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Responding to Violence in Ikotos County, South Sudan: Government and Local Efforts to Restore Order

By Clement Ochan



Children in Ikotos, South Sudan, using spent cartridges as toys.

Credit: Clement Ochan



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Summary

The study sought to document and analyze community responses to recent violence and local efforts to bring about relative security in Ikotos County, Eastern Equatoria, South Sudan. It set out to:

- document and analyze the range of causes and consequences of violence in the area
- understand the gender and generational aspects of the violence and its consequences
- explore mechanisms to bring about security
- explore the role of civilian groups—including church leaders, men, women, youths, children and elders—in pressing for new gun control laws
- assess the impact of restrictions on weapons imposed in 2004
- understand the short- and long-term future of the security improvement program in Ikotos County.

The field work for the study was conducted between May and August 2006. Clement Ochan, the lead researcher, was assisted by Ladu Tobias. Ochan drew upon five years of work experience in the area to help inform the analysis and locate key informants. Relevant information from 2005 field interviews in the same area was used where appropriate. The team also used secondary data to help provide context and flesh out their findings.

The team mainly relied on key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observation for data collection. Data was collected primarily in Ikotos town. All group discussions were held in the town or the workplaces of consulted organisations. Where possible, the team used a digital voice recorder to capture the interviews and discussions. The interviews and discussions were conducted in Arabic, English, or local dialects, depending on the linguistic capabilities of respondents and discussants. See appendix for list of those interviewed.

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Acronyms

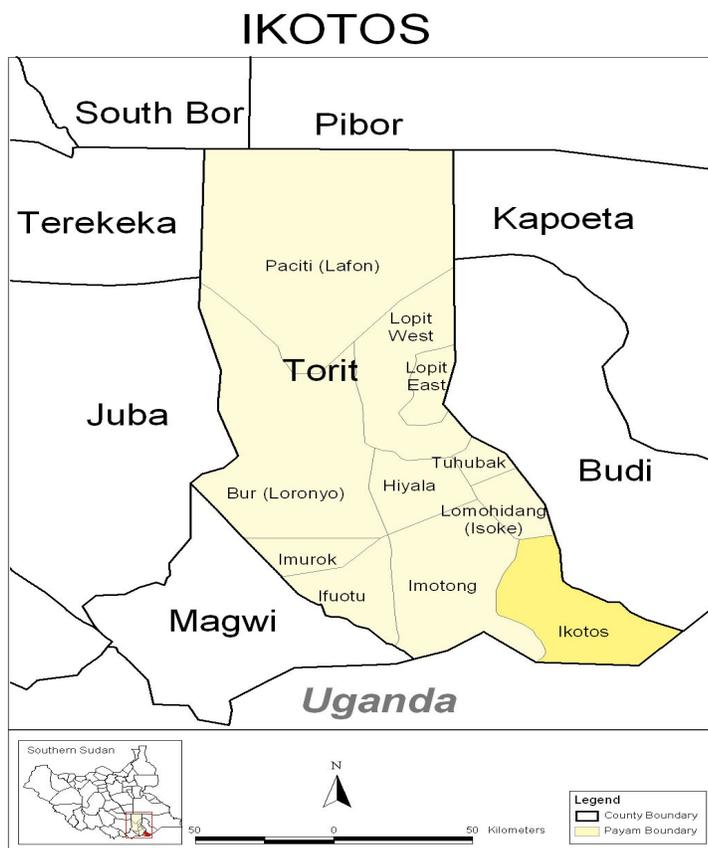
AIC	African Inland Churches
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
BLC	Boma Liberation Council
CBO	Community-based organization
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CRS	Catholic Relief Services
DoT	Diocese of Torit
EDF	Equatoria Defense Forces
GoS	Government of Sudan
GoSS	Government of Southern Sudan
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
NCA	Norwegian Church Aid
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PACT	Private Agency Collaborating Together
RPG	Rocket-propelled grenade
SRRC	Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SPLM	Sudan People's Liberation Movement
UN	United Nations
UPDF	Uganda People's Defense Force

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1. Background

Ikotos County is situated in Eastern Equatoria, in Southern Sudan. After decades of war it is hard to determine the population of any county in the region with any accuracy. In 2002 the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association—the humanitarian wing of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement—determined the population of the County, including internally displaced persons (IDPs), to be 67,340¹. The County is the ancestral home of the Nilotic Lango tribe, who are thought to have a population of around 25,000-30,000² people, many of whom live outside the County. The County is administratively divided into six *payams* and further sub-divided into *bomas*.

