



# South Sudan: Youth, Violence and Livelihoods

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**Cover image:** Members of Nasir Women's Association making soil stabilized blocks.  
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# Contents

<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>5</b>
Recommendations	6
<b>Introduction</b>	<b>9</b>
A youth livelihoods crisis?	9
Past and present livelihoods interventions	12
<b>Methodology</b>	<b>13</b>
Research challenges	13
<b>Livelihoods in transition</b>	<b>16</b>
Rural marketization of livelihoods	16
Aspirations and employment	18
Informal work and migrant labour	20
Women’s migration and work	22
Violence in work	24
Military employment	25
Livelihood options	26
<b>Social networks and survival</b>	<b>29</b>
Connectivity	29
Digital networks	31
Digital networks and engagement with violence	31
Connections with kin	32
Gendered choices	36
<b>Learning from past livelihoods interventions</b>	<b>39</b>
Early livelihoods interventions, 1983–2005	39
2005–2013 livelihoods interventions	41
Conflict mitigation and peacebuilding interventions	42
Lost institutional memory	45
Conclusions	46
Recommendations	48
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Annex 1: Table of livelihoods</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Annex 2: Table of interviews</b>	<b>58</b>

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South Sudan states are according to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005)

Map 1. (above) South Sudan

# Executive summary

This report explains the realities of life for South Sudan's youth population, the majority of whom are living in conditions of extreme economic precarity. Young people face enormous challenges in trying to survive and progress in their lives. This is happening in the context of overarching neglect of the citizenry by the government, corruption, ethnic based violent conflict and competition for control of the economy and natural resources, which has significantly undermined the social fabric.

The research was led by a team of young Southern Sudanese who have first-hand experience of these challenges. The team also faced significant constraints related to the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited some elements of the research. However, the team managed to include the viewpoints of over 100 young people in six different locations across the country.

During the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) period (June 2004–July 2011), Southern Sudan's economy experienced enormous growth predicated on widespread international goodwill and an increasing subnational budget based on a growing petroleum industry, coupled with significant financial and development assistance. Upwards of four million Southern Sudanese returned after decades of displacement.

After independence in 2011, and particularly since 2012, when the new Government of South Sudan (GoSS) shut down its oil fields in a fee dispute with Sudan, the economy went into structural collapse. The outbreak of violent ethnically based conflict in December 2013 further deepened this and exacerbated existing regional, gender and class inequalities. It also resulted in the massive expansion of donor funded humanitarian assistance that still struggles to meet the basic nutrition needs of more than half of South Sudan's population and provides minimal employment opportunities for its youth.

Most young women and men now rely on informal sector trade, agricultural production and market and food service work to earn money to live. But this precarious economic picture means that young people are particularly at risk of voluntary or forced recruitment into government militias, armed opposition groups or the national security sector forces. These options, at best, provide only poverty-level income, and any (rare) surplus is generally spent on personal and family expenses, including funding education.

Continued rural insecurity, including ethnic-based conflict, criminality and cattle raiding, combined with climate and environmental disasters, compounds the challenges of rural livelihood options. This drives youth migration to towns, where access to services and a wider range of opportunities are clustered. Social networks and online spaces are critically important for young people to better navigate South Sudan's economy. These spaces challenge generational control and supervision of young people's decisions and lives, including reworking gender relations and gendered labour.

Young people emphasize that the economic crisis and its widening consequences have helped turn people against each other, particularly between urban and rural populations. This mistrust also had challenging implications for the researchers as they communicated with potential respondents in rural areas, even in their own ethnic and peer groups.

Insecurity, poverty-level employment and a general lack of options for waged employment or investment capital is undermining young people's morality-based calculations. Even graduates, who would previously have had better job prospects, especially in government roles, now consider criminal activity or organized cattle raiding as a viable option.

Military and security sector work is the main employment option for many young men, despite wages being very low and uncertain. Previously, the military was seen as a path to a sustainable and honourable livelihood, with opportunities for advancement and higher education. Now, while the uniform and the gun can still be utilized to generate resources to meet basic needs, deployment to distant locations in the recent civil war has drastically undermined the success and attractiveness of it as a livelihood option.

South Sudan's youth do not consider livelihood support interventions by international actors to have contributed to any significant and sustainable impact. Instead, they consider the international approach to have predominantly focused on individual entrepreneurship, market engagement and small business support that people are already involved with, but which face the challenging conditions described above.

There were some intermittent successes during the CPA era, including the 'Akobo model', which this research suggests may be viable and replicable at the county level, especially with undisciplined armed youth. This research concludes that there remains an urgent need to better understand how genuinely sustainable livelihood interventions might work, and what international support for nation building and economic recovery might look like. These strategies would need to challenge some of the recurrent, abusive economic relationships, as well as the exclusive and elitist character of international assistance itself.

## **Recommendations**

These recommendations are intended to help international actors—governments and non-governmental development organizations—design more effective livelihood interventions supporting young people in South Sudan.

### **1. Address the disparity between urban and rural educational opportunities for young people.**

Young men and women want to be able to seek education for themselves and their children for their own personal fulfilment as well as their livelihoods. Education interventions must both acknowledge and challenge the concentration of educational

and employment opportunities in towns, which continues to build internal class, gender and geographic inequalities, drive urban migration and undermine young people's investments in agricultural systems. Interventions may include investing in rural education and teacher training, and potentially funding rural scholarships to university or higher education colleges.

**2. Provide and support opportunities for more young people to participate in local government.**

Young people want to openly discuss the economic crisis and confront leaders directly about the structural inequalities and conflicts the crisis is causing. The successful Akobo model of local government should be revisited, bringing young men and women from urban and rural areas into local infrastructure reconstruction.

**3. Support cooperative economic models that draw on previously successful approaches.**

Collective economic action may help strengthen mutual solidarity and support young people to work together to confront forms of exploitation as a group, rather than fighting for survival and opportunity by themselves. Livelihoods programmes that focus on rural self-sufficiency and small-scale entrepreneurship are often deeply vulnerable to climactic, environmental and conflict shocks. Interventions could revisit economic cooperative models and learn from past failures and successes: for example, brick making, agricultural collectives, fish and shea butter farms. This approach might also help challenge the individualist entrepreneurship language that alienates many young people and (among other factors) encourages ethno-local hostility and competition.

**4. Review microfinance initiatives and look at collective financing opportunities.**

Individual microfinance often leaves people more dependent on fluctuating markets and uncertain returns to service personal debt, contributing to the deep economic precarity detailed above. Collective investments and funding might support cooperative models designed locally to suit specific climatic and economic situations.

**5. Provide legal support for employment rights through local and customary court systems.**

Casual and low-paid workers are poorly supported by the centralized state system of law courts. Instead, they are more likely to seek redress for employment-related issues through networks of customary courts, which are less likely to be able to implement state employment legislation. However, to their advantage, they already have an established caselaw developed from previous litigation over unpaid wages, unsafe conditions or injury at work. Collaborative and locally organized consultations with courts and litigants could help to establish worker protection standards

based on local legal practice and community-specific needs and would help identify local employment abuses.

**6. Review funding mechanisms for livelihoods projects.**

A wide-ranging review of mechanisms for livelihood project funding should be carried out. This process should be led by national NGOs, drawing in donors, INGOs, private industry and telecoms sectors for consultation on the accountability, cost-effectiveness and design of skills development programmes.



# Introduction

South Sudan has faced decades of chronic economic crises and underdevelopment. This has been exacerbated by recurrent armed conflicts, which have caused multiple mass displacements and resulted in an extraordinary reliance on external humanitarian aid. The end of the Second Sudanese Civil War (1983–2005) brought a wave of societal reconstruction and fundamental changes to the country’s economic system, including a rush of international investment. However, many of these reconstruction efforts were broken, or interrupted, by the civil war that started in December 2013—the repercussions of which are still being felt across the country.

This study explores the consequences of South Sudan’s interconnected economic and political transition on the lives and livelihoods of young people in the country. As well as examining the current situation, it also reflects on the troubled history of external interventions designed to support peaceful and sustainable livelihoods for young people across South Sudan since the 1970s. Like today, with millions of South Sudanese internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees and millions more in South Sudan facing dire poverty and food insecurity, international assistance has generally been enormously skewed towards emergency humanitarian aid rather than recovery and development assistance. When and where the latter was availed, it was also almost singularly focused on state building, to support the establishment of institutions and systems, rather than on supporting citizens and leaders to redress the enormous stresses of decades of racialized exploitation, discrimination and division that formed the basis of violent conflict between South Sudanese people and their own government.

While there was an enormous amount of international goodwill, coupled with significant financial and development assistance following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005 and South Sudan’s secession from Sudan in 2011, this quickly evaporated following the start of a new civil war in December 2013. Most organizations that had been involved in macro and micro level livelihoods support were unable to continue those projects as insecurity and humanitarian assistance needs, as well as displacement, became widespread.

The project was led by a team of young South Sudanese researchers, who are themselves intimately familiar with issues of youth livelihoods and conflict. The research focused on the core question: How are young men and women navigating South Sudan’s unequal, manipulative and violent political economy and engaging in or evading armed work?

## **A youth livelihoods crisis?**

Research on young people’s livelihoods across Africa and beyond has highlighted the uncertainties faced by young people as they navigate economies and societies

increasingly structured by neoliberal economics and global capitalism.<sup>1</sup> Alcinda Honwana and others have emphasized how young people face marginalization and paralysis within local and global economies and politics, often termed as being ‘stuck’ in ‘waithood’.<sup>2</sup> These experiences are shaped by class and the specifics of economic reforms.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, young people respond to the uncertainties of this waithood, often engaging in casual work, hawking and other insecure labour strategies to survive.<sup>4</sup> Young people also deploy various strategies for moving towards economic security and self-fulfilment.<sup>5</sup> Recent research has also focused on young people’s participation in armed conflict, including work on recruitment dynamics and demobilization.<sup>6</sup> For some, youth armed mobilization is seen as being part of intergenerational tensions between the old, who generally have significant societal, economic and political power, and the young.<sup>7</sup> A growing field of work also focuses on young people’s social and cultural lives,

1 Arjun Appadurai, ‘Deep Democracy: Urban Governmentality and the Horizon of Politics’, *Public Culture* 14/1 (2002): 21–47; Cindi Katz, *Growing up Global: Economic Restructuring and Children’s Everyday Lives*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2004; Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, ‘Millennial Capitalism: First Thoughts on a Second Coming’, *Public Culture* 12/2 (2000): 291–343.

2 Jon Abbink, *Vanguard or Vandals: Youth, Politics and Conflict in Africa*, *Vanguard or Vandals*, Brill, 2005. (<https://brill.com/view/title/11338>); Alcinda Manuel Honwana and Filip de Boeck, *Makers & Breakers: Children & Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, Oxford: James Currey, 2005; Catrine Christiansen, Mats Utas and Henrik E. Vigh, *Navigating Youth, Generating Adulthood: Social Becoming in an African Context*, Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2006. (<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-261352>); Alcinda Honwana, ‘2 “Waithood”: Youth Transitions and Social Change’, *Development and Equity*, (2014): 28–40, [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004269729\\_004](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004269729_004); Silke Oldenburg, ‘“I Am an Intellectual”. War, Youth and Higher Education in Goma (Eastern Congo)’, *AnthropoChildren* 2016, no. 6 (2016), <http://edoc.unibas.ch/39991/>; Craig Jeffrey, ‘Timepass: Youth, Class, and Time among Unemployed Young Men in India’, *American Ethnologist* 37/3 (2010): 465–481, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2010.01266.x>.

3 Jeffrey, ‘Timepass’.

4 Juliet Gilbert, ‘Mobile Identities: Photography, Smartphones and Aspirations in Urban Nigeria’, *Africa* 89/2 (2019): 246–265, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S000197201900007X>; Clovis Bergère, ‘From Street Corners to Social Media: The Changing Location of Youth Citizenship in Guinea’, *African Studies Review* 63/1 (2019): 124–145, <https://doi.org/10.1017/asr.2019.3>.

5 Thomas Yeboah, ‘Navigating Precarious Employment: Social Networks Among Migrant Youth in Ghana’, *IDS Bulletin* 48/3 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.19088/1968-2017.128>; Grace Mwaura, ‘The Side-Hustle: Diversified Livelihoods of Kenyan Educated Young Farmers’, *IDS Bulletin* 48/3 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.19088/1968-2017.126>; Seife Ayele, Samir Khan and James Sumberg, ‘Introduction: New Perspectives on Africa’s Youth Employment Challenge’, *IDS Bulletin* 48/3 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.19088/1968-2017.123>; Oldenburg, ‘“I Am an Intellectual”’; Catherine A. Honeyman, *The Orderly Entrepreneur: Youth, Education, and Governance in Rwanda*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2016.

6 Danny Hoffman, ‘The Meaning of a Militia: Understanding the Civil Defence Forces of Sierra Leone’, *African Affairs* 106/425 (2007): 639–662, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adm054>; Frank Van Acker and Koen Vlassenroot, ‘Youth and Conflict in Kivu: “Komona Clair”’, *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance* (2000): 1–17; Koen Vlassenroot and Timothy Raeymaekers, *Conflict and Social Transformation in Eastern DR Congo*, Gent: Academia Press, 2004; Mats Utas, ‘Sweet Battlefields: Youth and the Liberian Civil War’, Phd dissertation, Uppsala University, 2003; Jairo Munive, ‘The Army of “Unemployed” Young People’, *Young* 18/3 (2010): 321–338, <https://doi.org/10.1177/110330881001800305>; Henrik E. Vigh, *Navigating Terrains of War: Youth and Soldiering in Guinea-Bissau*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2006; Rebecca Tapscott, ‘Policing Men: Militarised Masculinity, Youth Livelihoods, and Security in Conflict-Affected Northern Uganda’, *Disasters* 42/1 (2017): 119–139, <https://doi.org/10.1111/disa.12274>; Marjoke A. Oosterom, ‘Youth and Social Navigation in Zimbabwe’s Informal Economy: “Don’t End up on the Wrong Side”’, *African Affairs* 118/472 (2018): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/ady048>.

