violent methods of arrest that this type of community policing involved; at least, this was the reason given in informal interviews. Because of these methods, the RWC leaders in Eden, the zone next to Ocea, asked the 'Security Vigilance Group' to stop their patrols. In general, this initiative seems to have divided the waters. While everyone agrees that they need better training, some refugees report a high risk of abuses of power and violence, while other refugees, together with the OPM, UNHCR and some NGOs, see this initiative as an effective way of bridging the gap between the limited police resources available and the high rise in robberies and thefts. One RLO staff explained: 'This structure was a huge relief for the police'. She went on to explain how they had ended up hiring them to patrol their newly built field office at night, which no longer experiences break-ins. According to our observations and data, no other zone in the settlement has this semi-formal community policing arrangement. In the other zones, the RWC cabinets include a security focal point who may or may not have a group of people doing night patrols in specific situations.

4.4. Refugee conditions in Kenya

As a stable country in the centre of a region of great instability, Kenya has offered sanctuary for refugees from neighbouring countries for decades, just like Uganda. While Kenya is seen to have taken a disproportionate level of responsibility for refugees over the years, the response it has provided has also been described as 'complicated' in the sense that historically security concerns have outweighed protection concerns according to current debates (Brankamp 2020; Jansen 2013; Hovil, Opio, and Serugo 2023 :6). In contrast to Uganda, refugees in Kenya cannot work under ordinary contracts, do not have the same options for mobility, and are largely restricted to camps on the periphery of Kenyan society. Kenya's refugee-management policies are described as characterized by ad hoc shifts over the past twenty years, but the overall trajectory since the opening of the largest camps (Dadaab and Kakuma) in the early 1990s has consisted in a strong focus on security and counter-terrorism (Brankamp 2020; Jansen 2013; Hovil, Opio, and Serugo 2023).

Fearing that Dadaab would become the breeding ground of 'Al Shabab' terrorists and Kakuma a training ground for the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M), the Kenyan government enforced a number of initiatives to maintain control over the governance of the camps (Brankamp 2020; Berger 2021). In fact, this was the direction of things until only a few years ago, as indicated by the former president, Uhuru Kenyatta, in a speech he gave to IGAD in 2013 (Intergovernmental Authority on Development), recorded by Hanno Brankamp: '... "*refugee camps had lost their humanitarian character; instead, they facilitate agents of terror and destruction". For him, encampment was: a protracted situation characterized by hopelessness that easily feeds environmental destruction; ... insecurity; radicalization; criminality; and allows terrorist operatives to exploit it for their operational efforts*' (Brankamp 2021:156).

With the introduction of the new Refugee Act in 2021, [14]Kenya took various steps to shift its refugee management policy away from security concerns to an approach more aligned with that of Uganda. This provided refugees with better options for mobility, financial inclusion into the host community and self-reliance. With this move, Kalobeyei settlement was created as a satellite camp at one of the entrances to Kakuma. There, refugees lived without fences and with greater possibilities for mobility, economic integration and the sharing of public services. These developments also led to Kakuma town being upgraded to a municipality, the launch of the Kalobeyei Integrated Socio-Economic Plan (KISEDP) and most recently the Shirika Plan. This is a national plan that seeks to convert all camps into 'integrated settlements' with a focus on self-reliance, improved inclusion in the local economy, and inclusion in national services side by side with the host community (UNHCR, Government of Kenya, and Turkana County Government 2023; Government of Kenya and UNHCR 2023).

[14] See the 2021 Refugee Act (Refworld 2021).

Phone repair shop in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement @ Ayo Degett/DRC

4.4.1. Kakuma and Kalobeyei

Kakuma camp opened in 1992 as a response to the large influx of refugees from the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983-2005). The narrative of the camp opening has changed character over the years. The camp first opened to serve a group of approximately 20,000 refugees, primarily young boys and teenagers, who had arrived at the Kenyan border town of Lokichogio, which was then the main operational hub for the multi-stakeholder humanitarian relief programme Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS). Originally these young men and boys, also referred to as the 'Lost Boys', were perceived as fleeing hostilities and forced recruitment. Later it became clear that most were already enrolled in the youth-only battalions of the SPLA/M, 'The Red Army', also known as 'Al-Jeish al-Ahmar' (Jansen 2013; Berger 2021). They had been expelled from the training camps in Gambella, Ethiopia, where the SPLA/M was believed to have its training grounds and key satellite offices (Jansen 2018; Berger 2021). The population of South Sudanese grew rapidly, and by 2014 they counted approximately 87,971 (49.4% of the registered population) (UNHCR 2014). Many other nationalities also sought refuge in the camp over time, and currently (2024) the camp hosts 214,902 refugees from approximately twenty different nations. The majority (56.7%) are still South Sudanese, but other groups have arrived in large numbers from Somalia, DR Congo, Sudan, Burundi, Ethiopia and Rwanda, and even a few groups from Afghanistan (UNHCR 2024a).

Kakuma is located in Turkana County, in the north-western corner of Kenya bordering South Sudan and Uganda. Traditionally, the Turkana are pastoralists, and they share ways of managing life (including income-earning opportunities, food, marriage negotiations, 'conflict settlement fees' etc.) with the majority of South Sudanese in the camp, who are also pastoralists, such as the Dinka, Nuer and Anuak. The cultural divide between these groups is therefore not as great as that between the Dinka and Nuer in Rhino Camp and the Ugandan host communities. The relationship between the Turkana community and the inhabitants of the camp has been a popular topic of research for decades (Ohta 2005; Jansen and de Bruijne 2020; Jansen 2016; Rodgers 2021; Pincock, Betts, and Easton-Calabria 2021). Although this relationship is dynamic and complex, many of these studies show that the host community feels they benefit from the political and financial focus, infrastructure and opportunities that are brought to the area in relation to the refugee camps (ibid.), which is similar to the situation described in Uganda and Tanzania (Degett 2023).

Currently, 74,952 people live in Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement, only one-third of the number of people living in Kakuma. The majority (71.42%) of the population in Kalobeyei is South Sudanese (UNHCR 2024a). The land on which Kalobeyei is located was formally handed over by the Turkana County Government in 2015 and developed in line with Kenya's commitment to the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) and the CRRF, with the KISEDP moving into its second phase (2023-2027) (UNHCR, Government of Kenya, and Turkana County Government 2023). The difference between Kakuma and Kalobeyei is striking, even to the untrained eye. Kakuma is an overcrowded settlement hosting four times the population it is designed to accommodate (UNHCR 2024b); it consists of narrow dirt paths leading into packed market places and residential compounds. Kalobeyei is more spacious and is structured along a tarmac road where host-community members and refugees conduct their shopping and errands in shops and buildings like those in an ordinary medium-size rural town. It was anticipated that the populations in Kakuma would relocate voluntarily to Kalobeyei. For several reasons, this did not happen. The income-earning opportunities or chances to be 'self-reliant' were no better in Kalobeyei (Betts, Omata, and Sterck 2020a) and people's existing social networks in Kakuma outweighed the potential opportunities offered in Kalobeyei (Betts, Omata, and Sterck 2020b).

Both Kakuma and Kalobeyei are, in practice, divided according to nationalities and ethnicities. In 2024, the first year in which ASPIRE was rolled out in Kenya, we have focused on three South Sudanese communities in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, namely the Anuak, Dinka and Nuer, and have therefore based our research in the specific areas where they live, mainly Kalobeyei Village 1 and 2 and Kakuma 3 and 4. We also have two staff members on the team who belong to the Turkana, balancing the focus on the host–refugee relationship.

4.4.2. Humanitarian, Peace and Development actors

In Kenya, 22 humanitarian organizations were registered to work with South Sudanese refugees in 2024 (UNHCR 2024e:6). Most of these seem to have activities in Kakuma Refugee Camp and Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement. With support from UNHCR, the Kenyan national government, through the Turkana County Government and DRS, is responsible for refugee management in Kenya.

The International and national HDP actors operating in Kakuma and Kalobeyei make basic services available, such as health care, food assistance and education, similar to the arrangement for Rhino Camp. UNCHR is the leading agency in coordination and protection; it partners fifty CBOs and RLOs in Kakuma and Kalobeyei that contribute to the implementation and coordination efforts (UNHCR 2024e:58–59). The inhabitants of Kakuma and Kalobeyei, like the host community, have access to health care in hospitals and clinics funded by humanitarian organizations (ibid.: 50). According to the Kenyan Constitution and the Kenyan Education Act of 2013, every child has a right to primary education (ibid.: 54). In Kakuma and Kalobeyei the primary schools are managed by UNHCR and several NGO partners and are free of charge (UNHCR 2024c). Although secondary education is available in the two settlements, it remains inaccessible for a high proportion of young refugees who are unable to pay the school fees (UNHCR 2024e:49). Additionally, there are limited options for education beyond the secondary level in both Kakuma and Kalobeyei (ibid.).