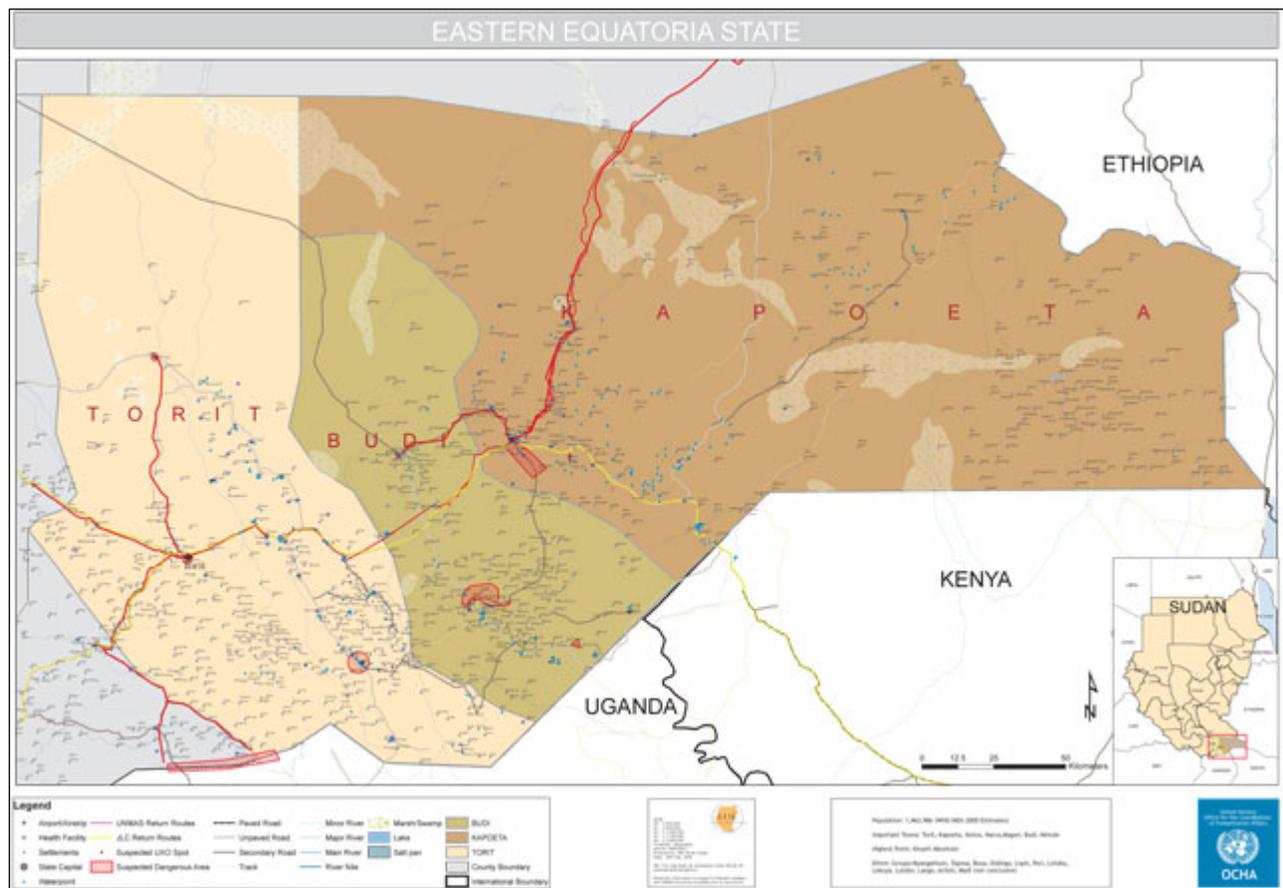


Administrative map of Ikotos County³

¹ SRRA Data base and Monitoring Unit Population Figures-2002

² Gurtong Peace Trust, “The Lango: Demography and Geography,” January 2007, www.gurtong.org/resourcecenter/people/profile_tribe.asp?TribeID=124

³ It should be noted that this map reflects administrative boundaries prior to the designation of Ikotos as a County in its own right in 2004.



Map of southern Eastern Equatoria Province⁴

The Lango tribe has six distinct sub-tribes—the Lokwa, Dongotono, Ketebo, Logir, Lorwama and Imotong. The Lango’s neighbours are the Didinga and Buya in Budi county, the Lotuko in Torit county, and the Acholi and Karimojong across the border in Uganda. Ikotos was a part of Torit County until 2004 when it was made a new County.

The Lango tribesmen are both pastoralist and agriculturalists. Cattle are integral to their day-to-day life, central to contracting of marriages, performance of rituals, and exchanges of gifts. Cattle raids have always occurred, especially during the dry seasons because cattle move faster in short grass than during the rainy season when the grass in the plains is very tall and makes it harder for raiders to speedily move them.

Ikotos County saw relatively little fighting for most of the decades of civil war between the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA) and the Government of Sudan (GoS) which ended with the January 2005 signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and the establishment of the autonomous Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) led by the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM). However, the entry of the SPLA into the area from the late 1980s sparked the displacement of many Lango civilians to IDP camps in GoS-controlled areas including Torit, Juba and Khartoum, while other Lango fled to refugee camps in Uganda and Kenya.

⁴ Original, high-resolution map available at:

http://www.unsudanig.org/library/mapcatalogue/south/data/planning/Map%20341%20Eastern%20Equatoria_Feb%202006.pdf. We thank the United Nations Sudan Information Gateway for its use.

1.1 History of Violence in Ikotos County

The rivalry between the six sub-tribes in Ikotos and the neighboring tribes has been ongoing since time immemorial. This conflict mainly takes place around the valley of the Kidepo, a seasonal river which flows from north-eastern Karamoja in Uganda into the flood plains of the east bank of Eastern Equatoria. The weapons used were mainly spears and sticks. The valley forms the border between Buya and Didinga on the east and the Lotuko and Logir to the west. During the dry season, the Kidepo valley is the main source of water and pasture for the communities living on its eastern and western banks. The Kidepo valley has for a long time been not only a battleground, but also a zone for friendly interaction and trade.

The key driver in the current pattern of hostilities in Kidepo can be dated back to 1983, when the Logir formed an alliance with the Toposa and attacked the Buya. Although the two sides were reconciled following the involvement of rainmakers in a peace meeting in 1985, the reconciliation proved short-lived. After only two years raiding resumed, over a hundred Didinga being killed in a single day. This prompted intervention from the Catholic Bishop of Torit who tried in 1991 to try and build peace between the two tribes.⁵ However, this and subsequent peace initiatives all failed.

Prior to the intensification of the civil war and the entry into Ikotos of SPLA forces, cattle raids between the tribes were relatively few and only involved use of traditional weapons. Cases of gun-aided banditry were rare. However when the SPLA entered the area, guns became more readily available. Cattle raids between the Lango and neighboring tribes have increased, illegal killing has intensified and 'gun hunting' – the term locally used to describe armed assaults of passers-by in order to seize their weapons – has become endemic. Guns were brought into the area in large numbers by the GoS, by GoS-sponsored militias such as the Equatoria Defense Force (EDF) and also by the SPLA, all wishing to arm potential supporters. Ikotos communities thus gained access to modern weaponry which they used during cattle raids and revenge attacks on neighbors.

In 1992 a split among the SPLA cadres led to factional fighting and incitement of ethnic hatred across most of Eastern Equatoria. A pastor explained what happened:

When the SPLA started to split into small factions between 1992 and 1994, different factions entered the area with an intention to win support of the local communities by giving them weapons. Poor people in the communities who had no access to guns now have access to guns. SPLA soldiers would barter one gun for a goat, or one bag of groundnut; one tin of sorghum or five chickens could fetch you a new AK-47 (Kalachnikov). Availability of guns encouraged young boys to start practicing stealing and raiding using their guns.

Whereas raiders used to deploy rudimentary weapons, today they have AK-47s and rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs). A raider with such a weapon is able to kill and injure a number of people within a very short time. Young men make up most of those killed or injured by guns

⁵ Pax Christie, *Conflict and peace initiatives in East Bank Equatoria, South Sudan 1992-1999*, no date, published by the author.

during cattle raids, but some women and children also suffer. The raiders plunder and wreak destruction, exacerbating poverty and leaving orphaned children and destitute widows in their wake.

Ikotos became notorious for gun violence as a result of a series of serious incidents whose consequences live on. In 1997, Logir from Ikotos County raided a Buya community in neighboring Budi County, sparking a subsequent counter-raid. The SPLA launched a raid, supposedly to punish the Logir and return stolen cattle. However, instead of returning the 300 head of cattle they seized to their Buya owners, they were distributed among high-ranking SPLA officers. In 1998, 25 men were killed in Faraksika (a livestock market north of Ikotos between the Lotuko and Didinga) following clashes between Buya and Lango in revenge for murders committed some years before. Throughout 1998, the Buya and Tenet (their traditional allies) carried out raids on the Lopit of Ikotos County, further spreading insecurity.

In 2000 there were several reported cases of rape and killing of innocent civilians but no statistics were collated. Attacks on NGO personnel were better documented. Lino Ofire, a driver for Norwegian Church Aid (NCA)⁶, was killed in an ambush while driving a group of relief workers from the Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Association (SRRA) who had been on a polio campaign. Juma Manoa, an NCA staff member, was killed in an ambush together with Simon Alier, a Sudanese nurse working for SRRA. They were attacked between Chukudum and Ikotos while transporting a patient in urgent need of surgery.