7 Eisei Kurimoto and Simon Simonse, eds., *Conflict, Age and Power in North East Africa: Age Systems in Transition*, Oxford: James Currey, 1998; Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The destruction of Liberia and the religious dimension of an African civil war*, London: Hurst & Co., 1999, 286–287.

activism and political critiques, including that which takes place through the internet—an increasingly important space in South Sudan.<sup>8</sup>

Some contemporary research has touched on the struggles and strategies of youth in South Sudan. For example, work by Cherry Leonardi in the 2000s argues that youth mobilization in South Sudan in the 1980s and 1990s was not indicative of generational tension or a youth crisis, but instead of youth occupying an ambiguous social space between the spheres of home and government.<sup>9</sup> Katarzyna Grabska and Martha Fanjoy's research on South Sudanese young people returning to the country after the CPA also highlights the uncertainties that they face and the various gendered strategies they employ as they navigate social belonging.<sup>10</sup> Alicia Luedke's research on youth gangs highlights how gangs can be a creative strategy to avoid exclusion and parochialism, but these gangs often still strengthen traditional gender norms that associate women with a life as wives, defined by childbearing.<sup>11</sup>

At the same time, young people's engagement with and participation in South Sudan's economy is poorly understood, particularly their lived experiences, aspirations, strategies and opportunities. Research explicitly on youth and livelihoods in the post-CPA period is limited. There is also very little research on the mobility of youth in South Sudan, both within the country and across borders, other than the research on the mass repatriation and return processes between 2006 and 2012. There is little research that has captured any of the internal migration dynamics, reasons and decision making behind this migration.

This research study specifically aims to explore the options and decision-making processes of young men and women across the country. Its core questions and methodology (see below) were designed to understand young people's aspirations and the constraints on their options for self-fulfilment. By providing a longitudinal and personal perspective on the shifting options and choices for young people across six research sites, the study provides detailed views of:

- The drivers of changing opportunities, systems and livelihood pathways over the last decade.
- The impacts of these shifting livelihood options on gendered, class and regional inequalities and power dynamics.
- South Sudanese young people's perspectives on these changes and their livelihood options.

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8 Bergère, 'From Street Corners to Social Media'; Gilbert, 'Mobile Identities'; Akin Iwilade, 'How to Know Africa(s) in an Age of Youth Hybridity', paper presented at the Centre of African Studies Lent Seminar Series, University of Cambridge, 12 February 2018.

9 Cherry Leonardi, "'Liberation' or Capture: Youth in between 'Hakuma', and 'Home' during Civil War and its Aftermath in Southern Sudan', *African Affairs* 106/424 (2007): 391–412.

10 Katarzyna Grabska and Martha Fanjoy, "'And When I Become a Man'", *Social Analysis* 59/1 (2015): 76–95.

11 Alicia Luedke, 'Violence, Crime and Gender in South Sudan: Reflections from the Field on Militias and Gangs', London School of Economics: Conflict Research Programme, 2020. ([http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/107520/1/CRP\\_violence\\_crime\\_and\\_gender\\_in\\_south\\_sudan.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/107520/1/CRP_violence_crime_and_gender_in_south_sudan.pdf))

There are strong similarities in our findings across the six research sites. These similarities are affected by local geographies and conflict dynamics; however, this research highlights similar fundamental cross-country changes to the political economy of South Sudan over the last ten years and common resulting impacts on young people's lives and livelihoods.<sup>12</sup> This report therefore analyses these changes and impacts collectively, highlighting differentials of class, gender and place throughout.

## **Past and present livelihoods interventions**

There have been extensive and sustained investments in livelihoods support and development programmes in South Sudan from the 1970s onwards. These interventions have evolved under successive developmental theories over the last 50 years, from macroeconomic collectivized farming schemes part-inherited from the colonial period, through to recent skills-based and cash-transfer projects. Much of this institutional history has been forgotten, including large-scale interventions during the 2005–2011 post-war interim period and the 2011–2013 post-independence period. The third section of this report provides an overview of this history, and its successes and failures, as a crucial point of reflection for current livelihoods policy and planning.

The field research asked: how, and how far, have these past and present livelihoods projects supported young people's working lives and options? The project aimed for a realistic understanding of this question by approaching the issue not from the perspective of young people engaging with current projects, but by a life history approach in which researchers worked with interviewees to highlight support and training, and its impact on their livelihoods and pathways.

Current and past external support for livelihoods was, however, barely noted by research respondents in their discussions of support and assistance for young people, and this striking omission forms part of our analysis below.

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<sup>12</sup> These findings are supported by the '2020 South Sudan Multi-Sector Needs Assessment: Area of Knowledge – Neighbourhoods Executive Summary' (REACH, December 2020), which found households with multi-sectoral humanitarian needs and crises geographically spread across the entire country.

# Methodology

The research used a holistic definition of ‘youth’ drawn from three intersecting ideas: age, as a generation; relational, according to position of subordinate social and economic power and responsibility; and political, as members of society who can be mobilized to violence.<sup>13</sup> Within this definition of youth, we included extensive interviews with women in rural and urban areas to highlight the impacts of established gender norms, discrimination and gendered violence on young women’s aspirations, options and pathways.

The research sites were identified to reflect the diverse local economies, conflicts (both past and present) and livelihoods interventions, whether historical or continuing. Our research teams worked in Leer, Mayendit and their rural surroundings; in Torit town and in nearby rural areas; in Bor town and in rural areas near Bor; in Yirol, and in cattle camps and rural areas outside the town; and in the neighbourhood of Hai Referendum in Juba, where the team conducted interviews with migrant young people from the four regional research sites as well as other young residents.<sup>14</sup> Several sites (the Bor, Torit and Juba areas) were selected explicitly because of historic livelihoods interventions in order to critically examine the long-term impact of youth livelihoods interventions.

The mixed-gender research teams in each site had intended to use mixed methodologies, combining individual semi-structured interviews and small group interviews and focus group analysis, complemented by participatory video making. The qualitative-led approach was chosen to highlight key power dynamics, social networks and decision-making pathways, developing an in-depth understanding of changing livelihoods and young people’s options and building on extensive recent quantitative economic research.<sup>15</sup> However, given the COVID-19 challenges (addressed below) the focus was predominantly on collecting life histories in order to prioritize the safety of researchers and interviewees. Mapping and investigation of current livelihoods interventions and projects could not be completed as planned due in part to the risks and regulations that limited extensive travel and meetings.

## Research challenges

The project experienced several significant challenges, most notably conducting research during the global COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The research was just commencing when

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13 Joschka Philipps, ‘A Global Generation? Youth Studies in a Postcolonial World’, *Societies* 8/1 (2018): 14, <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc8010014>; Deborah Durham, ‘Disappearing Youth: Youth as a Social Shifter in Botswana’, *American Ethnologist* 31/ 4 (2004): 589–605, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.2004.31.4.589>; Oosterom, ‘Youth and Social Navigation’; Oldenburg, “‘I Am an Intellectual’”.

14 Roughly equal numbers of interviews were conducted in each site, with two additional interviews conducted in Gogrial. See annex 2.

15 Including the World Bank’s 2020 series ‘Jobs, Recovery, and Peacebuilding in Urban South Sudan’; and REACH’s ongoing South Sudan Multi-Sector Needs Assessment.

COVID-19 was confirmed in South Sudan on 5 April 2020, which triggered restrictions on travel and movement within the country and generated an ongoing sense of uncertainty.

In this context, the safety of researchers and interviewees was the primary consideration and research therefore had to be adapted accordingly, whilst aiming to maintain a comprehensive approach. From its start in the first field site in March 2020, research was then paused for several weeks following the outbreak of COVID-19. The RVI maintained a regular review of the situation and in May 2020 submitted scenario plans to the East Africa Research Fund (EARF) / Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) reflecting the likely changes in the research approach in different COVID-19 circumstances.

Research in and around Leer and Mayendit was carried out just before the COVID-19 restrictions were put in place, but all other research sites were impacted by the restrictions. In this period, RVI did not support any travel within the country. Nonetheless, some members of the research team voluntarily dispersed to their rural homes (which align with the study sites), feeling safer in locations outside Juba, and were therefore willing and able to conduct some research. The decision to conduct research was discussed in detail between RVI management and the researchers, and a comprehensive risk and ethical assessment was prepared collaboratively and mutually agreed.

The project had originally planned a gender-balanced research approach with a male and female researcher in each location. However, the varying distances required to travel to different areas—it was mostly male researchers who opted to leave Juba during this time—meant that it was not always possible to maintain these ratios.

Given the prevalence of COVID-19 and related risks of transmission, the research methodology had to be adjusted to prioritize researcher and interviewee safety. Travel around field sites was limited, meaning a narrower scope of interviewee respondents, although this was complemented by telephone interviews where possible (network permitting), and focus group discussions and wider community group consultations were not possible. Some participatory filming and photography was carried out, but not to the level required to compile a coherent film as had been planned. Some film clips from sites may be published, but it is also important to consider that a sufficient level of diversity be represented in doing so. During this period, researchers were in touch with RVI staff in the Juba office on a regular basis and the project risk assessment was closely monitored.

Remote training in telephone interviewing was provided to the researchers by the project technical advisors and this methodology was used to support the research in the field and remotely. Although the researchers were confident in this methodology, it had severe limitations: comprehensively identifying respondents; phone ownership and network challenges; how much time people are willing to give; and people's willingness to speak about sensitive and challenging issues over an insecure phone line.

After the official lockdown ended, the research team completed additional fieldwork to fill in gaps identified during the first round of work. Strict COVID-19 measures and protocols remained in place that limited travel and the number of people in meetings, and distancing and hygiene measures were necessary.

The project highlighted many additional significant challenges for research and researchers. Conflict dynamics in Mayendit in 2018 created distrust and personal hostility. In Bor, the massive flooding in August 2020 left communities in deep distress. As news of the COVID-19 pandemic spread into rural areas, external visitors were viewed as a transmission risk. Fear of political discussion and the risk of violence or suspicion from security forces affected interviews in many locations. With these limitations, there was some bias in our overall data, skewing towards urban male residents with some limited education. Efforts were made to mitigate this in additional fieldwork after the lockdown, with some success.

Most common was the general frustration by respondents at further research, particularly on questions of economic survival: residents rightly are frustrated with decades of intensive data collection by cycles of humanitarian aid agencies with very little visible outcome. Some residents told researchers that data will not be helpful in changing policy. People are short on time and short on patience.

Despite the challenges faced, the research team was able to conduct over 70 life history interviews with a range of respondents with safety and non-transmission of COVID-19 maintained throughout.

# Livelihoods in transition

South Sudan's economy has gone through a process of transformation since the late 2000s, which has affected rural areas and the country's fast-growing urban spaces alike. Young people—especially those who started their working lives from the 2000s onwards—have had to navigate rapid marketization, the monetization of resources such as land and cattle, the militarization of work and deepening societal inequalities.

South Sudan's political and economic transformations have shifted young people's aspirations in different ways across the country's many rural and urban economies and social systems. These same repeated economic and political shifts and shocks can also force young people to suddenly change their plans completely. A young man from Torit explained:

We South Sudanese, we have faced a lot of challenges that can easily destroy our aspirations—especially when you plan to do something and then something happens to destroy what you have planned for.<sup>16</sup>

This first section explores these shifts in young people's livelihoods. Livelihoods are defined here as the capacities, assets and activities people need to have in order to live, or live well, including education, social networks, access to cash, shelter, healthcare and safety.<sup>17</sup> This section will also explore what enables or constrains young people's access to these assets, including South Sudan's changing labour markets and educational systems.

## Rural marketization of livelihoods

In the 1970s, South Sudan's rural resource-based livelihoods, including cattle-rearing, fishing and agricultural trade, were the broad foundation of the economy and labour market. These livelihoods were often organized around systems of *nafir* (collective work), requiring collaborative maintenance and investment, particularly from young people, who provided crucial physical labour and armed work in protecting and competing for access to water and fertile land.

Since the Second Sudanese Civil war started in 1983, waves of conflict, displacement, resettlement, social and economic reconstruction (and international aid) have contributed towards new market systems, which have become the basis around which economic

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with young man, Torit, 20 August 2020.

<sup>17</sup> Daniel Maxwell et al., 'A Synthesis of Feinstein International Center Work on Building Resilience and Protecting Livelihoods in Conflict-Related Crises', Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, December 2017, 8.



life in South Sudan is now structured.<sup>18</sup> After 2005, four million refugees returned to South Sudan bringing new experiences of international and urban living and livelihoods. The creation of the new South(ern) Sudanese, oil-rich (sub-national) government also restructured the economy, providing a financial base until 2012 for a large expansion of waged labour in the civil service and military, and helping the growth of private corporate investments and new companies and NGOs benefitting from a boom in investment and service delivery.

This reconstruction and its economic impacts were unevenly experienced across the country. Many rural and urban families in some areas of South Sudan (including Central Equatoria) benefited from a period of sustained stability, investment and employment opportunities; in other areas, including Jonglei, Upper Nile and Boma, continued conflict drove families into economic insecurity and displacement. In Upper Nile and Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, the return of millions of displaced people and their reconstruction of villages and homes exhausted many families' economic resources and increased often-violent competition over land and natural resources. The South Sudan civil war (December 2013–2018) again created massive displacement and social and economic destruction that exacerbated these fundamental economic shifts.

Since independence in 2011, young people living within rural economies now face increasing pressures on their livelihoods. These vary across economic geographies, but often include:

- Land alienation (including a growing rural land rental market).
- The impact of continued inflation (and occasional hyperinflation, such as in 2015) on crucial imports, including medicine, and the rising costs (and decreasing availability) of basic education.
- A widespread lack of investment capital or manpower controlled by young people that allows them to strategize for their futures.
- Increasing pressure on natural resources affected by climate change, environmental degradation, displaced people's resettlement and land privatization or seizure.
- The risks of accessing farm and grazing land, including the risks of raids and predation by local militias or military posts.

These changes have created various forms of insecure tenure and production across rural South Sudan.<sup>19</sup> A young woman living and working in Mayendit village emphasized how, for her family, farming work is now too risky to rely on. Her family expended its cattle wealth to help them weather local conflict and displacement in the 1990s, and now need cash to pay for basics, such as clothes and school fees. Self-production is too

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18 See Edward Thomas, 'Moving Towards Markets: cash, commodification and conflict in South Sudan', Rift Valley Institute, Juba/London, June 2019.