Currently, refugees in Kakuma receive food assistance on a monthly basis through mobile money-based electronic vouchers and in-kind food rations, while refugees in Kalobeyei receive the entirety of their monthly food assistance through cash transfers (UNHCR 2024e:54). The monthly in-kind food rations include cooking oil, beans and less than a kilo rice per person. The electronic vouchers, introduced in 2015, are called *Bamba Chakula*, a Swahili phrase which translates as 'Get your food'. These vouchers can only be used to buy food items from WFP-contracted retailers (WFP 2015). In contrast, the cash-transfer assistance given to inhabitants of Kalobeyei is unrestricted (Sterck et al. 2020:6). Due to funding shortages, the WFP suspended all cash transfers for refugees in Kakuma in April 2024 (WFP 2024). In addition, the food rations were reduced from 50 to 40 percent of the minimum food basket, starting in May 2024 (ibid.). These extreme reductions led to deadly protests and an increase in suicide attempts (USCRI 2024). Although the WFP was able to resume cash transfers and increase food rations again by July 2024 (WFP 2024), the overall trend is one of food assistance regularly being reduced due to a lack of funding, while significant increases in food assistance are rare.

Besides providing basic services, several of the humanitarian organizations have programmes related to peace specifically, such as the Jesuit Refugee Service, Peace Winds Japan and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF), which is the largest peace organisation in Kakuma. The faith-based LWF has been present in Kakuma since 1992 and implements several community programs related to peaceful co-existence, social cohesion and protection (LWF 2024). The RYPP initiative is implemented in Kakuma by UNHCR, using the same approach and purpose as in Rhino Camp (UNHCR RYPP 2024). The DRC is a key peacebuilding actor in Kakuma and Kalobeyei and UNHCR's primary partner in social cohesion and peacebuilding. Within the Humanitarian Disarmament and Peacebuilding sector, the DRC has five employees working on two to three projects. Additionally, in this sector the DRC is the lead on the elected refugee leadership structure, which differs from that in Rhino Camp, where it is managed by the Ugandan government.

Generally, refugees in Kenya form RLOs to address the gaps in the services provided by UNHCR and humanitarian actors and thus contribute to meeting community needs in the settlements (Kara 2022:2). In Kakuma and Kalobeyei the initiatives of RLOs mainly relate to livelihood, farming, education, hygiene, sanitation and activities for youth (for instance, sports and music). There are several peace programmes and initiatives such as peace-building training and conflict-resolution education. Some of these initiatives are supported by the DRS, but the majority of RLOs are not formally registered through the DRS (Kara 2022:10–11, 18). On the ASPIRE project, we are keeping a database of actors that facilitate programmes relating to peace, including RLOs, informal community groups, faith-based groups and CBOs.

4.4.3. Government authorities, security providers and the justice system

Refugees in Kenya are the responsibility of the DRS (Department of Refugee Services) under the national government at operational level and the Ministry of Interior, also under the national government, at strategic level (Hovil, Opio, and Serugo 2023). Like the OPM in Uganda, the DRS is assisted by UNHCR in its management of refugees. In both countries, this has created a parallel governance structure, where refugees are supported by the national government, UNHCR and its partners, while national citizens living in proximity to the camps are supported and governed by county government structures. The Shirika Plan, which is in process of being finalized at the time of writing this report (November 2024), intends to address some of the complications that this existing arrangement involves. The intention is to implement a shift from the existing short-term humanitarian focus to a more development-oriented focus on resilience and self-reliance, which also includes integrating the support and governance of refugees more into the county government structures (Hovil, Opio, and Serugo 2023).

The head of the DRS in Kakuma is the Camp Manager of the two camps, who oversees all issues relating to the refugees. In terms of the host population, the County Governor's office is located in the Turkana County headquarters in Lodwar, about two hours' drive from Kakuma. The county governance arrangement is mirrored by an administrator system, led by the Sub-County Administrator, a decentralized unit in charge of security, the provision of statistics and national government services. The lower levels of the county government administration are divided into Ward Administrators and further into Village Administrators. Local leadership and administration in Kenya are therefore quite different from those in Uganda. More notably, in contrast to Uganda, the refugee governance system (which we describe below) does not mirror that of the formal Kenyan administration. Although education and healthcare are free of charge in Kenya, the services in the camp and settlement are, in some respects, of higher quality than those available in the immediate surroundings according to people we interviewed, because they are supported by the humanitarian actors. As one young man from the Turkana group living a few kilometres from Kakuma explained: '*For now, although we have been informed that the quality is going down a bit, I would still take any sick person to the hospital in the camp. If you need a specialist, you can often find them because doctors [come] from abroad. Otherwise, you need to travel all the way to Lodwar*'.

The Kenyan police service, led by the police commander, is formally responsible for law and order in the camp. They have several specialist units, some of whom operate in the camps. From the outset of ASPIRE's activities in Kenya, it was clear that the relationship between the official police and the refugees is markedly different from that of Rhino Camp. Our data include many statements and cases demonstrating refugees' complicated relationship with the police. On the part of the refugees, this relationship was marked by fear, perceived abuses of power and bias in conflicts and criminal cases. In addition, some officers were reported to be drunk on duty, which was confirmed on a visit to a police station by the senior researchers. Hanno Brankamp, who has conducted long-term fieldwork among security-providers in Kakuma over the past eight years, documents this divide in detail from the perspective of the police. They perceive the refugees to be hostile towards the police and often 'stage' crimes and conflicts to improve their chances of achieving third-country resettlement by UNHCR (Brankamp 2021:160). We have data on several episodes where the refugees felt let down by the police, including one when a family member of an interlocutor, who had been stabbed with a knife, was allegedly refused the obligatory P3 form by the police. The P3 is a referral form from the police allowing the victim of a crime to be treated at the hospital. Without this, the patient will not be allowed treatment. In this particular incident, the delayed treatment meant that the patient died, which fuelled existing tensions and triggered retaliation spirals. The death could perhaps have been avoided, and the conflict could have been cooled down, had the police recognized the first victim (vis-à-vis the P3 form) and taken the matter over.

Another key stakeholder security body is the Kenya Police Reserve (KPR), an armed auxiliary force operating in rural areas of Kenya, including the camps (Brankamp 2020). These are heavily armed but look quite informal, often patrolling the camps in flip-flops and torn army-coloured clothing. To the untrained eye, they resemble members of

rebel armies on the peripheries of the ongoing conflicts. Their purpose and attitude are very different, however. Most refugees describe them as friendly, approachable and by far the preferred formal entry point for dealing with a crime. Seeing them holding hands and chatting with refugees in the streets of Kalobeyei is not uncommon.

The final key stakeholder in terms of security is the CPPT, a community policing initiative managed by the DRS. Initially, the initiative was funded by UNHCR and managed by the LWF. The CPPT members are refugees recruited from the communities in the settlement; they are embedded in their respective ethnic communities, despite the LWF's attempt in the past to discourage ethnic affiliation within the initiative (Brankamp 2016). Described as the 'eyes and ears' of the humanitarian actors and the police, the CPPTs are employed to provide crowd control, report security incidents and settle low-level disputes (Brankamp 2020:271). According to our data, the CPPT seem to solve some disputes independently; however, they mostly work closely with the other security stakeholders and authorities in the settlement. When a conflict involves both refugees and members of the host community, they work closely with the KPR to resolve it. For instance, we recorded a case recently of a refugee who sold a goat to another refugee in good faith. Little did he know that it had been stolen from a member of the host community. When the owner of the goat confronted the refugee, it resulted in a physical fight. The CPPT was the first to arrive at the scene, and later the KPR and the Kenyan police service became involved to facilitate mediation. When conflicts erupt between refugees from different nationalities or ethnicities, the CPPT usually involve the community elders and elected community leaders to represent those involved. In practice, according to our data, many CPPT members mainly attend to crimes and disputes relating to their 'own' national or ethnic group. For instance, if a heated conflict in the Somali community breaks out, it would be unlikely for the CPPT to send the Burundian member unless he happens to be nearby.

An example of a case perceived as 'minor' and therefore handled by the CPPT took place recently at a food-distribution centre, where three teenagers from the same ethnic group began fighting in the queue. One of them, a girl, was injured, and the CPPTs arranged for her to be taken to the hospital by ambulance. Once she returned, the CPPTs attempted to handle the conflict by asking all three teenagers to tell their side of the story and ultimately decided that the girls should be punished by being the last to receive food that evening.

Generally, conflicts are considered to be minor when they only involve a few individuals or children. Conflicts between larger groups, such as families or ethnic communities, are considered more serious. Just like Rhino Camp, serious conflicts in Kakuma and Kalobeyei are described as those 'when there is blood', and in principle such cases are reported to the police. In minor cases, such as the fight in the food distribution line, the CPPTs often inform community leaders from the block or neighbourhood of those involved about the conflict and its resolution. The community leaders may also inform the community elders about the case. Had this particular conflict involved individuals from different ethnic groups or nationalities, the CPPT would likely have involved community leaders and elders from the beginning.