One of the most tragic gun violence episodes was the killing of a pregnant woman together with her 11 year-old daughter in Ikotos town in June 2003. (It was this incident that compelled the Commissioner in Ikotos County to begin to strengthen gun control regulations.) However, a further outrage occurred in October when a staff member of Caritas was killed and another abducted while traveling from Kitgum in Uganda to Ikotos in Eastern Equatoria. By May 2006, when the Lango Community Peace and Reconciliation conference was convened to try and address tensions within the Lango and with their neighbors,⁷ it was estimated that ten people were being murdered each week in the county.

An interviewee described the proliferation of weaponry in the early 1990s:

When the factions broke from the mainstream between 1992 and 1994, the poor people in the communities got access to guns... those from other faction sides could sell a gun for one goat, one bag of groundnuts, a tin of sorghum or five chicken.

The increased availability of weapons and their violent use prompted more local people to want to obtain them to try and ensure their personal safety. Guns became so popular that, along with ammunition, they started becoming a medium of exchange. Because guns were

⁶ Norwegian Church Aid, <http://english.nca.no>

⁷ For a report on the conference, see:

www.unsudanig.org/docs/Lango%20Peace%20Conference%20Final%20Report_June%202006.pdf

readily available it became relatively easy to execute an attack, which prompted retaliation, especially when cattle were involved.

Between 2002 and 2003 even the outskirts of Ikotos town were not safe. People were killed at the airstrip, about a half a kilometer from the town. Those who ventured over five kilometers from the town risked being shot dead by bandits. Carrying guns outside the town exposed their owners to attacks from 'gun hunters'. Villages were regarded as 'no go zones,' where community members were forced to take charge of their own security since the police and SPLA could not.

Our study found that current insecurity in the area can be attributed to four primary factors.

1. The rampant banditry caused by neighboring tribes (Buya, Lotuko and Didinga) who come to raid cattle from the Lango. As livestock is a main source of livelihood among the Lango, they defend them at all cost and feel it is legitimate to retain weapons to defend wealth and livelihoods.
2. The presence of the Ugandan rebel group, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) in Ikotos County significantly increased security risks for the Lango. The LRA were notorious for killing, looting of food, burning houses, and abducting women and children. In March 2002 over 400 people were massacred in the Imotong area in the west of Ikotos County. LRA terror made householders determined to retain weapons for self defense.
3. There is much lingering mistrust between the SPLA and GoS. Many Southern Sudanese fear that the CPA—like the Addis Ababa Agreement which ended the first phase of the Sudanese civil war in 1972—may collapse, plunging south Sudan into renewed conflict.⁸ They are thus opposed to disarmament, arguing people should have the right to retain their guns for defense against future GoS attacks.
4. Many local people have invested heavily in their firearms and are understandably loath to hand them in without receiving compensation.

With guns in their hands, even cowards became brave enough to either organize a raid or retaliate at will. Today, the conflict is carried out in such a way that frequent raids by all sides result in killing of people, burning of property, and seizure of cattle. Key motivating factors are desires for revenge and acquisition of cattle.

Unfortunately, this trend is not likely to change soon since each community living around the valley is engaged in various levels of raiding.⁹ A report from the Kidepo conference in 2003—one of a series of events convened by NGOs, local authorities, and tribal leaders to promote inter-tribal reconciliation, summarizes the problem of the Kidepo valley as one in which

⁸ The withdrawal of SPLM ministers from the Government of National Unity in October 2007 has exacerbated these fears.

⁹ Brock-Utne, Birgit *Indigenous conflict resolution in Africa*, University of Oslo, Feb. 2001, www.africavenir.com/publications/occasional-papers/BrockUtneTradConflictResolution.pdf

sections within these rival ethnic groups have plummeted into self-perpetuating cycles of violence, cattle raiding, banditry and loss of human life.¹⁰

Some of the interviewees were also of the view that the rivalry and the violence that it begets may not stop soon because the Eastern Equatoria State government appears not to be doing enough to address the crisis. In addition, many adults have grown up with the belief that the rival communities will always threaten each other and that nothing will ever change.

1.2 Problems Faced by Residents of Ikotos County

Our study identified problems afflicting all communities in Ikotos County as a result of the civil war, stalled development, unemployment, and difficulty in resettling returning refugees and IDPs.

Virtually everybody lost somebody during the war. Some of the sufferings are physical—disability and loss of assets—while others may be psychological. An interviewee had the following comment to make about the effect of war-induced trauma:

...people are traumatized. You may find that somebody lost his relatives because of the war and you may find that somebody is disabled or lost his properties. Now when he has these feelings in his heart, just any slight argument/disagreement incites him. He immediately becomes violent and starts killing people.

There have been no structured efforts to deal with any of the psychological trauma and resulting behaviour in the area. People therefore may turn violent at the slightest provocation, a factor interviewees related to the many cases of shooting.

Some of the interviewees pointed out that compared to neighboring counties like Budi, there is very little development in Ikotos. Interviewees cited lack of good hospitals in the area as evidence that the government is not very concerned about the area's development. They also pointed out that poverty and the attendant joblessness have contributed enormously to violence, as the unemployed can easily take a gun to go and raid. The few meager health facilities lack enough medicine, resulting in increased morbidity and mortality rates. There is also food scarcity in Ikotos due to high levels of physical insecurity. IDPs in the area are only able to cultivate near their camps, unable to go further afield where there is available unused arable land due to fear of bandits and the LRA. Food thus has to be imported and prices have risen enormously. Most commodities in the market are beyond the reach of poor people. This has driven some people to banditry and robbery to access food they cannot afford under what have now become 'normal' circumstances.

Even though a good number of the people in Ikotos have received education (mainly at high school level)—either locally or in Uganda—jobs are very hard to come by and therefore most people have limited or no purchasing power. Due to the war and/or the death of parents

¹⁰ For a report on the conference see <http://www.ploughshares.ca/libraries/Build/Juba06report.pdf>

many youths had to abandon their education. This has left them unqualified for formal employment. A former raider, now working for an NGO, noted:

You see, the problem here is also that when there is an advertisement, the conditions are that you must be a secondary school leaver—'O level'. This is not good. Where will you take those who did not complete secondary school; those who lost both parents and relatives and those who could not finish school because of poverty or insecurity?

The problem is what to do with these deprived youths who feel neglected by the government. They feel ignored by the process of demobilizing the SPLA and welcoming back into the fold those who deserted the SPLM but are willing to come back. Some of these youth are among those who turn to armed robbery in the absence of any other way to earn a living. The youth would like to have work or a small business but as long as insecurity prevails, it will be unlikely that things will change.

There is not yet a structure on the ground to effectively deal with returning IDPs and refugees. It was estimated that 96,766¹¹ IDPs and refugees would return to Eastern Equatoria by 2006. In October 2007, 409 refugees returned to Eastern and Central Equatoria from Sudan. There have also been a number of IDPs making their own way home from camps in Khartoum-Omdurman and elsewhere. In Southern Sudan, around 140,000 IDPs made their way home in the first six months of 2007, joining more than an estimated one million who have returned since the signing of the CPA in 2005. However, accurate figures on overall IDP numbers in Southern Sudan are highly unreliable as there are few mechanisms set up to identify migration patterns or document and respond to protection needs of returning IDPs.¹² Currently, many returnees share housing with the local families, with whom they also share food and other resources. This has increased the burden on the local communities and caused an increase in food insecurity.