19 The following findings are supported by quantitative research in Jan Von Der Goltz et al., *Reviving Markets and Market-Linked Agriculture in South Sudan*, Washington, DC: World Bank Group, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1596/34665>.

risky to rely on without a financial safety net, because ‘the harvest might not be in good condition, and at the end of the day, you have got nothing, and your family will face serious hunger.’<sup>20</sup>

Many rural-based young people, with limited capital and security of tenure, have few options for less precarious work, particularly if their families raised them within traditional education systems in cattle camps or on farms. A young man working in Jeer cattle camp near Yirol, told us:

Cattle keeping’s my living. I started this when I was young and this is how my life is set. I’ve all brothers in school, and I’m the only son of my father left outside school ... I don’t have another choice. But I like cows.<sup>21</sup>

Other rural livelihoods that could provide supplementary or alternative incomes are similarly insecure, seasonal and have a low social status, for example charcoal and brick-making or fishing.<sup>22</sup> This work also requires initial capital such as food, equipment and transport during production. In some cases, young people need the right social, clan or local political connections to access rural livelihood opportunities. For example, many river fishing sites are on disputed borders and social tensions have to be navigated to fish in them.<sup>23</sup> Transporting and selling charcoal or fish is also often risky, with unpredictable taxes and fees at military checkpoints and markets.<sup>24</sup> Young men living near commercial agricultural production areas, for example in Kordofan or southern Darfur in Sudan, often prefer to travel across the border for cash-in-hand agricultural work to avoid the stigma of doing this socially degrading work at home and to benefit from better exchange rates.<sup>25</sup> This is also a strategy for young men escaping legal trouble, including fines for adultery or impregnating a woman.

## Aspirations and employment

Economic and political reconstruction since 2005 has fundamentally changed South Sudan’s employment market, and young people’s aspirations and options. By 2011, a combination of post-CPA peace investments in primary education and the expansion of international development programmes, regional governments and corporate investments all created significant work opportunities, especially for post-secondary school graduates across South Sudan.

The attraction of the civil service and reliable government salaries (as well as extraordinary employment benefits) funnelled ambitious young people into national, state and local governments to seek potentially lucrative political careers and investment

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20 Interview with young woman, Mayendit, 19 March 2020.

21 Interview with young man, Jeer cattle camp, Yirol, 8 August 2020.

22 Interview with young man, Yali, Yirol, 4 June 2020; interview with young man, Yirol market, 5 August 2020.

23 For example, Lakes Yirol, Nyibor and Shambe. Interview with young man, Yirol market, 5 August 2020.

24 Interview with young man, Yirol, 4 June 2020.

25 Interview with young man, Juba, 4 April 2020.

opportunities. Government offices often hired graduates directly from the prestigious University of Juba, which had relocated from its displaced site in Khartoum back to South Sudan's capital in 2008. Those hired through government offices supported a much larger informal economy. Employees would often send money to family in urban and rural areas. Many government employees invested and spent money in other private businesses such as restaurants. This created other opportunities for youth employment.

However, since the economic consequences of the oil shut-down in January 2012—Juba's response to a short-lived border conflict with Sudan—followed by the outbreak of conflict in 2013, securely paid government employment and foreign investment have collapsed. Many emerging private businesses owned and operated by young people in rural and urban centres collapsed under the pressure of rapidly rising inflation, making imports and running costs unmanageable.<sup>26</sup> The loss of regular income from government and civil service jobs—salaries often go unpaid for months or, when they are paid, are worth little—has also affected the wider economy, especially outside the capital, as a young migrant worker in Juba explained:

Government officials are supposed to invest their money in businesses like mini-buses and other things, so that they can employ young men to work for them, but this is not happening now.<sup>27</sup>

There is a growing private security sector, but this generally pays extremely badly and is plagued by stories of abuse and wage theft. Overall, even urban job options do not pay above the poverty level.<sup>28</sup>

Aspirations have changed with this economic crisis. Jobs with the UN and NGOs, which promise secure pay and often in US dollars, were sought during the post-CPA period, but have now become more preferable than government jobs, which are seen as less reliable and often pay less.<sup>29</sup> Many young men—even those from traditionally pastoralist communities, including the Dinka and Nuer—now aspire to accumulate cash wealth (even if this involves cattle trading) rather than to accumulate cattle reserves.

For young people with educational qualifications, the collapse of the formal job market (primarily the civil service and private sector petty trade) has deepened competition and employment discrimination, especially by class, gender and ethnicity. This has been exacerbated by the ethnic hatred fuelled by politicians and military leaders as part of their mobilization of communities and competition for political power since 2013.<sup>30</sup>

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26 These findings are supported by quantitative data in Joseph Mawejje, 'The Macroeconomic Environment for Jobs in South Sudan: Jobs, Recovery, and Peacebuilding in Urban South Sudan – Technical Report II'. Jobs Working Paper No. 51. World Bank, 2020, 5–6, <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/34664>.

27 Interview with young man, Juba, 4 April 2020.

28 Arden Finn et al., 'Jobs, Recovery, and Peacebuilding in Urban South Sudan – Technical Report I'. Jobs Working Paper No. 50, World Bank, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.1596/34663>.

29 Interview with young man, Gogrial, 14 April 2020.

30 Interview with young man, Juba, 6 April 2020.

One young man from Yirol noted that ‘the oil sector is for children of military generals and well-connected people’, and that ‘young women find it hard and there is exploitation in the job market for them.’<sup>31</sup> People already in secure or profitable NGO or private employment have been increasingly likely to employ close family members and friends to help them out during the economic crisis. A young Bor resident emphasized that ‘to be honest this problem [of nepotism] is caused by hunger and poverty.’<sup>32</sup>

Many rural primary schools have also collapsed, as unpaid qualified teachers have left to seek better employment in urban areas or refugee camps. Since 2014 this has funnelled significant numbers of aspirant rural and urban young men and women into private and state-run primary and secondary schools, which are still operating in rural towns. This has created new pressures on family finances and inequalities around educational access—even state-run urban schools are more expensive to attend because of the cost of living. Private schools also levy fees. One young man now in Juba explained that most of his teachers in the village resigned in 2013 ‘when prices of commodities started to rise ... others were absent for days in a week as they took up other work to raise money.’<sup>33</sup> Rural schools that do still function are now often staffed by local volunteers—generally school graduates who have few other employment options. One such young man, who now works in Juba, described:

I taught for a whole month, and after a month, I was paid SSP 100 as my monthly salary. There I wasn’t happy and I quit that school and started looking for another school where I would be paid SSP 600.<sup>34</sup>

## Informal work and migrant labour

Young people have been forced to develop innovative strategies, particularly in business, to cope with the shifting job market. They have built up businesses in a variety of different sectors, which include cutting and selling timber,<sup>35</sup> driving cattle to Juba for sale,<sup>36</sup> selling fish, trading in foreign exchange<sup>37</sup> and selling phone covers, audio files and airtime.<sup>38</sup> There are also the more traditional small businesses selling tea or food.<sup>39</sup> Some young people have developed networks that enable their employment in the church as teachers or community mobilizers. Others worked for a fee collecting

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31 Interview with young man, Yirol 7 August 2020.

32 Interview with young man, Bor, 31 March 2020.

33 Interview with young man, Juba, 3 April 2020.

34 Interview with young man, Juba, 8 April 2020.

35 Interview with young man, Yirol, 7 July 2020.

36 Interview with young man, Yirol, 7 August 2020.

37 Interview with young man, Yirol, 7 August 2020.

38 Interview with young man, Yirol, August 2020.

39 Interview with young woman, Yirol, August 2020.

charcoal, producing and laying bricks<sup>40</sup> or conducting buses.<sup>41</sup> Many of these employment options involve travel to towns, across borders for work or between rural marketing days.<sup>42</sup>

This means that migration for work is a key part of young people's survival strategies and a means of seeking out aspirational opportunities.<sup>43</sup> A young man now living in Torit noted that 'in my village people walk for six hours on foot to reach Torit. They come and work in the restaurants washing dishes and serving customers in the market.'<sup>44</sup>

Strategies for survival, including migration, often highlight that young people still have aspirations of better opportunities. The vast majority of young people across rural and urban areas in South Sudan have little to no primary school education, but that does not mean that they do not aspire to access education, including informal education and training opportunities in urban areas.<sup>45</sup> Seasonal migration to regional towns is a major pathway for young men and women seeking access to cash work for investing in their own primary and secondary education, in small businesses or in their siblings' education.

There are few employment rights or standards. Cash-in-hand work is often impossible to negotiate for a fair payment with so many people seeking employment. A young man in Juba noted, 'I never had the bargaining power.'<sup>46</sup> Knowing the going rate for any specific job in a specific town or market is crucial in order to avoid being taken advantage of.

At the same time, many young people feel that they can seek justice for pay disputes through customary courts. Where bosses do not pay up, many youth, particularly men, seek justice through customary courts and, where they are available and accessible, statutory courts. This is the major benefit of migrant work within South Sudan, as opposed to travelling into Ethiopia, Sudan or Uganda where legal rights for informal migrant workers are either hard to access or non-existent. A migrant worker in Juba emphasized that he chose not to return to jobbing agricultural work in Kordofan because:

After the secession of the South from the North, the host communities of Kordofan began to deny pay to migrant workers from south. Workers are also being mistreated and abused. But in Juba, if a man denies your pay, you can take him to court—which is impossible in Kordofan.<sup>47</sup>

Displaced people within South Sudan also struggle to access compensation or justice for lack of payment or ill-treatment at work, unless local court systems are worked out between displaced and local residents. A young woman who was displaced into

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40 Interview with young man, Yirol, August 2020.

41 Interview with young woman, Juba, 8 April 2020.

42 Interview with young woman, Juba, 4 April 2020.

43 Interview with young man, Gogrial, 14 April 2020.

44 Interview with young man, Torit, 28 August 2020.

45 Interview with young man, Juba, 6 April 2020; interview with young man, Juba, 3 April 2020.

46 Interview with young man, Juba, 3 April 2020.

47 Interview with young man, Juba, 4 April 2020.

Mayendit explained how she doesn't 'have a voice or a claim' in the area, 'even if you live safely there, you don't have power or authority.'<sup>48</sup>

Young men, and some women, balance the benefits of better earnings against the risks of informal and unprotected migrant work in Sudan or elsewhere. A young migrant worker in Juba explained:

If your family is completely unable to contribute even a coin to your education, and you don't want to hustle in town to raise your own money to finance your study, you would decide to go to north, thinking that work there is better paid and the possibilities of returning to school are high.<sup>49</sup>

There are real risks in transit for young people moving to Uganda, Sudan, Ethiopia and elsewhere for work, including language barriers, the risk of being taken advantage of because of a lack of knowledge about the route or the new area, and the challenges of finding job opportunities when there.<sup>50</sup> Young women are generally unable to make cross-border or rural-to-urban resettlements without family connections and support because of the significant social and practical barriers around lone women's travel. Young men rely on friends when seeking migrant work in new places and share information and often significant sums of money. For example, one young man recounted how he borrowed (and repaid) SSP 10,000 from a friend to start a small business when he arrived in Juba; while another borrowed goods from friends with market stalls and hawked them around remote residential areas of Juba in exchange for a cut of the profits.<sup>51</sup>

## **Women's migration and work**

Women of all ages and educational backgrounds move across and outside of South Sudan for work, including as partners to migrant workers or to help their children access better education. Longer-distance migration, to Juba and outside South Sudan, is generally more possible for young women with some education and/or middle-class family backgrounds, especially for women seeking NGO employment.<sup>52</sup>

Especially since the economic crisis in 2013, young women have increasingly travelled to towns or market villages to find work and stability for their children, particularly when their husbands are absent as migrant workers or in military postings elsewhere, or cannot support the family sufficiently.<sup>53</sup> Women of all ages, including young girls, have increasingly engaged in market work, alcohol brewing, tea selling and restaurant industries as a means of sustaining their families and supporting their siblings in schools. While this

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48 Interview with young woman, Mayendit, 23 March 2020.

49 Interview with young man, Juba, 3 April 2020.

50 Interview with young man, Juba, 3 April 2020.

51 Interview with young man, Juba, 7 April 2020; interview with young man, Juba, 3 April 2020.

52 Interview with young man, Bor, 1 April 2020.

53 Interview with young man, Juba, 6 April 2020; interview with young women, Bor, 23 March 2020.

has created forms of new financial independence and, for some young women, changed the balance of power between themselves and patriarchal authorities at home, market work, and particularly independent work or employment like running restaurants or tea shops or serving as a waitress, often involves serious social stigma and the risk of sexual harassment. One young woman in Nyang town explained:

A girl that appears in public often is not respected [by local society]. That is the problem for all young women. When I opened this restaurant at the end of 2012, I was not that respected. I was asked many questions by strangers. “Are you still married? What happened to your husband? Why are you in the market? Is your husband weak?” These were the daily questions. For young women who are tea ladies, waitress or shop attendants, they are seen as morally wrong.<sup>54</sup>

For women of all educational backgrounds, ‘volunteer’ NGO or UN work—such as community-level volunteer hygiene promoters or COVID-19 information volunteers—is a particularly important option because this work provides a basic stipend and is a respectable job that can be balanced against other work like market trading or tea selling in the afternoons and evenings.<sup>55</sup> Previous research has found, however, that some of this work is done without payment, or sometimes with the promise of future payment, when NGOs are forced to work with pre-financing mechanisms.<sup>56</sup>

Women across South Sudan who are able to access secondary and higher education are, like men, seeking formal employment in NGOs, the UN and the private sector, with significant financial benefits for their families and personal freedoms. Women across our research sites noted that this work also comes with some risks of sexual harassment or sexual exploitation in the formal employment sector, including work contracts being conditional on exchange for sexual services or even long-term (exploitive) relationships.<sup>57</sup>

## LIFE STORY 1

### **Dependency and freedoms for young mobile women**

A young Dinka woman from Warrap, approximately twenty-three years old, tells us how she started her primary school education in her home area but moved to Uganda for secondary school, after having tried and failed to find school access in Kenya. She completed Form 4 exams in South Sudan. She explains that her pursuit of education across East Africa was supported by an uncle working for the International Organization

54 Interview with young woman, Nyang Town, 8 June 2020; also noted in an interview with young man, Juba, 7 April 2020.

55 Interview with young woman, Mayendit, 19 March 2020; interview with young woman, Torit, 19 August 2020.

56 Department for International Development, ‘Localising humanitarian aid during armed conflict: learning from the histories and creativity of South Sudanese NGOs’, March 2020. (<https://www.gov.uk/research-for-development-outputs/localising-humanitarian-aid-during-armed-conflict-learning-from-the-histories-and-creativity-of-south-sudanese-ngos>).