4.4.4. Management Committees and Community Leaders

Over the years, the South Sudanese have been in a majority in Kakuma, and according to various accounts, they possessed their own 'political' administration during the first decades, including councils of elders, customary courts (also referred to as bench courts) and detention centres (Brankamp 2020:276; Jansen 2013). In the first decade of the camp's history, new arrivals were allocated plots of land based on their nationality and ethnic affiliation, and the humanitarian actors and national authorities did not interfere too much in the refugees' own governance structures. In the early 2000s there was a change. The Kenyan Government and UNHCR banned the parallel customary court authorities from hearing criminal proceedings in the settlement (Brankamp 2020:276). As part of UNHCR's restructuring of Kakuma in 2011 into blocks and zones the previous community structure was abolished. In its place was a constitution, managed by LWF to delegitimize the remaining unofficial authorities and curb the influence of the councils of elders by introducing a new governance structure of elected refugee leaders, known as 'community leaders' (ibid.: 275-6).

Since the adoption of the Kakuma Constitution in 2011, the refugee leadership structure has consisted of a block management committee, a zone management committee and a camp management committee (UNHCR 2024d). Formally, the block management committees consist of ten members: two elected block leaders and one representative from each of the eight sectoral committees in the block. These cover different sectors, including 'Peace and Security' and 'Gender and Children'. The block leaders' role is, according to the online version of the constitution, to act as a bridge between the block and the zone, solve conflicts, and cooperate with the sectoral committees (ibid.). In practice, their responsibilities include resolving low-scale conflicts, such as minor conflicts in the water queues, and ensure that zone leaders are informed about issues of conflict. At the next level, the zone management committees comprise two block leaders from each block in a particular zone (UNHCR 2024d). Lastly, the camp management committee is composed of the chairpersons and vice chairpersons from each of the zone management committees, as well as a representative of persons living with disabilities. The camp management committee is responsible for coordinating activities in the camp in cooperation with the government and other relevant actors in Kakuma.

The formal refugee leadership structure in Kalobeyei was introduced in the Kalobeyei Constitution adopted in 2019 and comprises community-elected representatives at the compound, neighbourhood and village levels, the leadership of both neighbourhood and village levels consisting of a chairman and a chairwoman (UNHCR 2024d). According to the constitution, this refugee leadership structure acts as a link between the residents in Kalobeyei and the Kenyan authorities and humanitarian partners in the camp, with all communication being channelled through the village leaders. Thus, any issues arising in the neighbourhood are ideally channelled through the compound or neighbourhood leaders to the village leaders, who raise the issues with the relevant authorities such as the DRS or the focal points of the humanitarian partners (ibid.). This is similar to the RWC structure in Uganda and the management committees in Kakuma, which act as intermediaries between the refugee community, the humanitarian actors and the government authorities. However, in contrast to the RWC structure in Rhino Camp, which is led by the OPM, the refugee leadership in Kakuma and Kalobeyei is not recognized as a government structure led by the DRS, and our data indicate that their interactions are challenging. Instead, leadership is administered as part of a humanitarian peacebuilding structure and is currently led by the DRC; it is therefore not directly linked to the local authorities in the camp, nor UNHCR.

Formally, neighbourhood representatives and village leaders in Kalobeyei are responsible for attending to and solving minor disputes in the neighbourhood and are supposed to report crimes to authorities, including the CPPT. According to the constitution of Kalobeyei, the neighbourhood representatives are responsible for ensuring peaceful co-existence between the different ethnic groups in the neighbourhood, while the village leaders are charged with ensuring peaceful co-existence among the inhabitants of Kalobeyei in general (UNHCR 2024d). This reflects the role of the block leaders in Kakuma, who are also responsible for ensuring peaceful co-existence between the various ethnic groups in the block in accordance with the constitution of Kakuma (ibid.). Our data show that community leaders rarely solve conflicts alone but involve the elders and the customary institutions of those involved in the conflict.

4.4.5. Customary and ethnic institutions

Despite the Kenyan Government and UNHCR's attempts to ban parallel justice systems, as described in the section above, customary and ethnic institutions, such as customary courts and councils of elders, are important actors in conflict-handling in Kakuma and Kalobeyei. Just like in Rhino Camp, they work on a daily basis to settle disputes and de-escalate conflicts. The customary authorities represent the many different ethnic communities in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, such as the Dinka, Nuer, Anuak, Acholi and Toposa. According to research conducted in 2013, several customary court systems, structured hierarchically with the community-level courts, are linked to the high courts in South Sudan (Jansen 2013:120). With a few months of data on ASPIRE, we do not have enough data to document if and to what extent- these links between community-based courts and courts in South Sudan still exist, although this is likely, according to informants' statements. Customary institutions usually handle

internal conflicts between members of the respective clan or tribe while also taking part in handling inter-ethnic conflicts in collaboration with other customary courts and councils. These authorities handle civil cases and minor criminal cases, some common cases being conflicts involving youths, petty crime and theft, and disputes related to resources, loan and debt. Conflicts between families or couples, including disputes regarding betrothal, dowry negotiation and divorce, are also frequently managed by the customary courts. According to our data, cases related to marriage are usually handled by customary institutions, including clan-based institutions and councils of elders. In most cases that we have recorded, community leaders and the police are not in the picture unless disputes spiral out of control and become deadly. However, not even in these cases are they always referred to the statutory actors. For instance, a case hearing was held by an ethnic customary court in Kakuma to solve a conflict between two families. A young woman had become pregnant, and her boyfriend, a man from the same tribe, denied responsibility for the pregnancy. This particular customary court employed a specific set of criteria for punishment and compensation in relating to pregnancies outside marriage. Under their regulations, the young man was required to pay compensation of 260,000 KSH (2500 USD) – equivalent to five cows – to the girl's family. If this was not paid, the young man would be handed over to the police and detained for three days while his parents or relatives communicated with relatives in South Sudan to raise the money. In this case however, as the man denied being the father, the regulations stated that the child would belong to the family of the mother, which is considered a 'punishment' of the father. [15].

When a conflict involves individuals from different ethnic groups or nationalities, the mediation usually includes community leaders, elders and sometimes the CPPT. For instance, when a fight erupted between two women over the queue for the water tap, the CPPT separated the women and hosted a mediation with the respective block leaders and the elders representing the ethnic groups of the two women involved. In such cases, the councils of elders act as mediators for the two ethnic communities to ensure a sense of 'fairness' while also acting as witnesses should the conflict escalate or be referred to the police at a later time. The block leaders and elders will hear both sides

[15] Denying responsibility can affect the man's reputation in the community. He will be perceived as irresponsible, which can damage his marriage prospects in the future. Moreover, some believe that denying responsibility for a child will bring a curse on the man, causing him to become impotent.

Houses for new arrivals in Kalobeyei Settlement @ Ayo Degett/DRC

of the story and decide on a solution to the conflict or agree on the appropriate compensation.

Hanno Brankamp has documented the close collaboration between the CPPTs and the councils of elders in Kakuma. For instance, the CPPTs refer non-criminal cases under Kenyan law, such as adultery, to the elders to handle according to the customary laws (Brankamp 2020:282). However, the councils of elders sometimes claim authority over criminal cases as well. As one CPPT in Brankamp's study explained, referring cases of girls being 'impregnated' or raped to the police would not necessarily resolve the conflict between the community members involved. In these cases, the customary court is able to ensure peace between the community members by facilitating dialogue and compensation (ibid.), or in other words to restore a sense of social harmony, a matter we will return to in the last chapter. Although UNHCR sought to steer itself away from the 'councils of elders' as formal governance actors (Brankamp 2020:275–276), the Kakuma Constitution does state that 'councils of elders' should represent the various ethnic groups in the camp and deal with the civic issues of their specific ethnic community. The councils of elders are meant to cooperate with the camp management committee and to advise on matters related to peace and security (UNHCR 2024d). It is, however, important to note that these more informal customary actors, including elders, sometimes also serve as formal leaders. Just as in Rhino Camp, people in powerful positions in the local community often overlap in their roles: 'elders' and customary leaders often also serve as elected Community Leaders, or RWC chairpersons.

4.4.6. Community security-providers

Whereas community-led security initiatives have been formed in Rhino Camp to bridge the gap between the limited police resources available and the rise in crime, this is not the case in Kakuma and Kalobeyei. The CPPT, originally consisting of 'refugee guards', was introduced by the LWF a few years after Kakuma was established to address insecurity and crime at a time when the police presence in Kakuma was limited and the humanitarian actors needed assistance with the management of crowds and the reporting of crime (Brankamp 2020:276). By 2016, around 330 CPPTs had been recruited (ibid.:271). Today, there are approximately one or two CPPTs in each block of Kakuma, and in Kalobeyei there is one CPPT in each neighbourhood. The high presence of the CPPTs across Kakuma and Kalobeyei may explain why there are fewer informal community security groups in Kakuma and Kalobeyei compared to Rhino Camp. In addition, the N4 in Kakuma also has a community security initiative, patrolling the settlements night and day. They handle civil cases while reporting more serious crimes to the police. According to our data, N4 and CPPT work closely together in Kakuma. None of these have a formal mandate to detain or punish perceived perpetrators, but it is clear from the literature on this topic (Brankamp 2016; Gidron 2023) and our data that this is one of their key raisons d'être.