Raiding affects agriculture when attacks coincide with the cultivation season. Young raiders spend months planning retaliation, choosing an opportune time to attack their targets and seize their assets. Cattle products like meat and milk form very important components of the local diet. Milk is especially important for children. Raiding for food becomes important as a result of the food insecurity that is periodically experienced. When stocks of grains go down, people are known to go out to raid cattle which, they then barter for grain from merchants.

¹¹ OCHA IMU, "South Sudan IDP Refugee Return Population Projection for 2006," OCHA, 2006.

¹² Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, "Sudan: Outlook for IDPs remains bleak," October 2007, [http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/\(httpInfoFiles\)/CA](http://www.internal-displacement.org/8025708F004BE3B1/(httpInfoFiles)/CA)

2. Drivers of Violence in Ikotos County

The quest for bride price, cultural pride, desires for revenge, and poverty are cited as the main reasons behind the scale of cattle raiding.

2.1 Cattle Raiding and the Quest for Bride price

The issue of bride wealth contributes greatly to conflict within the communities living in Ikotos and is directly linked to gun violence. All of these issues are closely linked with rampant post-war poverty in the communities, and erosion of cultural values as communities that hitherto were enemies mix and intermarry. Marriage is a very strong and honorary undertaking among the Lango. A Lango elder and intellectual described its central importance:

Among the Lango, every normal young man must marry. In the old days, young men who would go to boarding schools far away from their villages, would leave schooling half way and rush back home for the sake of marriage. If a young man is timely married, he is considered a family man; he is respected. Young men always want to have children before they are old. When they marry late in age (above 35), people laugh at them. Being a bachelor for a long time is like a breach of social norms, so one would be a laughing stock to the community.

To conduct respectable marriages among the Lango, one must have cattle. If you have a lot of cattle, you are highly respected for cattle are a measure of wealth. With many cattle you are a rich man and can marry at any time. Traditionally people with more cattle would marry more women and bear many children. That is what gives cattle such importance in the community. One who has many cattle has access almost to everything. Having cattle is equated to having a lot of money in the bank. People always come and borrow from those who have more animals for traditional performances, including two of the most important ceremonies, funerals and marriages.

With the recurring cycles of conflicts in Sudan, some Lango clans lost most of their cattle and fled to Uganda. They then resorted to cultivation to make a living and used money (instead of cattle) to pay bride wealth. Now cash is often accepted for marriages but when challenged to pay the bride price in cattle, raiding may be the only option for youth in an environment where small arms are in abundant supply.

The bride price has noticeably increased. Parents of a bride-to-be, now ask for a significantly higher amount of money from the prospective groom. The prices are especially high when the groom is not from the bride's community. There have been cases where the disapproving girl's parents ask for between 40 and 50 head of cattle, while hoping that the groom-to-be will find it impossible to pay and give up. In a pre-war situation, the number of cattle required ranged between 15 (in Imotong) and 22 (in Ikotos town). Today, the pressing demand for exorbitant bride wealth drives the aspiring groom and his friends to raid to attain the 40-50 head of cattle demanded by the prospective bride's family.

To circumvent having to pay exorbitantly for the bride, many youths have raped and impregnated girls to force their parents to let them go at a cheaper price. Culturally, parents cannot live with a pregnant daughter in the family home, because doing so is considered shameful. They may let her go at a cheaper price but also may coerce the groom's family to pay the normal bride price. However, the girls' brothers, in most cases, demand the bride wealth with violence and may end up beating the potential husband. This has at times led to the death of the prospective husband, which then results in retaliation by his family. At times, parents are beaten by poor prospective in-laws when they go to demand bride wealth for their daughters. When such clashes erupt between families, guns may be used.

Informants told us that a new practice has developed. When a man is caught making love with a girl, or has impregnated her but is unable to pay the bride price, her family can lock him in his house, sometimes using up to 20 padlocks. The groom's parents or other relatives are then forced to pay about UG Shs. 10,000 per padlock per day (approximately US\$6) as a fine until they pay the agreed bride price.

The other reason why most parents demand very high bride price is because traditionally it is shared with the extended family. For example if the price is 30 head of cattle, the immediate family of the girl would take 25 head and the rest would be shared among the uncles, aunts, and other close relatives. This tradition is reinforced by a very strong belief that a girl may not bear children if the price is not shared. In case she does, it is believed that such offspring would die. However, most of the grooms cannot produce 30 cattle from their own kraals and are therefore forced to go and raid elsewhere.

This study also found that there were set ways within the communities of dealing with pregnancy out of wedlock. When a young man has made a girl pregnant, the parents or their emissaries go to discuss the issue with the family of the offending man. They then agree on compensation, which varies from one community to another within the larger Lango tribe. The Lokwa traditionally paid six goats. In Imotong six goats were paid for fornication, while if the girl got pregnant, the fine was one cow and six goats. The same fine was asked for in Logir and Dongotono. In Bira the fine was seven cows.

A priest explained to us that the fine demanded for compensation has become a problem because there are now inter-tribal marriages—such as between the Lotuko and Lango—among tribes with different systems of compensation. When an agreement cannot be reached, it was reported that people resort to violence or forceful confiscation of the culprit's property and then demand as much *kasuru bet* (bride wealth) as they want. The fact that currently there is no standardized procedure to deal with the issue of bride price in mixed marriages has encouraged the offended families to ask for up to 1.5 million Uganda shillings (\$880) which the culprits have to pay to avoid chaos and potential bloodshed.

Some of the interviewees clearly recognized the links between bride price, cattle raids, and armed violence. They pointed out that the strong link is especially present in cases where a youth is poor and has no sister whose bride price he can use to marry the bride of his choice.

Girls and women also play a role in encouraging raiding. Beautiful brides-to-be are known to compose songs to exhort young men to go and raid cattle to pay for their bride price.

Another related issue that brings conflict in the area is absentee spouses. There are many women whose husbands were forced by war or work to move to either Juba, Uganda, or Kenya. Many of these women have subsequently started new liaisons with other men in the community. Violence erupts when these women bear a child or seek to legalize the new relationship. The woman's in-laws often become violent because they feel they have paid *kasuru bet* in vain. Such in-laws often resort to using guns when the new husband refuses to pay sums demanded of him.

2.2 Cattle Raiding: Pride, Revenge and Poverty

Some raids are to take revenge for events spread out over many years. For example, the enmity between the Lotuko (of Torit County) and Imotong people can be traced back to the killing of a Lotuko hero called Lohuyoro, some "seven generations ago". This was a humiliation for the Lotuko, made worse by the song composed by the Imotong to commemorate their victory. The victory song is still very popular among the Imotong generations later. Even though the original incident took place so long ago the two communities are still sworn enemies and the Lotuko forever contemplating appropriate revenge for the death of Lohuyoro. While the song is meant to annoy the Lotuko, it is also intended to ensure that the future generations do not forget and to remind them of their obligation to participate in defending themselves against the Lotuko.