57 Interview with young woman, Juba, 8 April 2020.

of Migration (IOM) and was mostly determined according to the cost (Uganda was much less costly than Kenya). Her uncle now is in business in Juba as well as working for the GoSS.

She is now a university student, still being supported by her uncle. She used to go back and forth to her home village to visit family, but since 2017 that has stopped because of the violence and mistrust and lack of any opportunities for youth there. She would have liked to stay in Uganda, to finish university and to start a career, but returned to Juba due to the economic crisis, as did many other South Sudanese young men and women. Many of her age mates have either joined the military or local militias, either voluntarily or because their family and elders insist that they do so. The rationale of the family and elders is the youth are required to protect the local population and their assets (cattle) from being raided by enemies.

She emphasizes that young people have almost no say in their own futures and that of the country, even at the local level. She describes how family and elders remain in an old paradigm, and that you have to be an elder before your opinion has any value. When young people are frustrated by the lack of opportunity and lack of any voice at home, they often just decide to migrate to cities. There, women often face sexual exploitation and harassment. That happened when she applied for a job in the energy sector. Friends who got jobs told her that their employment depends on them accepting the sexual advances of the employers. One of her friends felt pressure from her family to find a job and support her mom, who was sick. Her friend's father had died in the civil war and there was no one else in the family who had qualifications to seek a city job. Her friend feels trapped in a relationship with the man, fearing losing her job if she tries to end the relationship. She emphasizes that women need to come together and find ways to speak to senior women in the government to address this issue.

She explains how in recent years young people have become more independent from their families and parents, since they can access information from the internet, while the older generation is mostly stuck in old ways. Local remedies for COVID-19 are an example: neighbourhood 'gossip' moves across the country and people believe these stories, like taking tea without sugar at 6 a.m. will stop you from getting the virus. But COVID-19 has really affected the opportunities for the youth in South Sudan, and the economy is a disaster. She emphasizes that people are going to be dying of hunger. Young people in cities and the villages just roam around without doing anything constructive. What kind of future will this bring?

## **Violence in work**

Many areas of employment in South Sudan hold the possibility or necessity of violence, including in self-defence. The table in Annex 1 details the employment sectors of interviewees during this project, broken down by gender, location, decision-making factors influencing engagement and the risk or use of violence.



Many livelihoods involve the risk of violence, such as competition for or theft of fares among motorcycle taxi riders or between market traders, or the possibility of criminal activity, including second-hand mobile phone trading. It is therefore difficult, and misleading, to categorize employment sectors as either violent or non-violent.

Criminality and violence as a means of economic survival are increasingly common, particularly as options for secure and sufficient income via market-trading, agricultural production or other informal employment are undermined by years of economic crisis, inflation and stagnation. Gang membership and burglary are increasingly viable options for youth seeking economic and social survival. Many young people across research sites emphasized that the economic crisis, failing job market and endemic violence and trauma are key drivers of urban criminality and gang violence, as well as widespread rural cattle raiding. Young men in Bor noted that the West Coast and Ganja Talents gangs include many young ex-soldiers who have defected.<sup>58</sup>

In rural areas the situation is also similar. A young man in Rubkuay emphasized that some of the young men involved in local criminality and inter-communal violence are graduates and students. He noted that some young men have accepted that in order to find the money to marry or to take forward their education they will have to loot or steal cattle, even from within their own communities.<sup>59</sup> Cattle raiding dynamics and decision making is discussed below as part of social networks.

## **Military employment**

Employment in the official security sector (army, police, wildlife rangers or prisons) boomed in 2005–2012, especially as militias were incorporated into the national army in 2006.<sup>60</sup> Between 2004 and 2013, men and women in the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) or uniformed forces increased from below 50,000 to over 300,000. Military pay was relatively secure and provided the possibility of promotion and further education or training via internal ethnic and political patronage networks. Employment in the security sector also often allowed implicit benefits such as the ability to set up checkpoints, demand taxes and possess arms to facilitate looting. When the civil war erupted in 2013, a large number of serving soldiers defected to the armed opposition. Others deserted, selling off uniforms and guns to criminal gangs and cattle-keepers.<sup>61</sup>

For soldiers in South Sudan's national army (the South Sudan's People's Defence Forces, SSPDF) and in the armed opposition, the military no longer provides a practical pathway to further education and training. Many commanders who previously sponsored univer-

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58 Interview with young men, Bor, 1 April 2020.

59 Interview with young man, Rubkuay, 18 March 2020.

60 Alex de Waal, 'Peace and the Security Sector in Sudan, 2002–11', *African Security Review* 26/ 2 (2017): 180–198, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10246029.2017.1297582>; Nicki Kindersley, 'Armed Work and State Reconstruction in South Sudan: Beyond the Peace Deal', Note Analyse, Observatoire Afrique de l'Est: Enjeux Politiques & Sécuritaires, Khartoum, Sudan: CEDEJ Khartoum, June 2019.

61 Interview with young men, Bor, 1 April 2020.

sity studies for selected officers, or arranged urban postings so that young men could study while on duty, have stopped investing in this way. One deserter explained that this was justified by his commander as a waste of education, as educated military officers aspire to political office rather than remaining under command:

When I once asked my commander to go back for studies, he told me studies spoil good soldiers, and that we would become politicians after studies. Studies are now for connected sons within the army.<sup>62</sup>

With minimal and irregular pay, few opportunities for advancement and the physical risks of deployment, military employment has quickly become a last resort for many young men. A young man, now farming in Yirol, sold his gun and military fatigues to cattle camp leaders in 2017 when he absconded from the army.<sup>63</sup> Another young man, also living in Yirol, summarized the impetus for recruitment as ‘poverty, peer influence and having a gun as a sign of bravery and manhood’. This is especially true in neighbourhoods where young men fear inter-community attacks and want to gain some military training and access to small arms and ammunition for self-protection.<sup>64</sup>

Young men from better-off families often try to use family connections and bribery to get deployed in the few remaining personally profitable sectors of the military and police, including in the payroll, customs and immigration sections where revenues continue to provide salaries, or (for those with education and connections) in the better-paid national security services. Other young men are recruited in rural areas by local politicians as ‘community police’, or as personal bodyguards in Juba. Overall, it seems that in the current crisis, the military is ‘the last option for those who are failing in life’, as a migrant worker in Juba put it.<sup>65</sup> A young, female SPLA veteran noted that many young men enlist now ‘out of frustration’ and from a lack of any other options.<sup>66</sup>

## Livelihood options

South Sudan’s fundamental economic transition over the last 20 years has created significant generational and class stratifications, as wealth (in cash, cattle, education, land and decision-making power) has increasingly become concentrated within the small classes of UN and NGO sector employees, government stalwarts and military–political actors aligned with the GoSS leadership. Young people across this study emphasized that the economic crisis, and its consequences outlined above, have turned people against each other. This includes antagonisms between rural and urban residents, as rural residents feel undermined and disrespected, and urban residents feel unfairly stigmatized as sexually immoral and potentially criminal.

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62 Interview with young man, Yirol, 3 April 2020

63 Interview with young man, Yirol, 5 August 2020.

64 Interview with young man, Yirol, 3 April 2020.

65 Interview with young man, Juba, 6 April 2020.

66 Interview with young woman, Juba, 8 April 2020.

Social divides are complex: displaced young people, suffering extreme marginalization and often terrible living conditions, do sometimes have better access to health, education and NGO work within urban centres and camps such as the Protection of Civilians (POC) sites. Longer-term divisions and prejudices continue to play out, including the stereotyping and suspicion of young people with a Sudan education in Arabic—a legacy of displacements in Sudan between the 1980s and 2000s.

Alongside regional conflicts and local violence, the grinding economic crisis since 2013 has removed many prospects for further education, business development and funds for investment. With high inflation, continuing SSP devaluation and unstable market food prices, cash-in-hand work in markets, trade and agriculture is no longer a reliable source for everyday food, shelter and school fees. Due to a combination of local factors—including climate change, conflicts, raids, military predation, shifting property rights and taxes, and variable market prices—agricultural and cattle-herding work has become both dangerous and precarious. These livelihoods are often collectively called ‘subsistence’ work, providing basic self-sufficiency and security; but for many young people this work has become too precarious, insecure and entrapping. These changes have reconfigured many young people’s aspirations and options, and in many cases destroyed their investments and educations. A young woman now living in Mayendit explains:

I used to send some money to Juba to someone, to buy hair for hairdressing and other hairstyles and [get it] sent it back to me. I took them to the market for sale, and that business sustained me and my child. It was a good business during that time, but now it’s broke. I have no cash to keep the business going. I have no job at the moment; I just wait for the UN ration at the end of the month for our survival. [As young women] we used to sit down together to share ideas, but there’s not enough capital to bring young women into business.<sup>67</sup>

The economic crisis and the displacements and armed mobilizations of the wars and conflicts since 2013 have impoverished many young people who were increasingly reliant on the growing market and waged employment economy developed during reconstruction over 2005–2012. These compound crises and the growth of a market economy have created opportunities for a small middle and upper class to profit at the expense of a large underemployed and precarious young workforce. Young women and men across research sites emphasized that this economy has increasingly become unequal, manipulative and violent.

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<sup>67</sup> Interview with young woman, Mayendit, 23 March 2020.

## LIFE STORY 2

### The collapse of the military employment sector

Our researchers spoke to a young man, about thirty years old, born in a poor household in Yirol to uneducated parents. Like any other vulnerable youth growing up in war and poverty, one of the best options available for a sustainable livelihood was to join the military, which would provide a reliable salary and facilitate settling down, finding a wife and starting a family. This was a widespread mindset among young men during the CPA era from 2005–2011, as the GoSS and the international community had a strong focus on professionalizing the SPLA. Our interviewee’s dream came true when he enrolled for military training in 2009 in Malou Page camp. He spent one year as a trainee. Eight years later, in 2017, his military career came to an end in disappointment, under pressure from his family and frustrated by long periods without any salary. He is now starting again, as a farmer.

I went into the army because I thought my life would be better and I could even become a military general. I’m one of eight boys ... and I was finding it hard to marry. I was lucky to get a wife because in Wau the dowry is not that high. I bought six cows and that was enough for my in-laws—that was in 2012. I was taking good care of my wife within my salary, until I was transferred to Juba in 2013.

Like many South Sudanese youth who voluntarily joined military service after the CPA with hopes of salaried military service, our interviewee was recruited through his father’s connection to an SPLA general. He underwent training and graduated successfully:

I got the information in Rumbek that there was recruitment ongoing. My friends were joining. I went to a friend of my father, also a distant cousin, who was an SPLA general. I was with my father when we met him. He needed my father’s support to guarantee that I was really interested to work in the army. He welcomed my decision to join the SPLA. I was called the other morning to arrange my things and to go to Malou Page.

His military career was going well until he was reposted to active conflict zones when civil war broke out in December 2013. As a married man, there was pressure from his family to support them with food and medication. But on the front lines, government salaries were delayed for months or disappeared. His fears for his personal safety and for his family led him to desert the army, taking along his personal gun and military uniform. He sold them to the gel weng (the cattle protection force) in Yirol. His wife divorced him since he was unable to provide any financial support.

I left the military; I left with nothing except my hands and my gun. When I arrived back home, I had to sell my gun and khakis to gel weng. It was a very bad time for me and my family. My wife had just left with our kids because there was nothing I could give to them. There was no salary, no food, no medication for us and my wife was putting pressure on me. I was in Malakal and that was a war zone, and I couldn’t risk taking my family there.

He came back to Yirol to settle among his family and to restart his life as a farmer.

# Social networks and survival

Commodification, militarization, marginalization and deepening societal inequalities have limited the space for young people to make choices and advance their livelihood aspirations. At the same time, young people have developed an array of strategies to attenuate inequities and seek viable opportunities for education and employment, both for long-term career advancement and shorter term ‘survival’ work.

A growing generational divide between youth and elders is often highlighted as a key element of South Sudan’s chronic social crisis. Simple assumptions that the cause of this divide is the armed nature of many youth survival strategies obscures the more complex political and economic changes that have contributed to this breakdown in generational relations. This includes changing gender dynamics across generations, particularly regarding women’s urban and trade livelihoods. This section addresses the gap in research to date around young people’s use of social networks and social connections to more successfully navigate the changing political economy.<sup>68</sup>

## Connectivity

Connections and social networks are essential for daily survival as well as larger livelihood aspirations, whether for urban or rural, educated or illiterate male and female youth. The diverse livelihood strategies expressed by the range of correspondents in this research indicated a common reliance on (differing) networks of mutual support.

Firstly, social networks are essential tools for knowledge sharing, which enhances decision making and the awareness of risks and opportunities (plus how to avoid or exploit either). Creating friendships is described as essential for survival when young people travel to new places.<sup>69</sup> Young people prioritize staying connected with friends, family and other contacts, investing time and money in their networks of friends across South Sudan and in neighbouring countries. These networks are often a useful way of accessing information to help them understand what opportunities may exist in other parts of the country—helping them to break out of their difficult, captive contexts.