In this chapter, we have provided an overview of ASPIRE's study foci in 2024, namely the conditions of life and the various forums for conflict-management in Rhino Camp, Kakuma and Kalobeyei. The next section will focus specifically on how we approach these observations analytically.

Passage between compounds in Kakuma Refugee Camp @ Ayo Degett/DRC

5. Seeking solutions: endeavours among multiple possibilities

5.1. Navigating conflict-management possibilities

In the above chapters, we have portrayed the conditions for conflict management in Rhino Camp, Kakuma and Kalobeyei—that is, the landscape of institutions and organizations available for dealing with conflicts. In this chapter, we examine how refugees actually use them in their endeavours to find peaceful resolutions. We turn the lens on to the users' perspectives to improve understanding of how they, as subjects, navigate their 'conflict-management possibilities' and engage in endeavours for peace. To unfold what we mean by 'navigating' these structures, we use the concepts of 'legal pluralism' and 'forum-shopping'.

5.1.1. Legal pluralism and forum shopping

'Legal pluralism' refers to situations in which multiple normative orders or legal systems co-exist (Griffiths 1986). It is often used to understand the role of customary law in locations where access to the formal court system is limited and other systems for dispute resolution are also in play, as is the case in northern Uganda and among South Sudanese refugees (Gidron 2023; Anying and Gausset 2017). In these situations, people navigate (and are forced to navigate) the different forums that handle the conflicts that arise in their communities. By forum, we mean a place, situation, group or institution for discussing and attempting to resolve an issue. Here these include community leaders, community-driven initiatives, HDP actors, statutory actors (OPM, DRS, Uganda Police Force, Kenya Police Service, CPPT) and customary institutions and courts. In other words, the organizations for refugees we have described in Rhino Camp, Kakuma, and Kalobeyei can function as such forums when conflicts arise.

Choosing between different options is what scholars define as 'forum-shopping' (Benda-Beckmann 1981:117). In his research in Kakuma, Jansen describes 'forum-shopping' as part of the 'institutional multiplicity' that defines the camp: '*Institutional multiplicity in the camp means that refugees (but also NGOs) can go "forum shopping" to address their issues or seek opportunity. One can try the tribal leadership, the camp administration, powerful brokers or business people, the Kenyan police, the NGOs or the UNHCR and all those individuals who work in these offices, or all of them together, in different ways*' (Jansen 2013:128). The case of Nyalat described in the introduction is a good example of the legal pluralism, institutional multiplicity and forum-shopping we see in our growing pool of data on ASPIRE. Nyalat first sought a solution with the most common entity for solving petty crime in Kakuma, the customary court. Formally, theft is supposed to be handled by the police, but she knew from experience that these minor cases were often referred back to the communities. When the police take on cases, it is often time-consuming and costly. Therefore, her first option was the customary court. In this example, and many similar examples we have followed, it is clear that the mandates of different institutions often overlap; thus, the customary court can impose mitigating measures to solve a case, and so can the police.

Nyalat was primarily concerned with finding the most beneficial solution to her problem. She decided on the preferred modality for solving her issue by 'forum-shopping', that is, trying out different options among the multiple forums available to her. At the same time, it was clear that Nyalat was the driver behind the choice of referring the case to the customary court and onwards to the police. Gatluak and the mother of the alleged thief were obliged to go along with these choices of forums set

by Nyalat. The thief's mother would have benefitted from letting the case stay with the customary court, where the compensation for the phone was set at a lower rate. Had she had a choice, she would probably have left the case there. This case therefore also shows that not everyone involved in disputes is necessarily able to choose to shop in the 'forum' for conflict handling. Often one party to a conflict is dragged into a specific mechanism or institution that is more advantageous for the other party.

5.1.2. Patterns of connection

We have been exploring patterns in the connections between individuals, communities and the specific forums available and how these connections affect conflict-handling. While this analysis is still ongoing, one specific issue cutting across the data in Uganda is the pattern of police engagement in conflicts in the settlement. Building on countless examples from the research in Uganda, it appears unlikely that the police would engage in the simple theft of a stolen phone among the refugees, as the Kenyan police did in the above-mentioned example from Kakuma (especially if the perceived thief had already fled to South Sudan). Having police involvement in these minor cases of theft seems more likely in the context of Kenya, yet it is rare even there.

In our data from Uganda so far, it is clear that the police are involved in these types of minor cases where host community members are also somehow involved. An example of this is a recent case from Rhino Camp. Two refugee children fought at the water tap over their place in the queue. Although this happened across the road from the local police post, the police did not want to attend to it. This attitude changed when one of the young boy's relatives turned up. His relative was a host community member, and suddenly they arrived on the scene to divide the parties and agree on a solution to the conflict. Another example of this is a recent case that unfolded in a different area of Rhino Camp concerning a refugee woman called Nyoka.

Nyoka, who lived in close proximity to the host community, was woken up late at night by a group of young men from the nearby host community. They were angry and had surrounded her house. She agreed to go with the young men to the police station, where she was told that she was being arrested on suspicion of having 'facilitated' adultery, which is illegal in Uganda. Her neighbour, Oleru, a young Lugbara woman from the host community, had borrowed Nyoka's phone on a few occasions in recent weeks. The youths assembling in front of Nyoka's house belonged to the clan of Oleru's partner Richard, and they were concerned that Oleru had left Richard for another man. Moreover, they believed that Oleru had used Nyoka's phone to facilitate these arrangements. The police and Richard's relatives were convinced that Nyoka knew Oleru's whereabouts. Nyoka claimed that she had no knowledge of this affair and had no idea of Oleru's whereabouts. As the police post in the settlement has no detention centre, Nyoka had to be transported to the police station in the nearby town for detention on claims of her not being cooperative. To perform this transfer, the police required a fuel fee of 50,000 UGX from the complainant. Richard's relatives agreed to cover this fee on the condition that they would be compensated this exact amount by Nyoka on her release. After a few days, Nyoka was released against a bond. Her husband and relatives paid 100,000 UGX, which included the compensation to Richard's relatives.

As for Oleru, it turned out that she had indeed decided to leave her partner and settle with another man. When Richard's relatives finally located her, they decided to take her and the new partner to the LC for investigation. The LC chairman let the young couple stay in his compound while the dispute was ongoing to ensure their safety and that they did not run off. Richard's relatives did not agree with this arrangement and called the police to make sure the young couple were arrested. The police, however, could not find any evidence of any formal or cultural marriage agreements between Oleru and Richard and could not pursue claims of adultery. The police therefore decided to refer the case back to the community to be solved by the customary institutions.

Just as Nyalat explored the best option for having her theft case resolved, so did Richard's relatives. First, they sought support from the police, then they contacted the LC chairman, and upon disagreeing with his approach, they took the case back to the police, who then referred it to the local customary institution. Clearly, the two examples show that the fields of jurisdiction of actors, statutory as well as customary, overlap and that they do so in the camps, as well as in the host communities. In the institutional multiplicity of displacement settings in (and around) Kakuma, Kalobeyei and Rhino Camp,

people belong to multiple social fields and regulatory orders. The place, people involved and situation determine by whom these cases are managed.

The above case of alleged adultery also prompts another point: the importance of a better understanding of patterns of connection between institutions both inside and outside the camps and settlements. As we saw in the case of Nyoka, peoples' connections and alliances might determine their expectation of a certain outcome. Richard's relatives, for instance, appeared quite certain that the police would detain Nyoka once they had conducted a civil arrest of her at her home. They knew that the police would take their case seriously; as inhabitants of the nearby villages, they felt that the local police were more connected to them than to the refugees.

In our pool of data from this year (2024), we see many cases involving gender among the refugee population: suspected adultery, disapproved courtships and people who leave their partners. None of these cases appeared to be brought to the police in either Kenya or Uganda. As mentioned by a field assistant when the case of Oleru and Nyoka was being discussed by the field team, it was 'unthinkable' that a refugee would bring this type of case to the police. The police would likely reject it and, in addition, a 'police-related' solution to such an issue was difficult to imagine. For the host community, however, the police appeared to be a centrally important institution for managing many types of cases, including those related to adultery. Because of the connection between the police and the host community, the refugees would normally have low expectations that host–refugee disputes would fall out to their advantage. This is probably also why Nyoka's family did not dispute the fee for her release, nor that she was dragged into the case in the first place. Because of the power imbalance and alliances at play, they considered that paying the fee without a fuss would be the fastest way out of the dispute.

The ways in which the parties to a dispute consider their options exemplify our concept of subjectivity. Nyoka and her family were subjects in the double sense of being subject to conditions that favoured the host community in dispute management, and also acting subjects who acted on the basis of their concerns, capabilities, knowledge and experiences. Memories of past engagements with statutory actors and customary courts were important in how they chose to navigate their options.

5.1.3. Institutional readings

Refugees navigate conditions, but the conditions themselves change. This is especially the case when the conditions consist of organizations manned by actors with their own perceptions and interests. We now want to direct attention to how forum members themselves constantly read situations and manoeuvre among the multiple other forums in their surroundings. These organizations, both formal and informal, consist of people who constantly measure the 'pros' and 'cons' of engaging in how to handle specific conflicts. From the many cases we are following, it is clear that they consider the benefits of engaging in specific cases while constantly balancing 'if' or 'at which point' this engagement might become too risky or 'pointless'. We have already seen examples of this in Nyoka's case described above. Here, the police referred this alleged case of adultery back to the customary court because they realized that it was more relevant for a customary institution to solve and that a charge of adultery cannot be brought if there is no formal marriage.