The cattle raids often occur between the four tribes Lango, Lotuko, Buya, Didinga in Sudan, and the Karamojong of Uganda. The Didinga and Buya, and Buya and Logir also often raid each other for cattle. The diagram below shows a sketch of the trends that the raids among the tribes in the region take.

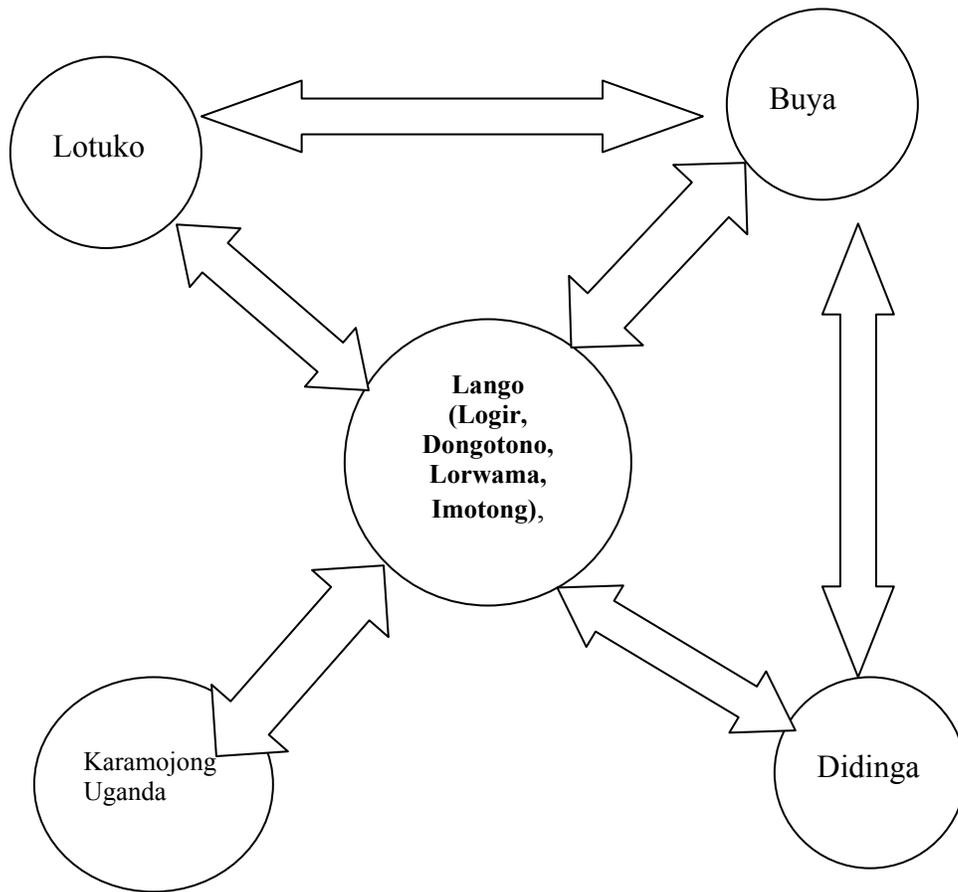


Figure 1. Raiding Patterns among Regional Tribes

Some of the raids are driven by a cultural sense of pride, offering a means for young men to be identified as heroes within their communities. Among the Toposa people, in Kapoeta County, it was revealed that, if one is killed while on a cattle raid he is treated as a hero and is given a burial with pomp and fanfare. As an informant explained:

If you go to the Toposa, they have their culture: if you die of a natural death, you are not recognized as a hero in the community. No cow is slaughtered, no funeral is held, you are thrown away like a dog. But if you die raiding you are a hero. Cows will be slaughtered, people will praise you.

To take vengeance is a cultural necessity. As one informant explained it:

When our cattle are raided, we also organize raids on the tribes that have raided our cattle... Now if for example, my brother is killed in a raid, I have to avenge his death. So what we normally do, we go and lay ambush around that village where the brother was killed until we also killed someone important from that tribe.

2.3 Rape

Instances of rape were reported by many informants. Rape is certainly much more common than would appear from examination of official statistics. It is surprising that when we interviewed members of the police force, they told us that only six cases of rapes were reported in 2005. We found no reported cases of rape victims seeking medical attention at the hospital.

A police informant described what regularly happens:

You meet a lady in the road; you tell her 'I need you'. The girl either accepts or starts struggling from your grip. All the rape cases reported were at gun point. The rapists also use pangas (machetes) or knives while threatening the victim thus 'if you raise alarm, I will cut you'. Most of the culprits then flee the towns where they have committed the offences.

In the process of executing communal punishment, some SPLA soldiers were alleged to have raped women from among the communities that have been involved in cattle raids. An interviewee who insisted on anonymity noted the SPLA's use of rape as a means of communal punishment:

When SPLA comes, who is the loser? It is you the community. Even women are being raped just because of one person.

There are laws on the books against sexual crimes in the New Sudan Penal Code, Section 317, whereby a convicted rapist should be jailed for not less than 14 years in addition to paying agreed fines. However, in many cases rapists pay the bride price and a fine. Most victims do not report their rape, due to high stigma against rape victims and the shame that it may bring to the family. Families may not be willing to report for fear of reducing the bride price if it is known that a young woman has been 'spoiled'. There are no organizations offering any services to rape victims.

A Lango elder and intellectual had a reservation on the way people use the word 'rape'. He explained that traditionally, girls' elopement is still practiced among the community. This is where a girl is taken 'by force', by a group of boys at night and locked up inside a hut to spend the night with her boyfriend. Once they have spent a night together the girl is said to have become his wife. All the relatives of the boy have to do is to inform the parents where their daughter is. The parents of the girls then send an emissary to discuss the bride price. Within the traditional Lango community, this is not considered to be rape, although it may constitute rape according to the penal codes.

When a girl is forcibly taken, it is now less likely that her brothers will come in the traditional way, to negotiate and demand their rights, instead they are likely to come and beat up the potential husband, at times causing a fatality which leads to a cycle of revenge and retaliation.

2.4 Banditry

Mujirimin (criminals) ambush passers-by in order to loot and kill. Interviewees suggested that many are driven into these violent livelihoods by poverty and hunger. As one informant put it:

If one has no blanket, he goes and robs so that he tries sleeping under a blanket covering. If a person has gun, but does not have food, he can still kill to get something to live on.

Banditry is also propelled by the quest to acquire a gun, which in turn is used for cattle raids. Without a gun, one cannot raid cattle in a community where everyone is armed. One informant told us:

If I don't have gun, I ask people to lend me theirs, once I get it, I go and lay ambush on the road looking for whoever is carry a gun..... 'tang' (sound of a bullet on the target) I kill, so that I get my own gun. Once I have a gun of my own, I am already rich.