For this reason, young people connect on a regular basis for information about employment and educational opportunities, as well as options to migrate to new locations to find gainful work. Testimonies from friends who have moved to towns, about better schools or money-making opportunities, are influential in encouraging people to

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<sup>68</sup> For a full discussion of this research gap, see Maxwell et al., ‘A Synthesis’, 21.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with young man, Mayendit, 18 March 2020.

migrate.<sup>70</sup> These networks of friends and siblings are repeatedly described as an essential resource for finding out about jobs and ways of accessing them.<sup>71</sup>

Certain livelihoods require access to networks that can supply market information and function as supply chains. This is particularly the case for those selling SIM cards, mobile credit and imported clothes. For example, one man from Yirrol describe how he returned there, after growing up in Adjumani Refugee Camp (Uganda), and started a small shop; his success meant that he often called friends in Uganda to encourage them to join him.<sup>72</sup> By 2014, however, doing business became increasingly dangerous and less profitable and thereafter many of his friends returned to Uganda.

Secondly, these networks provide longer-term support, especially when livelihood strategies only provide for daily needs and are precarious. Interviewees described how they built trust with friends until they could rely on them to participate in their businesses. Young people described how they took loans from friends and others within their networks to facilitate their travel, to help them start small businesses and to survive in difficult times.<sup>73</sup>

Sometimes this collective support is more formally organized, and it is not uncommon for it to function as a form of savings regime over time. This allows young people living on the everyday margins of survival to save enough to try to take new, albeit small, opportunities. One young man described how he participated in ‘table banking’, which refers to a group-based funding system in which all members contribute a small sum (a few USD each per month), and each month all the money is given to one person in the group. The process continues until all members of the group have benefitted from receiving the ‘banked’ sum. When our interviewee was the recipient, he used the money to travel from Kenya to Uganda for education and was able to purchase the right identity documentation.<sup>74</sup> This is a version of a common and longstanding collective saving mechanism known across Sudan and South Sudan by the Arabic word sandouk, meaning box (describing the savings pot). It is most commonly used by women at a neighbourhood and church level, but our interviewee showed how this practice has expanded among young migrant men.

During migration, groups of friends also offer financial and social support for survival. One young man described how he made a treacherous journey from Sudan to Libya and there sought manual work in exchange for daily provisions to survive.<sup>75</sup> He described how travelling with friends created a basic, but mutually beneficial, safety net.

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70 Interview with young man, Juba, 7 April 2020.

71 Interview with young woman, Bor, 18 September 2020; interview with young woman, Bor, 11 September 2020; interview with young man, Juba, 7 April 2020.

72 Interview with young man, Yirrol, 7 August 2020.

73 Interview with young man, Juba, 7 April 2020.

74 Interview with young man, 17 March 2020.

75 Interview with young man, Mayendit, 18 March 2020.

## Digital networks

Mobile phone networks and access to the internet are central to many young people's livelihood strategies. Their influence is also changing the nature of social networks. In South Sudan, these digital networks have only been commonplace in the last decade, but people have rapidly become connected through digital media, such as Facebook and Whatsapp, and mobile phones.<sup>76</sup> A young man in Yirol explained:

You know the aspiration of this current generation—we are digitalized, we have come into the dot com world, life has been made so much easier. ... Now most people know computer science, and this connects you to the rest of the world—and people from America and so on are always connected through one network, social media. That is one of the things that has given the youth aspirations in life.<sup>77</sup>

Communication over Facebook, mobile phones and Whatsapp also allows the exclusion of certain influences and increases the ability to hide from authority figures such as family elders. For example, communication via mobile phones can exclude certain opinions regarding militarized activities such as cattle raiding. In contrast to previous eras when drums and public speeches were the chief methods of mobilizing people to raid, interviewees spoke of how private and secure digital communications allowed mobilizations that excluded the opportunity for local elders to interject.<sup>78</sup> Young men and women also use phones to arrange secret meetings that may be otherwise prohibited by their relatives.

One further implication of the digitization of networks is how the capacity to connect socially has also become monetized. People need a constant supply of small amounts of money to be able to afford phone credit to maintain these networks of friends. In some areas where there is not easy access to mobile phone networks, people also need the money to afford to travel to places where they can connect. Occasionally NGO-owned satellite communication systems (very-small-aperture-terminals, VSATs) also allow access to the internet, but this is usually heavily guarded and only available to very few people.

This monetized access to social networks often has gendered implications. One interviewee in Bor described how jobs that are accessed or secured via the internet and noticeboards are more accessible for men, who are more likely to have the spare cash, time and mobility to reach central jobs billboards than young women.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Interview with young woman, Bor, 18 September 2020.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with young man, Bor, 12 September 2020.

<sup>78</sup> Interview with young man, Yirol, 5 August 2020.

<sup>79</sup> Interview with young woman, Bor, 11 September 2020.

## Digital networks and engagement with violence

Mobile phone networks are changing engagement with violence, including recruitment and armed cattle raids. News about recruitment drives to army and rebel forces have always spread quickly, but mobile phones have rapidly escalated the speed and spread of such messages. Soldiers who have been recruited and who are serving in Juba or in other places with good mobile phone network are able to post images of themselves in military fatigues to impress their friends in the city and in rural areas.

The use of mobile phones is also changing power and information dynamics around cattle raiding. Before digital networks, the coordination of raids had to take place in public spaces and was more visible to the whole community. Elders and chiefs would be involved either in determining raiding strategy or urging restraint. Mobile phones have made raids much easier to coordinate and have moved this coordination into more private spaces. Elders are often excluded from information about raids and lose their ability to influence them. As one local priest in Yirol described:

The way people mobilized in the past, to call people to war, was through drums and sending messengers between cattle camps and communities. The people who led in the organization of attacks were elders and war leaders. Now we do not have leaders but raiders. Now the cattle raiders' ring leaders just make few phone calls to mobilize, even when elders or chiefs are there [without them knowing], and then they [the raiders] disappear into forests. Tomorrow you will hear there is a raid. Phone is doing large damage to our young people.<sup>80</sup>

At the same time, it is unclear whether elders condemn these raids, even if they lament their control over them. Some areas most hard-hit by violence in recent years in South Sudan have also not had access to phone networks. For example, in central Unity, early on in the war between the Sudan People's Liberation Army-in Opposition (SPLA-IO) and the government, much of the phone network was destroyed. Some phone masts were rehabilitated in government-controlled areas and this network did occasionally allow access into SPLA-IO held areas. People were inventive in how they would access the network. One commissioner even set-up a pulley system to hoist his phone to the height of his large, thatched hut. Yet, this difficulty in getting connection reduced their utility for raid planning. People were still easily mobilized to deadly raids and offensives without the networks.

## Connections with kin

The nature of social networks in South Sudan has become more precarious. Social and economic security used to be primarily realized through kinship systems that people were born into instead of networks of friends that involved active maintenance through connectivity and exchange. Embedded in these historic kinship systems were collec-

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80 Interview with young man, Yirol, 5 August 2020.



tive strategies for survival and prosperity that repeatedly assert the authority of older generations over the family's wealth. Now, older generations in South Sudan lament a lack of influence over their young people, blaming urban and international migration, militarization and the ease of access young people have to guns.

Many young people themselves also describe this as a distinct new age of youth independence. This is a generation of 'self-service', of 'being alone' and of 'social media'.<sup>81</sup> Young people describe their generation as one that makes decisions 'that benefit ourselves alone', implying a rupture from a historic context in which a more collective good was pursued.<sup>82</sup> This 'self-service' also provides a freedom to invest in productive businesses, including those that bring much higher risks. As discussed above, even temporarily successful businesses are much more vulnerable to total ruin with the recent (negative) shifts in widespread conflict, politics and the economy.

Urban migration is often highlighted by community elders as making people 'forget' their family and 'spoiling' young people in that it diminishes elders' and rural authorities' influence over them.<sup>83</sup> Migration often does separate young people from kinship networks and homes, even if they do not want this. As Kindersley and Majok describe in Northern Bahr el-Ghazal, once youth migrate to seek better livelihoods, many migrant workers can no longer afford to return home to maintain kinship relations.<sup>84</sup>

In some areas, social status is acquired among youth by showing this independence from older generations. Groups of youth in towns, such as the 'Toronto Boys', come together in formal or informal associations, or gangs, and push against familial control of their socio-economic choices.<sup>85</sup> For example, in Yirol it has become socially acceptable, even commonplace, for youth to ignore the instructions of their parents. These non-complying youth are nicknamed dhongbang (bad boy) and other youth were mocked when they complied with their parents and not the new social demands of the dhongbang.<sup>86</sup> Young people are often frustrated by exclusion from family discussions and decision making, including that which directly implicates them. Instead, they have sought a greater degree of independence.<sup>87</sup>

Gangs such as the Toronto Boys may also serve as a replacement for young men who are no longer able to rely on the support of kinship networks. They may have lost kinship support through migration because of conflict or economic scarcity. Their distance from kin has made it difficult for them to connect and come to know these networks, diminishing their access and claims to them. Gangs provide an alternative network of social support and an alternative system of knowledge necessary for survival. Whereas kinship

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81 Interview with young woman, Bor, 11 September 2020.

82 Interview with young man, Juba, 8 April 2020.

83 Interview with young woman, Juba, 8 April 2020.

84 Nicki Kindersley and Joseph Diing Majok, 'Monetized Livelihoods and Militarized Labour in South Sudan's Borderlands', Rift Valley Institute, June 2019.

85 Interview with young woman, Juba, 8 April 2020.

86 Interview with young man, Yirol, 2020.

87 Interview with young man, Leer, 16 March 2020.

networks rely on a detailed understanding of family histories and friends, and relationships with neighbours, both constructive and destructive, youth gangs rely on different criteria, such as knowledge about markets, militarization and even music, to cement networks and survive, or even thrive.

Some young people who are not connected to family kinship networks narrate this as socially and economically liberating. However, these social networks of friends were also noted to be precarious and a sign of vulnerability as much as they were seen to enhance security or freedom. Independence from family networks allows young people to invest in the businesses, lifestyles and sexual relationships that were not possible under the governance of traditional kinship systems. Yet, money for survival is often only obtained on a day-to-day basis, and friendships—the basis for mutual support networks—require constant maintenance. This takes time and energy and does not provide the same sense of reliable security offered by family.

For young people who have maintained connections to kin and clans, many still seek advice from their parents or other elders.<sup>88</sup> For example, young men say that they continue to listen to their fathers' advice about marriage, education<sup>89</sup> or their choices related to serving in the military.<sup>90</sup> Many young people noted that youth who do manage to gain a reliable income expend significant effort and costs remitting money back to their families, which cements their relationships with kin, despite their physical absence.<sup>91</sup> This highlights their continued desire for the security of kinship, even when it is not easily accessible.

The influence of family members can include encouraging their children into military occupations. For example, one interviewee in Yirol described how parents often encouraged their sons to be community police because this gave the parents a sense of protection, including against the potential violence of the community police themselves.<sup>92</sup>

Many youth narrate a deep sense of obligation to their parents for the opportunities they struggled to give them. As one young woman in Leer described:

I want to finish my studies so I can help all my brothers and sisters, including my mother. I want to repay the okra my mother used to sell for my school fees. I want to get a job so that my mother can have the feeling that her sweat didn't go in vain. That is what I have been thinking even when I am in my bed. I will do that though I live in someone's home. Even my husband cannot deny me to help my parents.<sup>93</sup>

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88 Interview with young woman, Bor, 18 September 2020; interview with young woman, Bor, 11 September 2020; interview with young man, Leer, 16 March 2020; interview with young woman, Juba, 8 April 2020.

89 Interview with young man, Yirol, 7 July 2020.

90 Interview with young man, Yirol, 7 August 2020.

91 Interview with young woman, Bor, 11 September 2020; interview with young man, Leer, 25 March 2020.

92 Interview with young man, Yirol, 4 March 2020.

93 Interview with young woman, Leer, 23 March 2020.

Militarized labour, as well as cash, is a contribution that some youth describe making to their families to help cement kinship networks. When clan wealth in land or cattle is threatened by militarized and often elite grabs, armed defence is often considered necessary for further protection.<sup>94</sup>

Young people explicitly link the influence of their family's elders to their control of property and, ultimately, control of young people's socio-economic options. In certain areas, land and cattle were described as belonging to the family and thus require family agreement over their use.<sup>95</sup> A trader in Yirol described how this even applied to cattle that he had bought with money that he had earned himself, but not to money itself.<sup>96</sup> For those with family members who are able to provide jobs, this was also linked to opportunities for employment. For example, jobs in the oil sector were understood as most easily accessible through family relations, which further entrenches family influence.<sup>97</sup>

Many young people's education and livelihood decisions not only were shaped by family advice but were financed by collective resources. Migration for work often relied on initial financial support from families. Parents and relatives often provide funding for transport and initial survival costs when young people migrate to towns for work.<sup>98</sup> Uncles, parents and brothers were described as essential to provide financial support to go to schools and university.<sup>99</sup> Even travelling from Yirol to Uganda to avoid insecurity in 2016 included family consent as a cow had to be sold to provide money for this.<sup>100</sup> Marriage also often involves bridewealth, for which men must use the family's cattle.<sup>101</sup>

Yet, some young people discussed a creative use of money that went beyond parents' explicit instructions. One young man, for example, was given money by his father to buy shoes for school. First, he invested the money in a small business selling cigarettes and then airtime from his friend's shop. He used the profit from the business to buy shoes and subsequently had his own business, which gave him greater financial independence (and the ability to make autonomous decisions).<sup>102</sup> Young people who are able to build up their own financial resources, however fragile, are able to claim more independence over their decisions. Another young man narrated how his private life and successful business decisions were his own.<sup>103</sup> His success with friends in a timber business appeared to have facilitated this apparent independence.

There are decisions one makes alone and there are decisions that need parents.  
My decision to leave Uganda was solely mine. I was fed up being stuck in a

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94 Interview with young man, Bor, 12 September 2020.

95 Interview with young man, Yirol, 7 August 2020.

96 Interview with young man, Yirol, 7 August 2020.

97 Interview with young man, Yirol, 7 July 2020.

98 Interview with young woman, Bor, 18 September 2020.

99 Interview with young woman, Juba, 8 April 2020; interview with young man, Juba, 8 April 2020; interview with young man, Juba, 7 April 2020.