We see the police making many of these referrals back to the community. As pointed out by scholars specializing in security actors and customary courts in these research settings, these referrals by statutory actors are often related to their limited resources, a dysfunctional justice system facing huge backlogs, and an overall preference to engage with cases that may provide (fuel) fees (Brankamp 2021; Gidron 2023; Braak and Kenyi 2018; Anying and Gausset 2017). In the cases we are following, these are also important reasons for referring disputes back to the community. Yet, we are also observing another important motivator: the statutory actors are aware that community-based institutions are better placed to mediate certain conflicts and find more lasting solutions. This was the case with Oleru and her new partner, which the police referred to the customary authorities. Another example is a recent case in Rhino Camp where a generator a charity organization had donated to serve the public good disappeared. This case involved multiple actors, and because of its complexity and the presence of competent com-

munity-based conflict mediators in this location, the police decided to refer the case back to the community. It was solved with assistance from an RLO, a church and the RWC structure, who developed a neatly tailored compensation scheme that ran for over a year, with the aim of replacing the generator. A recent case from Kakuma illustrates how institutions themselves evaluate the risks and opportunities in conflicts and relations to other forums. This case has unfolded and intensified over several years. Four teenage girls from the same clan, which we will call Clan A, had become pregnant with young men from another clan that we will call Clan B. The members of Clan B refused to take responsibility for the children and teenage mothers. As these events seemed to be systematized and specifically targeting Clan A, they went to the customary court that engages with both clans, as they all belong to the same ethnic group.

At first the customary court took the case, but suddenly they dropped it. In the aftermath, Clan B decided to attack Clan A and mobilized about fifty young men armed with spears, bows and arrows. Although the police intervened quickly, a member of Clan B died, and a large group of young men from Clan A between the ages of 13 and 17 fled the camp in fear of retaliation. After several weeks in the bush and hiding within the host community, some of the young men caught malaria, became malnourished and agreed to be evacuated by a local NGO specializing in child protection.

We follow many cases of involuntary pregnancies and courtship in both Uganda and Kenya, but we have never before seen a case where the customary court withdrew from handling and mediating the case and let it escalate to the point of a dead teenager and children fleeing the camp. After some investigation, it turned out that Clan B was closely affiliated with an influential person in the army in South Sudan who had put pressure on the otherwise powerful customary court in question. This case is therefore a clear example of the way institutions consider the options available to them and the risks involved. In this particular case, the leaders of the customary court must have feared the influential person in South Sudan, and the risks must therefore have outweighed the benefits of having this dramatic case solved. This case is still considered 'unsolved' as we write this report, but it shows that because of the many actors present in the research field, new actors usually step in if other actors withdraw, such as the NGO specializing in protection and the host communities who hid the young men from Clan A.

Another case that exemplifies the judgements and manoeuvres of these forums unfolded some years ago in Rhino Camp. The RWC chairperson had recommended a group of young refugees for a livelihood training opportunity in the nearest town. A group of young host-community members had also been invited, and during the weeks of the training, one young refugee ended up in a romantic relationship with a young Ugandan woman. Soon after that, they decided to go to the man's family in South Sudan located close to the border with Uganda. According to the information available, the young man decided that the courtship should not develop into a marriage and wanted to take the young woman back to Uganda to end the relationship. Once the woman heard this, she committed suicide. Soon afterwards, the RWC chairperson heard this terrible news. He knew that it involved a high risk of a deadly conflict with the family of the young Ugandan woman and potentially the entire host community. Everyone would assume that the male refugee was responsible for the woman's death. In an interview, the chairperson explained:

> 'There would be a "tug of war". There would be conflict. For them [the hosts]… it would [lead into the generation of] our grandchildren. They would say: If you as [South] Sudanese, you kill our daughter, our sister… So of course that would create conflict.'

Aware of the risk of retaliation, the chairperson wanted to make sure that the news and the young woman's body were delivered to the family in the most sensitive way. Because this happened during the Covid-19 pandemic, when transport within and between Uganda's districts was restricted by law, he lighted upon the plan of hiring an ambulance in South Sudan. Through hard negotiations and the payment of several fees, he was able to pave the way for the ambulance to go to Rhino Camp and on

to the young woman's village and family. Because of the pandemic and the restrictions on people's movements, he was the only person who faced the shocked family members in the village, putting him at considerable risk of retaliation. After three difficult days of negotiations, payment of compensation to the family and convincing them to not retaliate for the death, he travelled back to Rhino Camp. The conflict had been mediated, and he had needed to top-up the payment from the South Sudanese family with several million of his own money.

This case is a good example of the endeavours not only individuals but also institutions undertake to handle conflicts. Although the RWC chairperson was not personally involved in this courtship case, he anticipated the way it could materialize into a deadly conflict during the pandemic, when conflict triggers might have been even more sensitive than usual. He, as representative of the refugee community in Rhino Camp, took charge of the negotiations between the young man's family in South Sudan (in absentia) and the young woman's family in the neighbouring town. He knew he was in a position to represent the refugee community in the camp, and he considered his options and decided that not engaging in this conflict-management would cause too high a risk of a protracted conflict between the refugees and their hosts. He was 'reading' the risks and opportunities from his position on the RWC. At the same time, he took a leap of faith by travelling alone to the village, but was convinced that this was the best option under the given conditions. In conclusion, we see many examples of institutions that handle conflicts in the settlement and see how their reading of specific events lead to specific outcomes. We have described the landscape of institutions as conditions that refugees as subjects endeavour to navigate. But a closer look at these institutions reveals that they also consist of subjects, like the RWC chairperson who made heroic attempts to avert a large-scale conflict. Institutional actors do not mechanically follow a fixed set of guidelines. They have doubts and worries about the uncertainty of particular outcomes, and they weigh the possibilities. In a sense institutional actors also shop for themselves, which scholars have termed 'shopping forums' (Benda-Beckmann 1981; Lund 2021). Forums are shopping for (or at least evaluating) disputes in an attempt to resolve them, through which they may strengthen their authority and influence or gain political benefits while turning away disputes which do not align with or may harm their interests (Benda-Beckmann 1981:117).

5.2. Making lasting arrangements

The case of the settlement of the tragic suicide of the young woman is a good example of the importance of making durable arrangements for peaceful coexistence. The RWC chairperson knew that if the dispute was not resolved in a satisfactory way, it could affect the relationship between the refugees and their neighbours for generations. The data from this year show how people and institutions seem to go out of their way to find long-term solutions to their disputes so that the conflicts are fully put to rest. In other words, they act: they endeavour to seek the best and most lasting arrangements from among the multiple options available to them. The RWC chairperson could have decided not to become involved in the conflict, or to refer it to the OPM, or to send someone else to represent the refugee community, or to send the body alone with or without payment of compensation. He did not do that. He decided to go with the option that, from his perspective, would settle the conflict in the long run so it did not continue into the generation of his 'grandchildren', as he phrased it. Another good example of this is a case from Rhino Camp that we have been following over the past year.

Rose, a South Sudanese refugee from Rhino Camp, was born into a mixed-ethnic marriage. Her mother's ethnic group is one of the largest in Rhino Camp, and her father belongs to another ethnic group in South Sudan. A few years ago, when Rose was 17 years of age, she visited her father in South Sudan, who tried to marry her off to a 75-year-old man with several other wives. To escape the marriage, she fled back into Uganda and eventually started a courtship with a young Ugandan man from the host community. In an interview the mother recalled the episode:

‘From there she made her own choice … But it was very hard, because [her father’s ethnic group] cannot get married to other tribes. They want their girl to get married into their tribe. We were reaching to the fighting [about to fight]. But good enough I was having friends. I have church leaders, so they tried to handle the issue.’

The mother was torn, as she wanted her daughter to stay with the man of her choice but feared the consequences this choice might cause once Rose’s father in South Sudan learned about it. Rose’s maternal grandfather shared his daughter’s view, and was determined to let Rose stay with the young Ugandan man. In an interview he said:

‘Marriage is [a] plan of God. No one should be forced. Let Rose marry a man of her choice. This is also good for us refugees—our daughter to marry Ugandan for peaceful coexistence’.

It did not take long for the news to travel back to South Sudan, and as soon as Rose’s father learned about the courtship, he sent two relatives to Rhino Camp to bring Rose back to South Sudan. He also threatened to kill Rose’s aunts in the settlement. At one point, young men from the father’s ethnic group surrounded Rose’s mother’s house, and the conflict grew more and more heated. At this point the customary leaders and church leaders from the mother’s ethnic group stepped in. Although they are not traditionally part of Rose’s marriage arrangements because of the culture of patrilineal kinship in South Sudan, they wanted to support peaceful conflict mediation. The father’s ethnic group had a customary council representing them in Rhino Camp, as do most ethnic groups. Together with the leaders of this council, the mother’s customary council was able to negotiate a ‘stick fee,’ a fine that would open the marriage negotiations with the relatives of the young Ugandan man. The father back in South Sudan was not satisfied with the amount, but the customary council representing his ethnic group in Rhino Camp told him that this was the way things would be as long as the young woman was in Uganda. After a couple of days, the relatives of the young Ugandan man had a few cows and goats transported to the settlement. The three ethnic communities slaughtered the goats and celebrated the negotiation, while they sent the cows with the father’s relatives back to South Sudan as bridewealth.