An angry individual, whose son or brother has been killed in a raid, may lay ambush and kill anybody related to the tribe of the raiders. Traditionally, among the Lango and their neighbouring tribes, cultural values around killing were respected. There used to be a strong prohibition against attacking women and children. However, with the advent of small arms, these traditional constraints are regularly ignored and cultural rules are breached.

2.5 Alcohol Sale and Consumption

All interviewees raised concern about the sale and excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages in Ikotos, particularly strong drinks imported from Uganda. They pointed out that taking of alcohol in the area has reached alarming levels and is causing social havoc. The most dangerous alcohol, referred to in southern Sudan as *guu*, is 40% alcohol and said to make those who drink it temporarily delusional.

We were told of a typical incident:

In Seretanya, a young boy stole some guu and drank. When he was drunk, he climbed over a big rock about four meters high. He stretched out his hands imitating an air plane and he said he wanted to fly like a plane. When he dived, he fell down badly and died.

In other cases, excessive alcohol consumption causes fights, random shooting into the air, domestic violence and even fights among members of the police force. Drunken youth are easily agitated and when they have guns they may become violent and start shooting. In a reported incident in Ikotos, a drunken man hurled a hand grenade and killed some SPLA officers. While during another incident, somebody under the influence of alcohol sprayed people in the market with bullets. On another occasion, a drunken father wanting to chastise his son bit him up randomly on the body while under the influence of *guu*.

Informants pointed out that much of the alcohol that ends up in Ikotos is purchased in Agoro market in northern Uganda, where it is exchanged for cattle or money. The researchers noted during field trips to Ikotos that teenage girls are used by distillers/middlment to transport alcohol in 10 and 20 liter jerrycans between Isoke and Ikotos. This not only exposes the girls to rape and murder by the bandits who lurk between the two towns, but also to arrest by the police and the SPLA who are known to arbitrarily punish those they arrest.

The effects of alcohol also have implications for food security. In the county most people survive on one meal a day consisting of porridge taken in the middle of the day or mid afternoon. In the morning, porridge is prepared for children but adults may venture out to look for alcoholic drinks to keep them going. This means that alcohol is taken on an empty stomach. In most cases, by the time meal is prepared, those who have taken *guu* are already drunk. This habit of taking a strong alcohol like *guu* on an empty stomach has serious health consequences.

2.6 Gun Trafficking

Guns are one of the main weapons used to perpetrate violence in Ikotos County. Here guns are not just a tool for self defense but a medium of exchange. Because SPLA fighters were not on regular monthly salaries and not provided with adequate food and other requirements, they have been known to exchange guns and ammunition for food, goats, sorghum, groundnuts, and any other foodstuff they could find. Many members of the local communities obtained their guns in this manner. In Agoro market in northern Uganda, guns were sold freely by traders from Sudan, Uganda, and Kenya. An informant who asked to remain anonymous told us that a nine- round automatic Yugoslavian Star pistol was sold in southern Sudan at UG Shs. 50,000 (US\$ 29) and is sold in Uganda for UG Shs. 300,000 (US\$172). An AK-47 is bought in southern Sudan at UG Shs. 100,000 (US\$57) to be sold in Uganda at UG Shs. 700,000 (US\$ 399). With the prospect of such high profits, weapons traders are willing to take great risks.

Buying of guns by the communities created something of a small arms race among tribes in South Sudan, further creating a demand for more guns in the region. Many arms dealers focused on south Sudan as prices were higher than in Uganda and more profit could be made. During this period, an AK-47 could be exchanged for two bottles of *kasesekassese* (a potent local alcohol brewed in Uganda) worth UG Shs. 40,000 and then sold on the Sudanese side of the border at UG Shs. 150,000. In 2002, the local gun markets in side South Sudan were in Agoro in Magwi County, Loguru and Lofus in Torit County, Laura in Budi County and Napotpot and Namuronyang in Kapoeta.

Proliferation of small arms in the area led to emergence of “gun hunters” who have made the roads in Ikotos County very insecure. Gun hunters are groups of armed men who waylay and kill travelers in the hope that they may have guns they can seize. The guns acquired by killing travelers are then used by gun hunters to conduct cattle raids within the region. Due to ensuing increased insecurity those who did not have guns started to look for guns to try and protect themselves. By mid 1990, gun hunting became the order of the day. Those whose

relatives were killed this way would in turn organize themselves and retaliate against villages where the gun hunters came from.

The diagram below illustrates the circle of gun violence in the County (Figure 2).