100 Interview with young man, Yirol, 7 August 2020.

101 Interview with young man, Yirol, 7 August 2020; interview with young man, Yirol, 7 August 2020.

102 Interview with young man, Juba, 7 April 2020.

103 Interview with young man, Yirol, 7 July 2020.

refugee settlement without a sign of progress. My decision to marry was a choice of my parents. I'm happy with their decisions and these are the only people I go for advice.<sup>104</sup>

## Gendered choices

Many young men have navigated their limited livelihood options by migrating to towns or abroad, or by operating small businesses in local markets. Young women, however, face significant challenges seeking their own autonomy outside of family networks. Families are often reliant on being able to give their daughters in marriage in exchange for bridewealth, especially during times of scarcity, and they fear the economic implications of reputational damage to their daughters, therefore keeping a closer hold over them.<sup>105</sup> Women and kin claims over the cattle from their marriage also play a key role in cementing kinship networks.

Many young women do still engage in a range of entrepreneurial activities to provide for themselves, their families and their children. For example, women often sell used clothes and provided midwifery services.<sup>106</sup> Selling tea is a popular option if women can borrow the initial equipment needed to start a tea stall.<sup>107</sup> Some women have businesses large enough to employ people.<sup>108</sup> However, the tension between the necessity to engage in the cash economy and the demands of the kinship systems often results in social condemnation for those who are already extremely marginalized. In some areas, including Yirol, there is often condemnation for women who engage in business in the market as opposed to just working at home.<sup>109</sup> There is an expectation that women will only occasionally be seen in public before marriage.<sup>110</sup>

As one female restaurant owner in Yirol stated:

You know girls are the most protected humans in our society. They are protected from public life until they get married and that applied to me. A girl that appears in public often is not respected.<sup>111</sup>

Women who do migrate to towns, including for education, are sometimes confronted with having to trade sex work as a means for survival. Many women, both well-educated and with no schooling, are believed to be consistently vulnerable to sexual harassment and exploitation when seeking work, including from their potential employers.<sup>112</sup> For

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104 Interview with young man, Yirol, 7 August 2020.

105 Interview with young woman, Leer, 23 March 2020.

106 Interview with young woman, Juba, 8 April 2020.

107 Interview with young woman, Mayendit, 22 March 2020; interview with young woman, Juba, 8 April 2020.

108 Interview with young woman, Yirol, 6 August 2020.

109 Interview with young man, Yirol, 6 August 2020.

110 Interview with young woman, Yirol, 6 August 2020.

111 Interview with young woman, Yirol, 6 August 2020.

112 Interview with young man, Juba, 8 April 2020.

example, when applying for a job with an oil company, one woman believed that she was rejected when she turned down the interviewee's invitation to go on a date.<sup>113</sup> These stories circulate at many levels in the community and perpetuate fears about female migration for education and employment and its potential negative consequence for kinship networks.

At the same time, extreme conflict induces economic stresses, particularly in locations covered in this research. This can prompt new, even if temporary, economic opportunities for women. Some women noted how extreme episodes of violent conflict in central Unity State had forced more equitable gender relations as women were allowed to move freely if they could provide for the home. Sometimes women had more opportunities to provide income than men, especially when men were uneducated.<sup>114</sup> More generally, women have differential access to informal income generation through casual restaurant and market food trading, which is gendered work across communities and socially awkward or impossible for men to undertake. Some men even stayed home to look after children. The stigma of these changing domestic arrangements is gradually shifting for some families. A young woman in Mayendit said: 'Now there is no humiliation, we are all equal'.<sup>115</sup>

### LIFE STORY 3

## Entrepreneurship and social networks

Our interviewee, a twenty-nine-year-old man, was born to a gol (clan) leader family in the Peth area in rural north-west Aweil. His father had lost his cattle to war when he was born. In 2001, he was taken to a local school under the trees operated by the SPLA's civil military administration. His father was unable to pay the fees so his mother, who was an alcohol brewer, paid in grain. When our interviewee reached primary graduation in 2008, the peacetime exam fees needed to be paid in cash, and his mother could not afford to pay from her brewing business. Instead, he 'turned his hope to the market', and found a job collecting money from gamblers in a dominoes parlour. The work was risky—sometimes violent—and the pay was low. He didn't raise enough to pay for his exams so worked for another year and sat his exams the following year.

Our interviewee was selected to attend high school in Aweil town by the State Ministry of Education because of his good grades, but he could not afford to move to town, so deferred for a year to save up. He used his social networks to find a place to stay in Aweil. His father used his connections as a local elder to get him on a vocational skills programme at Maluakon in 2009–2010 and he gained welding and masonry training. But he found it difficult to get employment in house construction after this, because he was seen as too

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113 Interview with young man, Juba, 8 April 2020.

114 Interview with young woman, Mayendit, 19 March 2020.

115 Interview with young woman, Mayendit, 19 March 2020.

young. He offered to construct houses in Gok Machar for free, or in return for food, for poor returnees and this worked to raise his profile and slowly raise his construction rates.

Our interviewee moved to Aweil town to study in 2012. Without connections, he struggled to find part-time work, but came top of his class and was sponsored for the rest of his studies by the school administration. After completing high school in 2016, he decided to find a way to relocate to a bigger city and attend university. The biggest barrier to moving to Juba was connecting with friends and relatives there to get accommodation. This took time. A private school in Aweil first offered him a teaching job and paid him SSP 100 every month, but soon he got another position paid SSP 600 each month.

While he worked, our interviewee became a dedicated attendee of a Nigerian-founded church in Aweil and approached the pastor seeking employment to pay for further studies. The Nigerian pastor, who also traded in motorcycle spare parts in Aweil town, offered him a job in his shop and mentored him on saving money and opening a bank account. He saved in SSP until the pound depreciated over 2016 and he decided to withdraw his savings and convert them to USD. He continued saving in USD by buying small \$5 and \$10 notes from SSP savings and storing the USD in cash.

Our interviewee eventually saved about USD 400, which would cover transport to Juba and a year's study. He then applied to the University of Juba and was accepted to the College of Medicine. His maternal uncle, a senior wildlife officer, agreed to offer him accommodation on the grounds that he wouldn't pay for his education. The Nigerian pastor promised to pay his tuition fees throughout his study.

In Juba, our interviewee invested his savings into a small business buying second-hand clothes in Juba markets, which he then sent to a friend in Aweil to sell there. They would divide the profit generated. His Nigerian friend and pastor also asked him to work part-time in his spare parts shop in Juba. Our interviewee started with few dozen pieces of second-hand clothes, which he bought at Konyokonyo market and sent by road to Aweil. The friend sold the clothes, but after a few rounds of trade during which the business made quite significant money, his friend disappeared with the money. This left our interviewee in debt and frustrated. At the Juba branch of his Nigerian church, he started organizing transport for congregation attendees in exchange for a small donation each month, and he found an evening part-time job selling prescription drugs with a private pharmaceutical dealer. This collection of small income streams helped him pay his debts and enabled him to stay at university in Juba.

# Learning from past livelihoods interventions

Since the late 1980s, there have been a number of international interventions in war-time livelihoods in South(ern) Sudan and later recovery and development programming, including interventions explicitly designed to reduce youth violence.<sup>116</sup> Livelihoods programming generally aims to invest in peace and material welfare, most commonly through access to microfinance, transport and infrastructure, market development, job creation and skills training. However, despite three decades of interventions, there is no in-depth understanding of what works. There is limited understanding of which programmes successfully reach at-risk youth and how they engage with projects. Much livelihoods programming is implemented by educated, urban-based youth in CBOs and NGOs, but mostly targets rural youth. There is a lack of understanding of how community-based organizations (CBOs) and NGOs, which are primarily based in urban centres, are perceived by rural youth and whether this reinforces perceptions of marginalization.

There is also insufficient evidence that this programming counters violence, and there are perceptions that youth livelihood projects might exacerbate inequalities and gains made by elites.<sup>117</sup> These programmes have often not addressed root causes of marginalization and bad governance.

## Early livelihoods interventions, 1983–2005

During the second civil war, many pastoralist communities saw huge losses in their livestock holdings. After the 1983 formation of the SPLA, large numbers of formally pastoralist youth migrated to Ethiopia to join and be trained by the SPLA, or in the hope of education in the SPLA-controlled refugee camps. Many of those who went in search of education also ended up serving in these armed forces.

Over time, other youth migrated northwards, some to rural agricultural areas as unskilled farm labourers or for share cropping, and into urban centres like Khartoum, Port Sudan, El Obeid, Kassala and Nyala, where men could access unskilled jobs in the construction sector and women could find work as domestic servants or in the markets. Paradoxically, it is thought that there was also a significant increase in the overall cattle numbers in Southern Sudan, with large herds consolidated by the elites, especially by senior SPLA officers.<sup>118</sup> There was also significant recruitment carried out in northern Sudan

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116 There has also been a recurrent association between livelihoods programming with disarmament, including official disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programming, that was intended to enhance non-violent youth livelihoods and mitigate against the attraction of violent livelihoods.

117 See also Maxwell et al., 'A Synthesis'.

118 Personal communications with FAO South Sudan, 2013.

of displaced Southern Sudanese male youth into the Sudan Armed Forces or Popular Defence Forces (PDFs) as military service was a requirement for obtaining secondary or university diplomas, or simply as a means of survival. Much of Khartoum's armed response to the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) and Southern Sudan communities was consequently carried out by Southern Sudanese youth, which further aggravated ethnic and clan conflicts that continue to resonate.

Displacement from the Equatoria regions resulted in people fleeing to Uganda and Kenya, where access to education (in English) was accessible and some employment as low or unskilled labour, including domestic service, was available.

Throughout most of the 1990s, when Operational Lifeline Sudan (OLS) provided humanitarian assistance to war-affected locations across Southern Sudan, the prevailing insecurity and control of garrison towns by the government meant all levels of the humanitarian response were managed from Kenya. Only the lowest tier of jobs at the 'front lines' was available to Southern Sudanese people. Even drivers and loaders, cooks and cleaners for the UN and NGO operational sites were often recruited from East Africa and predicated on family or ethnic relationships. Similarly, in the relief operations managed from Khartoum, to the government-controlled areas in Southern Sudan, almost no employment was available to Southern Sudanese people, who were seen as having a high-risk potential of being associated with the SPLA. The expanding development of the oil fields in Upper Nile and Unity states from the late 1990s was based on a 'scorched earth' approach and, like the humanitarian operations, almost no employment was available to people of Southern Sudanese identity.<sup>119</sup>

The only real opportunity was for young community leaders in the counties to establish a local NGO in order to try and attract aid to their communities and to seek funding for a fairer proportion of the aid jobs. This resulted in the creation of many 'briefcase NGOs', established and led by astute Southern Sudanese who learned the donor language, and were even trained in proposal and report writing, but often with no serious efforts at directing effective assistance to the needs of their communities. Once the CPA was signed, many of these civil society 'elites' were drafted into new government positions and were again well positioned to divert resources to themselves and their families, rather than for the recovery and development of their communities, counties, states or South Sudan in general.<sup>120</sup>

The Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD)-led Sudan peace process starting in 2002, and the resultant CPA protocols in 2004, created an enormous reversal of the conflict-related population movements of the previous two decades. This led to a very significant return of IDPs and refugees,<sup>121</sup> not just to their areas of origin but to the new emerging centres of political and economic activities, particularly the ten state

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119 Paul Murphy, 'Even the Meeting Trees Are Perishing: Planning for Peace in Sudan', IGAD, August 2001.

120 Department for International Development, 'Localising humanitarian aid'.

121 UNHCR, 'Return and Reintegration of Sudanese Refugees and IDPs to South Sudan and Protection of IDPs in Khartoum and Kassala States of Sudan', March 2006.



capitals, the oil producing regions and the federal capital city of Juba. At the same time, the prospects for emerging markets and economic development across all of Southern Sudan, including the expansion of petroleum extraction, resulted in an enormous influx of fortune seeking people from all across East and the Horn of Africa. They arrived in an unregulated, poorly or not governed context, which seemingly contributed to much less opportunity for the war-affected youth of South Sudan to be part of the economy in any equitable or productive way.

### **2005–2013 livelihoods interventions<sup>122</sup>**

When the CPA was signed, there was tentative hope among South Sudanese youth that there would be a genuine peace dividend. They hoped that this would open the way for their participation in the development of their own country. The main visible change, however, was the establishment of the subnational government in Juba and the conspicuous exclusion of young and qualified Southern Sudanese from it, unless they had been directly part of the liberation struggle or had familial connections to new governing class. The leaders of the SPLM/A focused on competing for positions in the new government hierarchy to enhance their access to power and resources to loot for their personal benefit and for their tribes, clans and/or patronage networks.

There were three main foci of international and national organizations to support the effective implementation of the CPA:

1. The establishment of effective government structures and systems.
2. Delivery of peace dividends, especially basic services, primary health care, education, water and sanitation.
3. Timely achievement of the CPA mandated census, elections and the referendum.

These overlapping priorities did provide some significant opportunities for educated South Sudanese youth to find employment, which would include skills training and capacity building with nascent government institutions (and their international support aid agencies) as well as with UN and INGO organizations. Much of the focus in the CPA era, with respect to support for livelihoods and employment programmes, was on the massive returns from refugee camps in East Africa and IDP camps in Sudan. One of the early employment opportunities for youth with the international aid system was supporting the physical return movements, utilizing way stations, where returning households were provided with safe locations to rest, water, basic health care (including vaccinations) and, as they approached their intended destinations, items like seeds, tools and household return kits, to support their reintegration and establishment of new households.<sup>123</sup> UN and INGO-supported primary schools and primary health care

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122 Much of this section is derived from personal reflections from the direct experience of Marv Koop, a long term (1994–present day) peacebuilding and stabilization worker in Sudan and South Sudan.

123 *The New Humanitarian*, 'The long journey home to the south', 14 December 2006. (<https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/fr/node/229006>).

clinics were also new opportunities for Southern Sudanese youth to be employed and engaged in supporting the peace implementation.

The other main focus of international aid was on state building, particularly establishing the long absent institutions and systems of governance, and the capacities of civil servants. This also included the nationalization and professionalization of the security sector, the massive expansion of primary education and health care, local food production and the establishment of federal, state and county governments.