Gidron’s important contribution to the scholarly field of conflict-resolution among Nuer refugees highlights the concept of ‘durable resolutions’. In his recent work, he emphasizes that the Nuer community tends to steer away from the statutory actors for settling conflicts, even for criminal issues, because in places of asylum these actors do not: ‘… deliver durable resolutions that sustain a sense of communal moral order and continuity’. He explained further: ‘As opposed to individualized state justice, which is limited by national borders and conceivably blind to the communal roots of disputes, community justice reaches into past events and relationships, regardless of where these took place or evolved, and [it] is also understood as being able to generate resolutions that promise to promote social cohesion and communal harmony, regardless of where those involved in any particular dispute may find themselves in the future’ (Gidron 2023: 2). The hope for a durable resolution was clear in Rose’s case. The parties on her mother’s side and the family of the young Ugandan man wanted to settle the matter for good, as did the forums involved—the customary councils and church leaders. The solution they eventually found reached into past events and relationships (Rose’s unwillingness to accept marriage to an old polygamous man), as well as effectively reaching across the border to Rose’s father and his people in South Sudan. As Gidron points out, the preference for non-state community justice mechanisms over formal ones may have less to do with cultural differences and more to do with the capacity to address a wider range of relationships. These solutions need to transcend national borders (Gidron 2022).

In her book on rape, Holly Porter describes the value of ‘social harmony’ among the Acholi in northern Uganda, which determines how this crime is dealt with. This ideal refers to ‘(…) a state of “normal” relations among the living and the dead, an idea

of cosmological equilibrium, and social balance of power and moral order' (Porter 2017:3). In this context, justice is about restoring social harmony rather than deciding legal responsibility (ibid.:221). Thus, the decisions on the appropriate manner of handling a crime, rape in particular, is mostly made by relatives and elders (ibid.:172, 183). Local solutions to rape can include payments of bridewealth (dowry) or compensation fees, cleansing rituals or prayers, and sometimes physical punishment (ibid.: 141). As in Rhino Camp, Kakuma and Kalobeyei, people in this neighbouring area of northern Uganda prefer local forums for dealing with crime because these are more accessible and because they are, in contrast to the statutory actors, able to restore social harmony. And just as in the refugee settlements, these solutions, especially in the case of rape, sometimes come with a high price for the women involved. It is, however, important to keep in mind the alternatives available. These are rarely favourable to such young women, who get caught up in a legal system where they are forced to pay endless transport fees for court hearings, arrests and case-management.

5.3. Concluding remarks

Our ASPIRE project began with a focus on youth. The findings from last year documented endeavours initiated by young people, but they also showed that conflicts and efforts to manage conflicts involve people regardless of age. It is not possible to understand youth in isolation from their elders. That is becoming even clearer from this year's research, where we see young people using statutory (formal) as well as informal mechanisms for managing conflicts. Many of the statutory institutions—the RWCs, police and semi-formal ethnic ('customary') structures like N4 are dominated by older, usually male persons. The conflicts frequently involve young people, whether they concern theft or marriage arrangements. Yet these young people are closely linked to older relatives. The mother of the young man who stole Nyalat's phone had to pay for it. The conflict situations of young women who fall pregnant or want to marry are partly controlled by senior relatives. Thus, youth endeavours must be adapted to conditions of power, authority and responsibility.

This year we are focusing on seeking solutions within a landscape of legal pluralism. We are identifying the different forums from which young people and their elders can seek help in managing conflicts. Having done so, we conclude that forums are not always distinct; more formal institutions may refer conflicts for mediation by less formal ones, such as elders in extended families and vice versa. Memberships may overlap, as when important elders who resolve conflicts in their clans are those chosen to sit on the statutory Refugee Welfare Councils. Choosing one particular forum for conflict management has different implications for the parties involved in the conflict. Bringing a problem to the police usually gives an advantage to members of the host community and often excludes consideration of the history and wider context of the conflict. Asking clan elders to resolve a conflict may mean a more lasting solution based on social harmony, but it may not allow young women as much say in the decisions taken to end the conflict. One party to a conflict may bring it to a forum that the other party would not have chosen.

In order to understand people's endeavours to resolve conflicts, we are trying to grasp their subjective assessments of the different forums. Important criteria include parties to the conflict (host community, refugees, different ethnic groups, children), practicality (cost and distance), connections (who knows whom?) and type of conflict (marriage cases, theft, livestock intrusions, land disputes, access to resources). People also consider the reach of a forum. Given the connections with people and events in South Sudan, it is relevant that some forums have networks reaching into the home country and familiarity with the history of a conflict. For some types of conflict, such as those about pregnancies and marriage, a wider kinship group is involved, and therefore a forum that transcends national borders is most effective. The ethnically based semi-formal organizations of lineage and clan, such as the N4, are brought into play here. These have leaders in the camps and also stretch into South Sudan and other states where refugees reside. The chances of a more lasting solution are greater when such forums are activated.

Community association of women addressing GBV in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement @ Ayo Degett/DRC

6. Feedback on findings

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

- The Academic Advisory Board (on the 14th of November 2024, Copenhagen).
- Representatives of the RYPP programme, including refugee peacebuilding mentors from Uganda, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia and Kenya in a UNHCR-led regional workshop (18th of September 2024 in Nairobi).
- Kampala-based stakeholders, including UNHCR, OPM, EU representatives, Embassy representatives, NGOs and research institutions (26th of November in Kampala).
- Nairobi-based stakeholders, including UNHCR, DRS, EU representatives, Embassy representatives, NGOs and research institutions (25th of November in Nairobi).
- Arua-based stakeholders including: RLOs, UNHCR, NGOs, CSOs and local government (26th September in Arua).
- Settlement-based stakeholders in Rhino Camp, including: OPM, NGOs, RLOs, members of the RWC, representatives from the district government and the ASPIRE Community Forums (25th of September in Yoro Basecamp).
- Settlement-based stakeholders in Kakuma and Kalobeyei, including: DRS, NGOs, CBOs, RLOs, elected refugee leaders and ASPIRE Community Forums (21st of November in Kakuma).
- Diaspora and newly resettled South Sudanese refugees from Rhino Camp and Kakuma in Sweden (9th November in Stockholm).

As this list shows, the people, stakeholders and institutions that have provided feedback come from very diverse backgrounds and hold different interests and positions in relation to the research. While some are experts on the methodology used, others are project-funders, protection and peacebuilding programme experts, and key interlocutors and respondents. Despite the differences in their positionality, some feedback was cross-cutting. In this section, we present key cross-cutting areas and the points we find most relevant for the future development of ASPIRE and next year's focus.

Validating the findings

Across all consultations, there seemed to be a high level of appreciation of the findings. The participants based in Rhino Camp, Kakuma and Kalobeyei recognized and affirmed the aspects presented in the data analysis, the examples from the field and the overall contextual description of conflict-handling, including the 'forums' presented and options available for action. They also confirmed that they, like most of their fellow refugees, preferred the customary structures for handling minor conflicts and disputes. As one participant stressed: 'Mostly among refugees we solve our own problems'. In addition, the settlement-based stakeholders raised many examples of spillover-conflicts from South Sudan, in line with our findings. They emphasized the problem of long-term grudges between clans, which often erupt in the settlements and take a toll on the residents. In relation to this, one stakeholder asked, 'What about the conflicts which are not solved?' ASPIRE may be able to answer this question since it aims to follow cases, populations and refugee-led initiatives over more than a decade, enabling us to follow conflicts as they develop and perhaps reignite over time. This unique long-term element of ASPIRE was continuously highlighted by the participants in all the consultations, who shared their excitement about this approach.

Balancing attention to legal systems, customary actors and humanitarian principles

As this year's findings highlight, many actors and structures are involved in handling conflicts in the settlements. It is clear from the findings and the feedback from participants that refugees often prefer the customary structures. These sometimes handle cases that formally are supposed to be managed by the statutory legal system or that contradict humanitarian principles and the laws of the host country. Actors across the consultations raised this as a key dilemma because, as we point out in the report, customary solutions can also be problematic. As one NGO worker pointed out: 'Perhaps we need to think of ways that humanitarian actors can support customary structures without compromising humanitarian principles'. A representative of a donor pointed out that working with these customary structures would jeopardize principles of 'do no harm', anti-discrimination and international human rights. Others again recognized that we need to look at the reality on the ground and work with the actors who are there. Participants across the consultations, particularly from UN institutions, pointed out that the customary actors do not sign on to the AGD principles and emphasized the need to respect and enforce the referral to the legal system, particularly for cases of GBV, rape and defilement. Although, this is the ideal procedure, the findings of ASPIRE underline the importance of considering the reality in the settlements, where access to police assistance is often limited or costly for the refugees in terms of money (and sometimes dignity). Moreover, as one participant from an RLO highlighted, 'only one person will be arrested, but the rest of the people involved in the conflict will be in the camp, so the cultural solutions are important'. The importance of understanding the customary leaders and their role in handling conflicts within their neighbourhood was also stressed by participants. Some suggested the possibility of exploring how customary mechanisms for handling conflicts can be strengthened through training and enforcing a synchronized focus on how both the customary and statutory systems operate and complement one another.