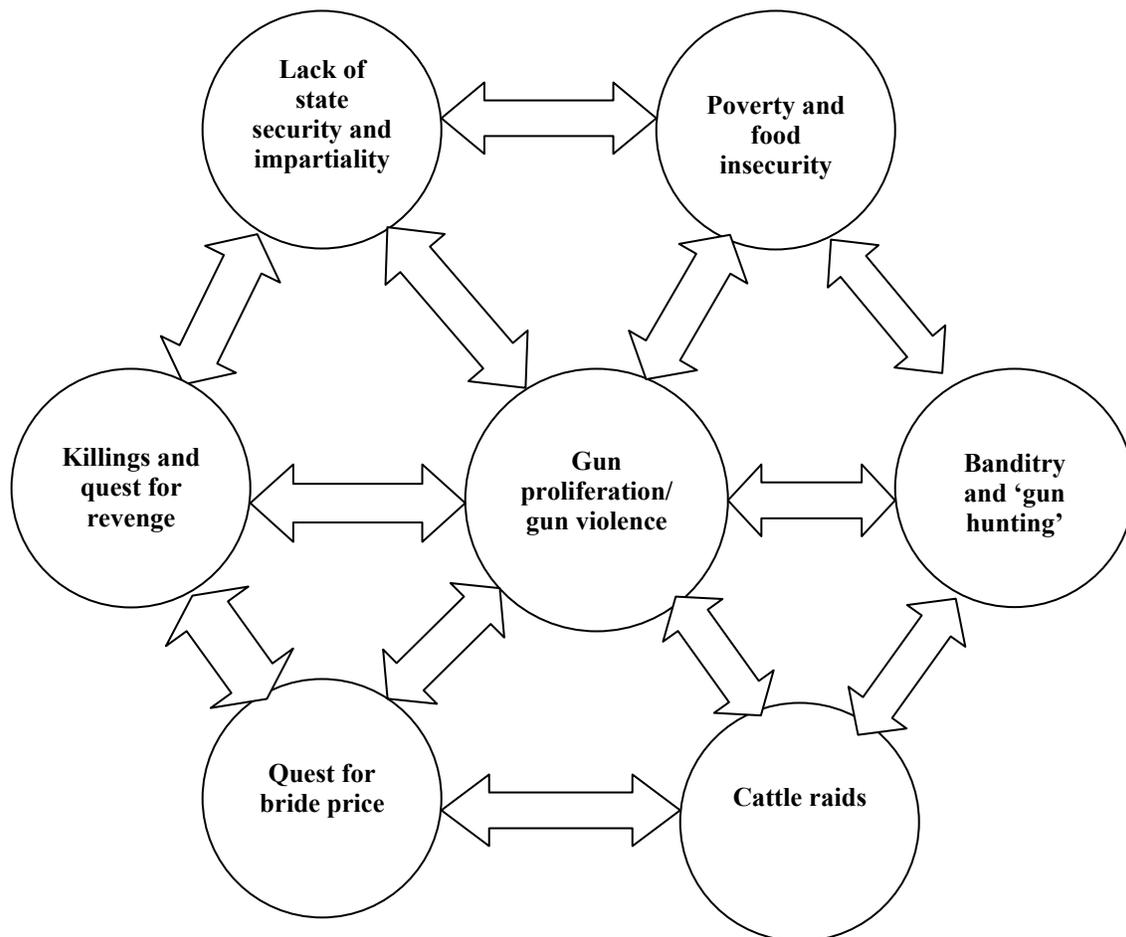


Figure 2. Circle of Violence in Ikotos County

2.7 Lack of state impartiality

Many of the interviewees pointed out lack of commitment by the government of the state of Eastern Equatoria to end cattle raids and the government's partiality when it comes to punishing or not punishing raiders from certain communities. It is alleged that the state government's inactivity is due to the fact that some members of the government might be profiting from the raiding.

An example of state inaction can be seen in a raid carried out by the Lotuko tribe in Imotong in December 2005 where members of the Lotuko clans from around Torit made off with over 200 head of cattle. A few months later Lotuko raiders returned and killed some people in the

same area. Five months later, when the research team interviewed people in the area, the government had yet to respond to this attack, despite the significant loss of life and scale of cattle theft.

One disgruntled informant condemned the SPLA thus:

There is also a problem with leaders...some send forces from Torit to Imotong to come and collect raided cows, and yet during the time cows from Imotong were taken, nobody send the soldiers to return them to Imotong.

Government functionaries are seen as encouraging, supporting, and condoning cattle raids by members of their own tribes while punishing those from rival tribes. This has resulted in tensions with some deciding to act unilaterally to solve cattle raiding disputes, hence threatening the legitimacy of the local government authorities. Respondents from Ikotos accused the authorities in Torit of raising tension between Imotong people and the people of Kafurere in Torit County. They pointed out that when Imotong people reported to the state governor that their cattle had been raided by people from Kafurere he took no action. Subsequently, the Imotong launched a retaliatory raid between Torit and Hilleu, having received reports their animals had been seen in the area. This prompted the Governor of East Equatoria to act, and he organised a joint force of SPLA and GoS soldiers to go to Imotong to punish the cattle raiders. The people of Imotong saw this as blatant bias because the governor is from Torit County. It was also seen as an attempt by their neighbors to peddle influence in the SPLA and to misuse the army against them just because they are better represented in the government and the army. This quarrel escalated to the extent that Salva Kiir Mayardit, the SPLM leader and GoSS President had to intervene to order the army to move out of Imotong. However, tensions remained high five months later. The Imotong people were still afraid to go to Kihyala in Torit County to transact their businesses for fear of being attacked.

The cattle raids have also resulted in fighting in the Imotong mountain ranges that have drawn in the SPLA who have been sent there to stop local tensions erupting into a full scale war. This has heightened tensions as communities' mistrust and fear of the SPLA because of their tactic of imposing collective punishments on communities until culprits are handed over.

The conduct of sections of the SPLA forces, the police and the local administration in both Ikotos and Torit Counties have made it difficult for some communities to trust them to ensure their security. We heard accusations that they practice nepotism, are corrupt, impose unfair communal punishments, use torture on suspects, and rape women from villages of suspected criminals. LRA forces have frequently attacked the local communities for foodstuff, abducting children and adults, and killing and maiming people. Neither the SPLA nor the Ugandan People's Defense Force (UPDF) have been able to provide adequate security to the local population. Elements in the UPDF have been accused of selling weapons and ammunition to arms traders in southern Sudan, thus further increasing the number of weapons.

2.8 The Police Force

In Ikotos County the police are also in charge of the prisons. Many informants claim the police force is corrupt and unreliable. For small bribes they will, release suspects from their cells. There are cases where suspects related to police officers were released without charge. The police often falsely claim that suspects have escaped. Criminals are well aware that if they are caught, they will be able to bribe their way to freedom. Upright police officers are frustrated when they do their duty, only to see injustice prevail.

These law enforcement challenges are the result of the fact that by the end of the long civil war there was no credible police force or prison system in South Sudan. When they took control of the GoSS, the SPLM seconded some military officers to form a police force. This force is yet to be professionalized, since most of its members have not yet received any training as police officers to enable them deal with members of the public. Some of the interviewees accused the police department in Ikotos of torturing innocent villagers as a communal punishment to persuade them to hand over criminals. As one put it:

If a person committed a crime in the villages and he ran away, the police normally come and round up the villagers and torture the innocent civilians. They demand that the villagers show the person who committed the crime... Even if you are falsely accused, instead of interrogating you in a good way, they beat you up before interrogation.

Adult males from communities suspected of harboring criminals are rounded up and punished and their animals taken. They are beaten up until they disclose the identity and whereabouts of the alleged criminals. People rounded up by police night patrols are arbitrarily fined, often having to pay with livestock. Many innocent civilians have thus suffered at the hands of the police, inevitably creating much resentment towards them and driving them to seek revenge on individual police officers.

Drunkenness was also identified as a problem in the police force. Interviewees reported that some officers often report for duty drunk. The research team had a first-hand encounter with drunken police officers during the course of their interviews.

As there are no proper jails in Ikotos County, the police are able to arbitrarily detain people for long periods without formally charging them or taking them to court. Prisoners are routinely caned or forced to perform manual labor. Detention and release of suspects and imposition of fines is seemingly done at the whim of the police, with many of the detainees being punished, fined and released without going through any formal court hearings.

2.9 SPLA Soldiers

Researchers heard many complaints against the SPLA. Many have lost faith in the ability or willingness of the SPLA to impartially defend the people. SPLA soldiers are accused of using the cover or darkness and dusk to dawn curfews to arrest, intimidate and dispossess people.

Particularly vulnerable are those returnees from Uganda who do not speak Juba Arabic¹³ are suspected of being foreigners and thus badly treated. One person alleged that:

The night curfew is abused by the soldiers. At night when the soldiers find you, sometimes they mistreat you and take you to jail after taking all your belongings. Also here in Ikotos we have people who have just returned from refuge in Uganda, some of them do not know there is curfew and when they are arrested they are not even forgiven for their being new in the area.

Some high-ranking SPLA offices stand accused of illegally smuggling *guu* from Uganda, secure in the knowledge that their own luggage is not inspected at border crossings. Some SPLA top officials are accused of allowing heavy weaponry (such as RPGs) to be used by their own relatives, rather than taken into combat for their intended purposes. The SPLA are said to have supplied weapons to their own tribes for acquiring cattle. Youth from Ikotos who were SPLA soldiers were reported as saying “if you don’t raid now, you will die in the war without owning cattle”. The same interviewee reported that in Ikotos area, a good number of SPLA officers own large numbers of cattle acquired through raids.