Much less effort was given to nation building, which would address the significant grievances felt by, and between, South Sudan's different population groups. The unrealistic premise underpinning the CPA, which was 'to make unity attractive', and the focus on the higher visibility CPA benchmarks—the census, elections and referendum—also undermined a broader and more inclusive approach to addressing the generational challenges facing the youth of Southern Sudan.

The limited but slowly maturing national NGOs also experienced a very significant downturn in presence and capacity, as a large proportion of their leaders and qualified personnel were drafted into the new government. Others joined the rapidly expanding United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), UN or INGO community, attracted by high salaries and benefits.

Overall, livelihoods and international development projects were almost completely focused on urban centres, and only minimal peace dividends reached the county and payam (an administrative district made up from a variable number of bomas) headquarters, or the villages and cattle camps, for almost the entirety of the six-and-a-half-year CPA period. It also became clear that by the mid-2000s a large proportion of the returning displaced and refugee populations were not going back to their rural villages of origin, but preferred being in or close to the urban capital cities or county headquarters, partly because of access to health care, education and social services.

## **Conflict mitigation and peacebuilding interventions**

In the six years of CPA implementation, there was a growing concern among donors regarding ongoing armed conflicts across Southern Sudan. The SPLA, holding 45 per cent of the sub-national budget, massively expanded its payroll. At the same time, large budgets were allocated to the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) Commission. Regional conflicts left unresolved by the CPA escalated, including violent reciprocal cattle looting with military armaments. Under pressure from politicians, the UN and diplomats, the GoSS initiated a national (mostly coercive) disarmament campaign directed towards the rural youth, especially across Jonglei and Upper Nile, which quickly disintegrated into violence and loss of life. This set a pattern whereby the GoSS's disarmament campaigns often exacerbated conflicts and violence.

There was an increasing demand from politicians, civil society and traditional leaders for some return to the 1998 church-led Wunlit process, which restored relationships

between the Dinka and Nuer and provided a foundation for the successful peace negotiations between the SPLM and the Sudan government. It was in this context that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) initiated a conflict transformation project at the county level in 2009. This took place in some of the most conflict-affected locations, including the Sobat triangle, Nasir, Akobo and Pibor, as well as in the Wunlit triangle and in the border regions of Southern Sudan and Sudan.

The basic approach to youth-focused peacebuilding was predicated on a somewhat simplistic conflict analysis—that violent inter-ethnic youth and cattle-focused conflict resulted from widely held rural youth frustrations at the lack of any peace dividend, any credible alternative livelihood opportunities and the far-ranging ungoverned and unpoliced rural vistas, where they could act as a law unto themselves. Project designs called for the real-time deployment of county officials to their intended locations. There they would foster the building of ‘exchange’ relationships between youth who would forego violence and cattle raiding and voluntarily relinquish their weapons, in exchange for hands-on training and on-going employment in building (or rehabilitating) badly needed civic infrastructure.

As these pilot activities launched, USAID (and their programme contractor AECOM) carefully added intra- and inter-ethnic peacebuilding components, co-locating youth from competing neighbouring ethnic groups for shared training and learning opportunities. Post project evaluation<sup>124</sup> noted that a very significant decline in deaths due to ethnic violence could be attributed to the project approach, which was thereafter widely replicated across violence-prone counties.

One main component of the programme was the simple low-cost production of soil stabilized blocks, which utilized large numbers of male and female youth in each county headquarter location. Local youth were also hired and trained for most of the construction initiatives, with very specific skills transfers and focused oversight from externals. Other smaller simpler components in some locations included sand collection and rock crushing for gravel production—a very scarce construction commodity in most of Jonglei state. Construction of county headquarter buildings, markets, Peace Centres, offices, youth centres, women centres, traditional authority centres and courts were all provided to the counties, utilizing this approach from 2009 until 2013.<sup>125</sup> Later in the programme, experienced youth from one location or ethnicity would move to a neighbouring community and lead the training with youth who had recently been engaged in violent cattle raiding against them. Over time, this project expanded geographically to more conflict impacted counties in NBEG, Unity, Upper Nile, Lakes and Warrap States, and was also replicated to the payam headquarter level. Expansion also included utilizing

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124 USAID also helped resolve local conflicts in flashpoint areas. In Jonglei state’s Akobo County, USAID-funded youth training and small grants, in collaboration with community leaders’ efforts, reduced conflict-related deaths from 700 in 2009 to 24 in 2010. USAID now refers to this type of successful programming as its Akobo Model.

125 Often referenced to as the ‘Akobo model’ in USAID’s Sudan reporting.

the same approach with youth towards construction of youth clubs and sport facilities in both county and payam centres, as well as the improvement of airstrips and roads.

In the Sobat River corridor, this approach also facilitated the construction of fishing camp storage buildings, loading docks, warehouses and fish markets, bringing together youth across ethnic and clan conflict divides to cooperate in generating significant livelihood and employment opportunities. Additional internationally funded inputs were also provided. These included fishing and transport boats, materials to build nets, fuel, spare parts, and training in different skills and techniques related to the fishing industry.<sup>126</sup> All provided significant peace dividends and opportunities for non-violent employment engagement with youth in both the public and private sectors. UNDP Southern Sudan also implemented a long term (2007–2011) community security and arms control project that linked community-based initiatives where the Akobo model was being utilized by INGOs and the county local governments in Jonglei and Eastern Equatoria to national level institution building in Juba.

There were a number of significant outputs and outcomes. In some communities, the youth formed their own associations or cooperatives and continued as an independent business overseeing block production and sales, as well as infrastructure rehabilitation and construction. The youth involved in the fishing projects formed associations and linked to other youth in neighbouring communities and across the ethnic divide. Some of the youth leaders also became advocates for appropriate environmental protection and conservation. Youth were now at the forefront of resource-based conflict resolution between competing and neighbouring ethnic groups and were no longer interested or available for recruitment for cattle raiding. Both female and male youth demonstrated significant civic pride in their contributions to improved local governance presence and capacities, improved access to services, and markets, which was only possible following the youth-led construction of infrastructure. A very significant increase in the provision of basic services from INGOs and NGOs was now possible, with increased local security and presence of higher capacity local government, all of which further increased potential for local youth employment and livelihoods.

Other youth livelihood projects over the past 15 years or so include many local assistance and training projects led by churches, local NGOs and occasionally INGOs. These projects tend to cluster around key bases with airstrips, often old wartime humanitarian sites, such as Oxfam and Save the Children in Malualkon. There, livelihoods programmes include provision of hardware like sewing machines, grinding mills, restaurant equipment, ox ploughs, carpentry tools and support for household-level cooperative farming—such as the World Vision supported rice scheme in Aweil—as well as training for tailoring, food production, construction, welding and food services alongside simple business skills. SPIDEP, a national NGO, supports women in rural towns around Aweil

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126 Fishing industry aspects included mechanics training and training in better and more sustainable fish harvesting techniques, cold chains to improve access to fresh fish markets and connecting fishing with local vegetable production (for sales and household use).

to organize sandouk savings systems for business start-up capital. Often the recipients of hardware and software components were organized, or organized themselves, into local associations and created additional small-scale employment opportunities. Any visible successes encouraged other young men and women to act on the opportunities for investment in the market.

Similar training and skills transfer initiatives were provided to refugees while they remained in northern Kenya and Uganda, but these initiatives did not extend any tangible financial or technical support to the refugees if and when they returned to South Sudan. Often, a lack of capital or market for these skills and industries hindered business start-ups. Microfinance projects were also established by international NGOs, including BRAC, as well as significant investment by the UN, INGOs and national NGOs in training teachers and health workers.

Very little knowledge of these interventions was presented by the respondents to the researchers in their interviews for this project. Due to the widespread expansion of armed conflict early in 2014, the focus of international aid was forced into a rapid large-scale transition into lifesaving humanitarian aid—a response to massive food insecurity and displacement caused by the war. Respondents involved in this research often lamented the very limited opportunities for youth employment, training or support for entrepreneurship, with the exception of the local security guard sector.

## **Lost institutional memory**

One of the crucial points from this study is how quickly and drastically the change from peace time to conflict affects livelihoods, especially for youth. Starting from mid 2004, as the CPA moved from negotiation to implementation and eventually secession in 2011, there was a spirit of opportunity for all to participate in nation building and respond to the aspirations of a liberated people. That was inclusive of new and expanded education opportunities, positions in the UN and INGOs and national NGOs, and especially in the establishment of local, state and national government administrations. The return of about four million formerly internally displaced people or refugees to Southern Sudan was an enormous ‘client’ base that sought support for their (re)establishment of households, farms and livelihoods. They also sought access to basic services, health, education, sanitation and water from the government and the international development community.

Those public service jobs and the demands for physical reconstruction of the country offered enormous opportunities for South Sudanese youth to gain marketable skills, experience and reliable jobs. While some of these broad national aspirations were at least partially realized, much else was not. This was partly due to the prominence and effectiveness of (north) Sudanese and other eastern African contractors and investors, who largely did not hire South Sudanese people and moved all their profits out of the country. The international aid actors and the peace-keeping missions (UNMIS in 2005–2011 and then UNMISS) were also characterized by massive expansion of staffing and

facilities. Typically, however, South Sudanese were only recruited for the lower tier positions, while internationals competed for the very well paid positions and extraordinary benefits that came with UN and INGO employment, even if many of those employees rarely if ever moved outside the Minimum Operating Security Standards compliant compounds into the field. Many of the educated youth respondents in this research noted the widely held frustration linked to employment seeking in the aid business, due to inaccessibility, elitism, nepotism and corruption in the human resources departments. Many civil society leaders of the local NGOs that engaged at the county level during OLS to enhance delivery of life saving humanitarian aid up to 2004 were recruited into the various levels of government—national, subnational, state and county—thereby significantly depleting the capacities and credibility of those organizations who could and should have been at the forefront of the CPA era recovery and development programming. These failures can also be blamed on the rampant misappropriation and corruption of the emergent government.

Some of the peacetime successes included South Sudanese returnees who came home with new skills and a vision to start up local businesses—particularly in construction, catering and tailoring—or were hired as health workers and teachers. Progressive County Commissioners were instrumental in mobilizing the local youth, in association with the UN and INGO transition and recovery projects, to get locally provided construction skills training and contribute paid labour towards the reconstruction of county infrastructure. Some of these young people, both men and women, continued their livelihoods through the formation of cooperatives and local companies.

## Conclusions

Young people's contemporary challenges within South Sudan's economy are well documented.<sup>127</sup> Conflict, inflation, infrastructural collapse and the decay of the rural education system have all undermined young people's abilities to make a living and to build future investments. With the risk of everyday violence and theft, and lives and families on the line, armed raiding, criminality or military employment are viable (if morally and personally unpalatable) options for survival.

In this study, young people connected these economic failures to issues of deep inequality, political manipulation and gendered and generational power dynamics. Many young people today feel deeply let down by the government—for its corruption, nepotism and greed that underpinned the economic and political collapse over 2012–2013—and by the international humanitarian and diplomatic apparatus. Many young men and women emphasized that there are few options for economic reform while 'selfish people' aim to retain their tight control over South Sudanese communities, invest in and exploit conflicts and monopolize the economic system.

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127 Most recently by Finn et al., 'Job Outcomes in the Towns of South Sudan'; Maweje, 'The Macroeconomic Environment'.

International recommendations for livelihoods interventions in this context are fundamentally at odds with these young people's interpretation of the structural issues at stake in South Sudan's political economy. International development recommendations about livelihood interventions are often essentially liberal and individualist, arguing for individual entrepreneurship, economic diversification and skills investment, individualized microfinance and the formalization of market systems—the creation of rules and regulations ostensibly to prevent abuses.<sup>128</sup> In South Sudan, young people's increasing dependence on individualizing, market-driven livelihoods—such as waged farm work or market trading—has only increased their precarity and insecurity in the face of inflation, devaluation, market volatility, climate change, land privatization and shifting local conflicts. Many common livelihoods interventions seem deeply unrealistic in this context.

Across research sites, this project evidenced how urban-centred livelihoods interventions, and the increasing reliance of young people on urban markets and migrant work, are likely to continue driving young people into towns and cities across South Sudan and elsewhere as they seek education and financial and physical security, which is increasingly unavailable or unpredictable in rural areas. Continued investment in formal sector employment and higher education in towns, and investment in basic livelihoods programming focused on rural cash-transfers, skills and tools in rural areas, are likely to perpetuate and exacerbate growing class divides and tensions among young people and between urban and remote rural communities.

International interventions should reflect on what form a secure and growing economy should take. Many market-based solutions that aim for post-conflict growth, often via cash transfers and micro-loan schemes, do not take into account systems of exploitation and power dynamics. This research has highlighted these critical class, gendered and regional inequalities and abuses of power in agricultural and urban labour markets that drive conflicts as well as perpetuate an impoverishing jobs market. Market-led growth will likely continue to be uneven and is unlikely to raise (and may even rely on exploiting) extremely low market rates for produce and labour in the short term. Marketization and monetization of the economy in the last 20 years has created deep inequalities and precarity among this young labour sector. Drawing on local histories of workers' cooperatives and unions could provide ways to support workers' rights and promote equal and collaborative development across ethnic and regional divides.

Such livelihoods programming must reflect on what 'localization' really means. An option may be a return to a form of the Akobo model. The Akobo model approach over 2009–2013 responded to similar conditions to today: frustrations from an increasing number of rural youth who felt pushed towards more violent livelihood strategies; a similarly extraordinary lack of local governance or opportunities for conflict affected

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128 For example, Roy Maconachie, 'Navigating the Intergenerational Divide? Youth, Artisanal Diamond Mining, and Social Transformation in Sierra Leone', *The Extractive Industries and Society* 4/4 (2017): 744–750, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.exis.2017.05.006>.

young men and women to contribute to—as well as to benefit from—investments in infrastructure and local government at the county and payam levels. The Akobo model relied on the energy, competency and commitment of County Commissioners who built trust, mobilized resources and maintained communications between local government and donors. Efforts to reconstruct forms of this model for youth livelihoods projects should centre the leadership of local and national NGOs, who remain credible agents of change and trust-builders locally. This would also allow international actors to walk the talk of localization and community ownership.