Power imbalances and marginalized groups

In this report, we have delved into the landscape of forums for conflict-handling in the three research locations. Some participants emphasized that those we have described are accessible to the majority, not to minorities, such as gender minorities, who already face discrimination and marginalization. Along the same lines, it was pointed out that the decision-making and influence on socially attuned 'solutions' for the wider social group depend on the decision-makers' age, gender, ethnic identity and other diversity factors. A number of participants suggested exploring access to justice and conflict-handling mechanisms for women's and other marginalized groups, including gender minorities.

Several important questions such as these were raised: How can marginalized groups in the settlements make use of structures which often dismiss and disregard them? How do young women – and other minorities – explore their possibilities, and how have gendered power imbalances changed over the years of our study? Will humanitarian actors' mandates for protection clash with building the capacity of informal actors who might, if inadvertently, increase some of these imbalances? As several refugee community representatives and RLO staff pointed out, marginalized groups may fall between the cracks of the existing formal and informal structures for conflict-handling, and it is important that HDP actors keep this in mind. An important question for ASPIRE in future would be to explore further how HDP actors could play a (better) role in filling this void and hence improving the safety net for those who are not welcome at the forums we have described above. To do that, a more detailed overview of the existing conditions and potential options are critical, which would be possible through a dedicated focus. Along the same lines, several protection staff expressed concerns about how the existing actors seemed to neglect the victim's perspective, especially in GBV cases.

Representation

Generally, the HDP actors and refugee communities in our research locations are most familiar with quantitative research and the 'representative' element embedded in large-scale surveys, baselines and monitoring tools. Despite thorough engagements explaining our methodological approach and the fact that we do not attempt to capture all areas of the settlements, all age groups, and all ethnic and national groups, an urge to have ASPIRE cover more groups and provide a more representative picture was brought up in most of our consultations. While we in the team acknowledge that the perspectives of Congolese, Somalis and Ethiopians are relevant to gain a 'fuller' picture of conflict dynamics in Kakuma, South Sudanese are the focus of the study, though the other groups are included if they prove particularly relevant to the conflict dynamics among the South Sudanese. Along the same lines, some actors in Rhino Camp are constantly concerned about the lack of representation for specific ethnic groups and areas of the large settlement. However, the project is designed with ethnographic methodologies at its heart; we delve into the details of a few illustrative conflicts rather than attempting to capture all conflicts. We risk spreading ourselves too thin if we try to cover many more population groups with the same number of staff. That said, we constantly measure and adjust our data and ensure a gender balance on the team and also that the most prominent languages are available to it, allowing us access to these groups. If future funding allows, it would also be relevant to explore the conflict-handling of South Sudanese refugees in the nearby urban centres (particularly the links and movements between urban areas and the camps) and the Sudanese who are increasingly fleeing into Uganda and Kenya as the conflict in Sudan drags on.

Mobility and the dynamics of cross-border conflict

Across our consultations, several participants have suggested exploring mobility further, looking into cross-border dynamics and mobility as a driver and resolver of conflicts. The findings of ASPIRE have already shown that mobility – such as fleeing from a conflict in the settlement to hide in South Sudan and vice versa – can be used as a tool for handling and escalating conflicts and crimes. Moreover, it is relevant to further explore the differences between Uganda and Kenya, since the proximity of the settlements to South Sudan varies, with Rhino Camp being situated closest to the border. Similarly, photos and videos also travel across the borders from South Sudan to the settlements in neighbouring countries and vice versa, making the influence of media and AI in triggering conflicts an important area to investigate further, as pointed out across the consultations. In our data we have already seen several examples of photos and videos of violent clashes in South Sudan leading to retaliation in the settlements. Conflicts in South Sudan are often mirrored in the settlements, as one participant similarly emphasized.

Building on last year's findings, the importance of a cross-border element continues to be highlighted by many stakeholders, including donors, NGOs, OPM, RLOs and refugees. The refugees and RLOs pointed out the strong flows of people, ideas, narratives and conflict dynamics between South Sudan and the refugee settlements. Some HDP actors and refugee representatives suggested following how peacebuilding approaches, tools and messages from life in displacement influence efforts to achieve peaceful coexistence in South Sudan. Government officials pointed out that flipping the focus into 'what' would keep the South Sudanese in South Sudan would provide useful insights. Participants also raised questions about identity for refugees returning to South Sudan: to which identity do they feel they belong, and how is this shaped by mobility? Extending the study into South Sudan would allow a greater focus on some of these aspects, although we will not be able to measure the direct causality between specific training in displacement settings and peaceful coexistence in South Sudan.

Lastly, conflicts 'inflicted' by new arrivals were brought up on several occasions, as in last year's consultations. There seem to be strong opinions about new arrivals causing more violent conflicts among refugee representatives as well as actors in the settlements and a desire to have ASPIRE explore this further. A more dedicated focus on mobility and on how movements back and forth are used as means to deal with the current conditions for refugees would allow such a focus.

Stakeholder recommendations for actions

The importance of implementing conflict-management training for schoolchildren and young people was brought up, just like last year. As one participant from a CBO expressed it, "They will bring the peace from the playground to the community". In addition, it was suggested that religious leaders be trained to include peacebuilding components in their areas of work, as well as provide better conflict mediation and peacebuilding training for elected refugee leaders and community security teams. One peacebuilding specialist noted that few of the cases we present involve formal peacebuilding activities implemented by NGOs. This led to a discussion of relevance and the potential need to re-think 'when', 'for whom' and 'in which situation' peacebuilding and mediation activities by NGOs and UN agencies are most impactful. As the specialist pointed out, the mapping conducted by ASPIRE would support this review, explore the barriers for effective programming, and identify where 'we', as international actors, are most relevant.

Impact of ASPIRE

In line with the feedback from 2023, many participants across the consultations mentioned the need for clearer action points on how ASPIRE's findings could and should be put to use and inform decisions on programming. Development of so-called 'best practice tools' and training components was suggested as something ASPIRE could take on. At the same time, many stakeholders emphasized their appreciation of the longitudinal research arrangements of ASPIRE, pointing out that such knowledge gathered over time will provide rich insights into the structures that exist in the settlements and how the needs of the communities can best be addressed. In addition, across the consultations, the participants highlighted the necessity of developing a method to trace the impact of ASPIRE over time. In Uganda, some participants thought that the increase in funded RLOs in Rhino Camp was partly due to ASPIRE recommendations. We cannot confirm this correlation, but we are happy to see that people attribute positive change to the implementation of ASPIRE.

Suggestions for new thematic areas

Many additional suggestions for future focus areas came up during our consultations in 2024, including: the option of exploring the role of generational engagement and identity; the impact of changing refugee policies; the influence of witchcraft on conflicts; the ways in which drug and alcohol abuse contribute to conflicts; and role of the diaspora. In addition, a few participants highlighted that younger generations may not identify with clans and tribes to the same degree as their elders, which would be relevant to explore further over the years. Lastly, some participants pointed out that, while it is useful to have insights into the various conflict triggers and the different forums for handling conflicts, it is equally, perhaps more important to focus on how conflicts can be mitigated before they occur or fully erupt. Some of these suggestions are new (e.g. the role of the diaspora) and others are already reflected in our data but had not been selected for the report this year. Our data pool grows larger year by year, and every year we chose to zoom in on specific issues and thematic areas, although the data are much fuller than this. For instance, we have followed many cases of witchcraft and use of witchcraft practitioners as ways of handling conflict and also as conflict triggers. These findings might be included in the 2025 report depending on the choices and preferences of the peer researchers.

In conclusion, the consultations conducted in November 2024, after the final draft of the report was written, proved very useful for the research focus of ASPIRE in 2025 and onwards. While some suggestions are immediately relevant, other suggestions might be more useful for the further development of the project, and some would require additional funding to increase the scope and focus.

Host community members in Kalobeyei Settlement on their way to farming activity @ Ayo Degett/DRC

7. Questions for continuing research

Next year we will extend our research into South Sudan. We will be asking how refugees who return from Uganda and Kenya continue their endeavours for peace upon their return. They are navigating under very different conditions with a different organizational landscape. In our continuing research, we will therefore be expanding comparisons of endeavours under different conditions. The state has a different type of presence in most sectors in South Sudan, so it will be interesting and challenging to explore the roles of the statutory actors in comparison with the customary ones, which are more prominent in this setting. We know that some of the RLOs in Uganda and Kenya have opened operations back in South Sudan. These will be particularly apt for study, since we can compare the same endeavour under different conditions.

Opening the component in South Sudan will also allow us to add a greater focus on mobility and how movements across borders are used as efforts to solve the conflict or escape the consequences of actions that are perceived as wrong or illegal in one country or geographical area. The example of the young man who stole the phone and ran off to South Sudan is a good example, and it also raises questions about the 'how, when and who' of mobility as a means of handling conflict for the individual and the community. Another case related to mobility that has unfolded over the final weeks of the report writing (November and December 2024) also exemplifies the opportunities and constraints related to movements over the border. A young man who conducted a massacre of civilians in a South Sudanese village near the border decided to flee into Uganda and onwards to Rhino Camp, thinking he would be able to 'blend in' or settle unnoticed. However, in these times of smartphones and the sharing of photos and information online, it did not take long for the community members in Rhino Camp to put two and two together and identify this young man. A planned retaliation attack by the victims' family members was avoided by the intervention of the local security vigilantes. According to rumours, the alleged perpetrator is now living in hiding, possibly in Arua. Being able to trace conflicts, disputes and retaliation across borders would provide us with more in-depth knowledge of how mobility becomes a means of both de-escalating conflict (in the case of the phone theft) and triggering it (in the case of the retaliation attempt). Along the same lines, it would be interesting to gain a better understanding of information-sharing and the sharing of photos. While many horrific acts take place in this context, it is also clear that some of the photos that are shared are not 'real' but are potentially generated using Artificial Intelligence (AI) or 'photo-shopping'. Investigating how these photos spread and how they contribute as conflict triggers would be relevant for next year, especially as access to AI and social media is increasing in the study locations.

We also want to delve more into the comparative aspect of the study. Having more established research components in both Uganda and Kenya next year will provide us with an opportunity to compare more systematically how South Sudanese in Uganda and Kenya manage conflicts. One of the key observations that is becoming clearer and clearer during the field research is the difference in the mandate of the refugee governance structure. In Kenya, the elected refugee leaders seem to have a complicated relationship with the statutory actors, including the CPPT. These latter operate in parallel to the elected leaders; they have a direct management line to the DRS and are on its payroll, as opposed to the elected leaders. A trigger point for the challenging collaboration is that elected leaders are held accountable for the actions of the camp inhabitants, even though they are not recognized as 'leaders', nor systematically consulted, nor given a mandate to take decisions. The elected leaders are not allowed to select a representative among themselves who could convey their concerns to the Kenyan authorities, as is the case with the hierarchy of RWC 1, 2, and 3 in Uganda.

This power imbalance leaves limited room for manoeuvring and 'enforcing' peaceful environments, as opposed to the RWC structure in Uganda, where the RWCs are recognized as 'real' leaders by OPM and the other statutory actors. Being given this

formal mandate to 'lead' means that the RWCs can more easily attend to and handle simmering conflicts that could spin out of control, as happened in the riots in Kalobeyei in May 2024 and clashes between inhabitants from Kakuma 4 and Kalobeyei in June 2024 (USCRI 2024; Lutta 2024).

The research in 2024 has confirmed the importance of generational relations in understanding efforts to resolve conflicts. Gender has emerged as an equally significant dimension, since many conflicts involve partnerships, marriage and pregnancies.

We will be exploring how youth endeavours for peace in the countries of refuge and situations of return affect gender relations. Questions of subjectivity are important in that young women (and gender minorities) may be somewhat less subject to male control and more able to act as subjects of their own lives in the refugee camps. The same may be the case for youth in general. Thus, continuing research will pursue questions of possible changes in relations between the genders and generations.

Consultation of community leaders in Rhino Camp Refugee Settlement @ Ayo Degett/DRC

Fence in Kakuma Refugee Camp made of cooking oil containers provided on general food distributions @ Ayo Degett/DRC

8. Reflections on opportunities

HDP actors who read this report are themselves best placed to decide what opportunities for intervention it is most relevant and feasible for them to pursue. Our reflections here are therefore suggestions, based on the research.

The 2024 research on legal pluralism shows that many endeavours to resolve conflicts and achieve greater peace revolve around non-statutory mechanisms. The councils of elders and the customary institutions that reach into South Sudan manage more conflicts than the police and the state judicial system. There are significant opportunities for HDP actors to strengthen the support to these organizations, for example, by facilitating and improving trust-building and links between statutory and customary actors, capacity-development and improving referral mechanisms [16]. This would mean recognizing non-statutory actors, including customary actors, as solid community-based structures that manage specific community conflicts under specific conditions. HDP actors could provide them with better access to conflict management and conflict-sensitivity tools and training (e.g. to ensure the perspectives of women and minorities are heard, that civil arrests happen in a non-violent and dignified way, and that the necessary material support is provided to allow for these mechanisms to work in practice).

The establishment or improvement of referral mechanisms are key, and on a practical level, these non-statutory key actors might also need better access to transport (to police or healthcare facilities) and access to phones/phone credit. As pointed out in the report and by the feedback participants, there is a need to build and support the capacity of the formal actors as well. Some NGOs are already engaged with this, and this might be an intervention that national or international NGOs are sometimes better placed to undertake, as existing power dynamics might make it hard for community-based RLOs to train police forces, for example. In addition, the ASPIRE research findings might also provide evidence and opportunities for peace actors to revisit and re-target activities in order to become more relevant, effective and impactful. The findings also provide an opportunity to explore the details of conflict resolution processes that are used by different actors (i.e. arbitration, mediation, conciliation, dialogue etc.) and peoples' choice to engage in one process over another.

As pointed out throughout the report, Refugee Welfare Councils play an important part in their local communities in handling conflicts. This is not least because of their role as an 'intermediaries' or 'brokers' between more informal community-based actors (such as customary institutions, clan leaders, elders and church leaders), and more formal actors (such as HDP actors, statutory actors and local government authorities) (Vancluysen and Ingelaere 2020). Building on our findings, this 'broker'/'intermediary' role is key to preventing simmering conflicts from escalating and bringing in relevant actors to deal with it—whether customary, HDP or statutory. There seems to be a clear-cut opportunity for the Kenyan authorities to adopt this refugee governance structure from the Uganda arrangement as a step towards stronger mechanisms for community-driven conflict-handling and for HDP actors to advocate this to be a current policy development in the country. Our findings also testify that, on the ground, community-based security actors, whether of ethnic origin like the N4 or the security vigilantes (in Rhino Camp), play a central role in dealing with thefts and conflicts over resources. In the absence of sufficient formal police in the settlements attending to these types of crime, it would be useful to build the capacities and recognition of these alternative actors.

Despite decades of effort, HDP programmes still involve significant risks of fuelling existing conflicts, triggering new conflicts or enforcing divides. Our data testify that poor sensitisation of programme changes, what are perceived as 'unfair' resource allocations and failed livelihood programmes have triggered violent conflicts. There is room for improvement in both integrated

[16] Many programmes have this focus already, one example of a recognised long-term peacebuilding programme that worked specifically on inclusion and trust building between statutory and non-statutory actors is 'The time is now' (Mydlak 2019).

programming and conflict-sensitive approaches. This might need to involve a wider approach and become a priority at the strategic level, but a first step could be to ensure that protection analysis and conflict-sensitivity analysis and approaches are used in future programmes in the settlements and in the daily coordination with refugee communities through the elected refugee leaders and beyond. Our findings also continuously emphasize the high capacity of community-based actors and local RLOs in the settlement who could ideally channel more of the programming through donor funding.

9. Literature

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Abbreviations

AGD	Age, Gender and Diversity
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ASPIRE	Aspiring for Peace and Inclusion Research
CBO	Community-based Organisation
CDC	Community Development Center
CHS	Core Humanitarian Standards
CPPT	Community Peace and Protection Teams
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
CTEN	Community Technology Empowerment Network
DDG	Danish Demining Group
DR Congo	Democratic Republic of the Congo
DRC	Danish Refugee Council
DRS	Department of Refugee Services
EU	European Union
EU INTPA	EU International Partnerships
GCR	Global Compact on Refugees
HDP	Humanitarian Development and Peace (actors or interventions)
HI	Humanity & Inclusion
HQ	Headquarters
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
INCAF	International Network on Conflict and Fragility
KISEDP	Kalobeyei Integrated Socio-Economic Plan
KPR	Kenya Police Reserve
LC	Local Council (local governance structure in Uganda)
LWF	The Lutheran World Federation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NWoW	New Way of Working
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee
OIOS	Office of Internal Oversight Services
OLS	Operation Lifeline Sudan
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister (Uganda)
PM	Programme Manager

POCs	Protection of Civilians
FA	Field Assistant
ReDSS	Regional Durable Solutions Secretariat
RLO	Refugee-led Organisation
RLON	Refugee-Led Organisation Network
RWC	Refugee Welfare Committee (Uganda)
RYPP	Regional Youth Peacebuilding Project
SG	Steering Group
SPLA/M	Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement
TPO	Transcultural Psychosocial Organisation
UCPH	University of Copenhagen
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
UNMISS	UN Mission in South Sudan
USCRI	U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants
VSLA	Village Savings and Loan Association
WFP	World Food Programme
YSAT	Youth Social Advocacy Team

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