This research has demonstrated how young people’s livelihoods and choices are now heavily reliant on social networks built in a digital space. Social media is often seen as a democratizing space for youth participation and community-building. However, digital technology and digital spaces both create new forms of social, class, gendered and political divides and risks. These technologies and spaces also create new paths for surveillance, mobilization and political manipulation, in the context of significant and widespread violence from security forces and the repression of free speech. It is unclear how new digital political dynamics, such as interactions between young people and senior government authorities publicly on Facebook, will affect local and national politics and conflict dynamics.

## Recommendations

Young women and men interviewed during research, and the South Sudanese researchers conducting this project, set out several starting points for reviewing livelihoods-based approaches that target young people. The recommendations are directed at governments—including the GoSS—and international organizations involved in development activities in South Sudan.

**Address the disparity between urban and rural educational opportunities for young people.** Young men and women emphasized that they want to be able to seek education for themselves and their children for their own personal fulfilment as well as their livelihoods. Education interventions must both acknowledge and challenge the concentration of educational and employment opportunities in towns, which continues to build internal class, gender and geographic inequalities, drive urban migration and undermine young people’s investments in agricultural systems. Interventions may include investing in rural education and teacher training, and potentially funding rural scholarships to university or higher education colleges.

**Provide and support opportunities for more young people to participate in local government.** Young people across research sites emphasized that they want to openly discuss the economic crisis and confront leaders directly about the structural inequalities and conflicts the crisis is causing. The successful Akobo model of local government should be revisited, bringing young men and women from urban and rural areas into local infrastructure reconstruction.



**Support cooperative economic models that draw on previously successful approaches.**

Collective economic action may help strengthen mutual solidarity and support young people to work together to confront forms of exploitation as a group, rather than fighting for survival and opportunity by themselves. Livelihoods programmes that focus on rural self-sufficiency and small-scale entrepreneurship are often deeply vulnerable to climactic, environmental and conflict shocks. Interventions could revisit economic cooperative models and learn from past failures and successes: for example, brick making, agricultural collectives and fish and shea butter farms. This approach might also help challenge the individualist entrepreneurship language that alienates many young people and (among other factors) encourages ethno-local hostility and competition.

**Review microfinance initiatives and re-examine collective financing opportunities.**

Individual microfinance often leaves people more dependent on fluctuating markets and uncertain returns to service personal debt, contributing to the deep economic precarity detailed above. Collective investments and funding might support cooperative models designed locally to suit specific climatic and economic situations.

**Provide legal support for employment rights through local and customary court systems.** Casual and low-paid workers are poorly supported by the centralized state system of law courts. Instead, they are more likely to seek redress for employment-related issues through networks of customary courts, which are less likely to be able to implement state employment legislation. However, to their advantage, they already have an established caselaw developed from previous litigation over unpaid wages, unsafe conditions or injury at work. Collaborative and locally organized consultations with courts and litigants could help to establish worker protection standards based on local legal practice and community-specific needs and would help identify local employment abuses.

**Review funding mechanisms for livelihoods projects.** This process should be led by national NGOs, drawing in donors, INGOs, private industry and telecoms sectors for consultation on the accountability, cost-effectiveness and design of skills development programmes.

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## Annex 1: Table of livelihoods

Livelihood options for youth	Location during field research	Gender	Age / marital status	Violent / non-violent	Main factors influencing decision making
<b>Petty trade / marketing</b>	<i>EQ State:</i> Torit; <i>Lakes State:</i> Yirol; <i>CE:</i> Juba; <i>Unity State:</i> Thaker and Leer; <i>Jonglei State:</i> Bor	Depending on location and trade sector, women and men.	A full age range across sites, including married and unmarried young people.	Typically non-violent, but competition over customers generates fighting, e.g. boda-boda riders resort to violence in some instances. There is also violent theft and assault during market and trade competition.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family economic status<sup>129</sup></li> <li>- Search for education<sup>130</sup></li> <li>- Delay in army salary influences some soldiers to choose trading to generate income (Yirol and Juba)<sup>131</sup></li> <li>- Lack of employment opportunities<sup>132</sup></li> <li>- Migrant work (Torit and Aweil)<sup>133</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Cattle camp</b>	<i>Lakes State:</i> Yirol; <i>Unity State:</i> Mayendit and Leer; <i>Jonglei State:</i> Bor	Men and women. Mostly unmarried women work in cattle camps in dry seasons, otherwise young men are workers.	15–35, often from historically wealthy families or families who acquired cattle in recent years, generally through significant political or military power at state or national levels; or kin members of these families who are employed via cash or in-kind payments to look after cattle.	Violent, depending on local conflict dynamics and the risks of armed looting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Access to arms<sup>134</sup></li> <li>- Dowry acquisition</li> <li>- Cultural/wealth factors<sup>135</sup></li> </ul>

129 Interview with young male boda rider, Torit; interview with tea lady at Thaker, Unity state and Nyakuiy in Leer; interview with young man in Juba.

130 Interview with young women, Juba.

131 Interview with young man, Yirol.

132 Interview with young man, Torit; interview with young man and woman, Juba.

133 Interview with young man and woman, Juba.

134 Interview with young woman in Jeer cattle camp and with a cattle keeper in Bur near Leer; interview with young man, Juba.

135 Interview with young woman in Jeer cattle camp and with a cattle keeper in Bur near Leer; interview with young man, Juba.

Livelihood options for youth	Location during field research	Gender	Age / marital status	Violent / non-violent	Main factors influencing decision making
<b>Teaching</b>	EQ, Torit NBG, Aweil	Mostly men, some women	30–35	Non-violent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Availability of paid teaching job<sup>136</sup></li> <li>- Lack other job opportunities<sup>137</sup></li> <li>- Willingness to help educate young population<sup>138</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Fishing</b>	Lakes State, Yirol	Male	A range of ages	Non-violent in Lakes, although potential disputes over-fishing rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Family background</li> <li>- Growing demand of the fish market</li> <li>- Economic activity not associated with violence</li> <li>- Lack of cattle and agricultural land<sup>139</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Farming</b>	Across all sites	Male and Female	14–60s	None; but often exploitative, involving economic violence and threat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Search for cash to buy food<sup>140</sup></li> <li>- Search for cash to pay school fees or start business</li> <li>- Buy cattle to marry</li> </ul>
<b>UN/ INGO / NGO</b>	CE, Juba especially; across sites	Men and women	A range of ages	Non-violent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Limited economic opportunities</li> <li>- Search for economic growth</li> <li>- Capacity building in the humanitarian field<sup>141</sup></li> <li>- Acquisition of skill<sup>142</sup></li> <li>- Family position in the community<sup>143</sup></li> </ul>

<sup>136</sup> Interview with young man in Torit and young man, Juba.

<sup>137</sup> Interview with young woman, Juba.

<sup>138</sup> Interview with young man, Juba.

<sup>139</sup> Interview with young man, Yirol.

<sup>140</sup> FGD with young men, Juba.

<sup>141</sup> Interview with young woman, Juba.

<sup>142</sup> Interview with young woman, Juba.

<sup>143</sup> Interview with young man, Juba.

Livelihood options for youth	Location during field research	Gender	Age / marital status	Violent / non-violent	Main factors influencing decision making
<b>SSDF / SPLA-IO / armed militias</b>	Lakes State, Yirol Unity State, Leer and Thaker and Warrap State, Tonj	Male	A range of ages	Both violent and non-violent, depending on postings; work often involves the threat of violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Economic gain (SSPDF)</li> <li>- Sense of community protection (militia recruitment in Tony)</li> <li>- Coercive recruitment (Tonj and Aweil)</li> <li>- Community defence (IO and Tonj)</li> <li>- Political influence from military elites (SSPDF, Militia and SPLA IO)</li> <li>- Peer group influence</li> <li>- Self-protection, pride and power to act with less accountability (all)<sup>144</sup></li> </ul>
<b>IT / mobile phone related sales, services</b>	CE, Juba	Men only	A range of ages	The risk of violence; women are less involved in mobile sales because second-hand phones are generally understood to be stolen property and their trade carries the risk of arrest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Friends' connections in the trade</li> <li>- Economic growth</li> <li>- Lack of other economic opportunities</li> <li>- Inability of their parents to provide required basic needs<sup>145</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Restaurants, cafes</b>	CE: Juba; all sites	Mostly women, some men	25–30	Non-violent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Skills acquired through training</li> <li>- Economic growth opportunities</li> <li>- Diversification of livelihood income</li> <li>- Land of Agricultural land</li> <li>- Need to improve the standard of living of the family members<sup>146</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Criminal gangs</b>	EQ: Torit; all sites	Men	15–25	Violent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Idleness/lack of work opportunities</li> <li>- Peer group pressure/influence</li> <li>- Economic gain through stealing and robbing</li> <li>- Identity and protection<sup>147</sup></li> </ul>

144 Interview with young women, Leer; interview with young men, Leer; interview with former SSPDF soldier, Yirol; interview with young men, Torit.

145 Interview with young men, Juba.

146 Interview with young woman, Juba.

147 Interview young man, Torit.

Livelihood options for youth	Location during field research	Gender	Age / marital status	Violent / non-violent	Main factors influencing decision making
<b>Church positions</b>	All sites	Majority women, many men	A range of ages	Non-violent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work opportunity</li> <li>- Spiritual blessing</li> <li>- Connection for better economic opportunity<sup>148</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Building / construction</b>	CE: Juba; all sites	Men	15–35	Non-violent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Lack of other skills and education</li> <li>- Lack of capital to invest in agriculture</li> <li>- Experience from previous migrations and displacements</li> <li>- Less associated to risks of violence and based in towns<sup>149</sup></li> </ul>
<b>Armed/highway robbery</b>	Lakes State: Rumbek; Warrap State: Tonj	25–30	Men	Violent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Access to arms</li> <li>- Conservatism</li> <li>- Economic gain/poverty</li> <li>- Revenge</li> <li>- Work for a senior figure behind the scenes<sup>150</sup></li> </ul>

148 Interview with young woman, Juba.

149 FGD with young women and men, Juba.

150 Interview with young woman and man, Juba; FDG with young men, Juba; these young people shared their experiences and analysis of highway ambush and robbery on the road between Juba and Bahr el-Ghazal.



## Annex 2: Table of interviews

Location	No.	Sub location	Gender	Employment
Yirol	1	Jeer cattle camp	M	Camp leader
	2	Yirol market	M	Driver
	3	Yirol town	M	Timber / building materials trader
	4	Yirol town	M	Shopkeeper
	5	Yirol town	M	Priest
	6	Yirol market	M	Music seller
	7	Nyang	F	Restaurant owner
	8	Yali	M	Fisherman
	9	Yirol town	M	Soldier
	10	Yirol town	M	Soldier & welder
Torit	11	Torit town	M	University student
	12	Torit town	M	Teacher
	13	Torit town	M	Teacher
	14	Torit town	M	Unemployed
	15	Torit town	M	Volunteer with SSRC
	16	Torit town	F	Volunteer
	17	Torit town	M	Teacher
	18	Torit town	M	Volunteer, student
	19	RVI office	M	Teacher; NGO worker; military
	20	Mayo Girls Primary School	M	Teacher
	21	Torit town	M	NGO worker
	22	Torit town	F	Student
Juba	23	RVI office	M	Casual worker & student
	24	RVI office	M	Part-time nurse
	25	RVI office	F	Researcher & athlete
	26	RVI office	F	Student
	27	RVI office	M	Student
	28	RVI office	M	Student & hawker
	29	RVI office	F	Restaurant owner & SPLA
	30	RVI office	M	Unemployed
Juba	31	RVI office	M	Manual workers; part time students

<b>Location</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Sub location</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Employment</b>
Mayendit	32	Leer	M	RRRC director
	33	UNIDOR compound, Leer	F	Head of household
	34	Rubkuay	M	Unemployed
	35	Rubkuay	F	Head of household
	36	Rubkuay	F	UNIDOR cleaner
	37	Rubkuay	M	Migrant worker
	38	Daplual	M	Teacher
	39	Daplual	M	Unemployed
	40	Leer	M	NGO worker
	41	Leer	F	Unemployed
	42	Gam	M	Farmer
	43	Gam	M	Farmer
	44	Kulier / TPA	F	Unemployed
	45	Kulier / TPA	F	Unemployed
	46	Kulier / TPA	F	Unemployed
	47	Kulier / TPA	F	Unemployed
	48	Kulier / TPA	F	Farmer
	49	Kulier / TPA	F	UNIDOR worker
	50	Rubkuay	F	UNIDOR worker
	51	Rubkuay	F	UNIDOR cleaner
	52	Rubkuay	F	UNIDOR worker
	53	Rubkuay	M	Deputy commissioner
	54	Riery, Mirnyal	F	Students
	55	Leer	M	Trader
	Gogrial	56	Gogrial	M
57		Luonyaker	M	Student
Bor	58	Bor town	M	Government employees
	49	Bor town	F	NGO workers
Juba	60	Shirikat	M	Pastors
Bor	61	Bor town	M	Unemployed
	62	Bor town	M	Community association
Juba	63	Shirikat	M	Teacher
Bor	64	Bor town	F	CBO coordinator
	65	Tibek, Bor town	F	Journalist
	66	Bor town	F	Teacher
	67	Nigel, Bor town	M	Local government worker
Juba	68	Shirikat	M	Hawker

<b>Location</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>Sub location</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Employment</b>
Bor	69	Laangbaar, Bor town	M	Farmer
	70	Tibek, Bor town	M	Security worker
	71	Tibek, Bor town	M	MP
	72	Tibek, Bor town	M	NGO worker & court clerk

**South Sudan: youth, violence and livelihoods** explains the realities of life for South Sudan's youth population, the majority of whom are living in conditions of extreme economic precarity. Young people face enormous challenges in trying to survive and progress in their lives. This is happening in the context of overarching neglect of the citizenry by the government, corruption, ethnic based violent conflict and competition for control of the economy and natural resources, which has significantly undermined the social fabric. The research was led by a team of young Southern Sudanese who have first-hand experience of these challenges.