The SPLA was also accused of robbing people of their property before the coming of Alosio Ojetuk to Ikotos, the SPLA commissioner credited with commitment to tackle anarchy. A trader claimed that:

Those SPLA soldiers used to forcefully rob people’s property; they see someone having something good. They just go and kill the person and take his property. Now when Ojetuk came...

2.10 Constraints on the Ikotos Business Community

Violence in Ikotos has greatly affected local commerce. According to local traders, the gun violence on the roads is sponsored and sustained mainly by bandits crossing from Uganda. However, they feel such banditry is often inaccurately blamed on the LRA. One told us that:

They (Ugandan militias under UPDF control) also attack our people coming from Nimule and they take their cattle on their way back. And they claim that that is the LRA... Those causing atrocities along the roads here are not really the LRA alone, sometimes they are (Ugandan) government militias. Normally when they see a vehicle coming and it is loaded with goods, if there are no SPLA soldiers on the vehicle, they attack and loot the vehicle. The reason I am saying this is that there was a time when some ‘bandits’ clashed with the SPLA around Ikotos. It happened that one of those wounded in the clash was found in Madi Opei hospital in Uganda. If that was an LRA, I don’t think the UPDF would have allowed him in the government hospital.

¹³ The lingua franca used between different communities in the region and within the SPLA is a pidgin dialect of Arabic known as Juba Arabic. Anybody not able to respond to orders in Arabic immediately stands out as a foreigner.

The other major problems faced by businesses in the area is the very poor and dangerous road link with Uganda and the lack of markets in Bira, Ngaluma and Imatong. Isoke market only started operating in 2002. Our commercial informants pointed out that free movement of people and goods is restricted due to insecurity caused by the presence of bandits, the LRA and bad roads that have not been repaired for decades. Movement is so slow that a journey from Kitgum to Ikotos that used to take four hours, now takes up to 24 hours, or even longer during rainy season.

The monthly Agoro market serves traders and customers from both Sudan and Uganda. Agoro's main advantage is that it has a good supply of drinking water from a river that comes from the Imotong Mountains. Many Sudanese cross the border to buy and sell in Agoro for there are not enough commodities available in Ikotos. Due to insecurity on the border, some have suggested establishing a cattle market in Seretenya which is inside Sudan but this has not happened as the area lacks running water.

Interviewees reported dangers in reaching the market from the Sudanese side. Some traders and customers from South Sudan have been attacked and killed by unknown gunmen. It is said that people are quietly killed in Agoro by business rivals or when they seen to be carrying large sums of money. Despite heavily taxing the Sudanese traders, the Ugandan government does not offer them sufficient security. UPDF forces in Agoro are shielded by civilians as their barracks are at the center of the village and in the case of an LRA attack it is the community living around the soldiers that suffers first. Informants note that during attacks on the market in recent years, the UPDF has done little, responding only after the LRA rebels have left the area.

An interviewee on the Sudanese side of the shared Uganda/Sudan border feels that the governor of Eastern Equatoria State, stationed in far-off Torit, has not done enough to press the Ugandan authorities to protect the Sudanese traders. He has allegedly failed to take action about raiding incidents reported to him. It is widely believed that he should instruct all the county commissioners and the administrators to do more to tackle these security issues.

Those engaged in commerce point out that most traders operate on a shoestring, lacking the capital to bring in such commodities as musical instruments and videos, despite high local demand. There is no wholesale shop in Ikotos because of lack of capital and the army restricts what can be imported into Sudan. The business community would like support of the kind provided by an NGO in Yei which provides loans. They feel that in Ikotos the government levies high taxes but offers little in return. Respondents want the GoSS to provide loans and encourage establishment of banks in places like Torit, so those engaged in commerce could safely store funds and obtain loans. The only bank that has established branches in South Sudan is the Nile Commercial Bank with branches in Rumbek, Yei, Juba, Yambio, and Maridi.

3. Responding to Violence

Structured rules about gun control started around 1989, when the SPLA captured many towns in Eastern Equatoria. This was the time the SPLA was transforming itself from a rebel group to an organized movement. At this time, the SPLM thought the civil population should have guns for self defense, but there was concern for their proper use, hence only selected communities were armed. Importantly, since not all communities supported the SPLM whole heartedly, recruitment and representation in the force was varied. This variation also extended to access of arms by non combatant members of various communities living in the region.

SPLA commandants posted to Ikotos were at first very inaccessible since they kept many layers of bodyguards who would interrogate whoever was trying to come to see them. Officials also ordered the SPLA fighters to restrict the movement of people within and around the towns. Gun violence continued to worsen even with the advent of new administration in the area.

There was a marked improvement in security in Ikotos County after the appointment of Alosio Ojetuk as a Commissioner of Ikotos County. Many respondents attributed the change to Ojeuk's institution of strong directives, prohibiting unauthorized carrying of firearms in Ikotos County which was widely credited with bringing relative calm to the town. To a certain extent he instilled discipline among the SPLA soldiers in Ikotos. Gun control in Ikotos was initiated to restore peace in the area, to stop raiding and killing and to enable communities to gain respect for the government. The idea was conceived by elders, local leaders, women groups and churches during peace meetings which was later implemented by Ojetuk. The Commissioner ordered stationing of security officers on all the routes leading to Ikotos from Agoro and Seretenya. Any alcoholic beverage netted by the security personnel was destroyed on the spot.

When Ojetuk was subsequently promoted to become Governor of East Equatoria in 2003, he imposed stricter gun control regulation. The rules put in place by Ojetuk to regulate use of firearms were:

- 1.** No unnecessary firing in the air
- 2.** SPLA who are not on duty prohibited from carrying weapons
- 3.** Only the police, SPLA and high ranking government officials allowed to carry guns
- 4.** No civilians should possess guns
- 5.** All guns in civilian hands to be handed in to the civil authorities
- 6.** No civilian allowed to move with guns in towns
- 7.** Any senior SPLA official carrying a private gun must have a license

Interviewees in Ikotos town reported that gun violence has decreased and that rules have instilled military discipline and led to decreases in rape, random discharge of weapons,

highway robbery, and trafficking and consumption of alcohol. Some interviewees pointed out that now people can venture out on the road to Ngaluma without the fear of attacks by 'gun hunters'. The rules are so strict, according to some interviewees, that when armed villagers come to town they keep their guns at the periphery and pick them up when going back to the villages.

The people who abuse guns to raid, kill and rape are armed members of Ikotos' indigenous communities, as well as the armed forces and outsiders. The civil communities of Ikotos, the IDPs and returning refugees have responded to the problems associated with the alarming increase in gun violence both as individuals and organized groups. The church and civil society organizations in particular have been the springboards from which the members of the community have been able to act.

Ikotos' indigenous communities have collaborated with the local authorities and provided information leading to the arrest of those who have violated gun control laws. Some members of the community have also volunteered to work as members of their local Boma Liberation Council (BLC), a civilian group set up by the SPLM to address security issues pending extension of the ability of the formal police force to operate in rural areas. BLCs serve as links between the civil administration, the police, SPLA and communities. BLCs strive to help address the misuse of guns, but their impact to date has been modest because they are not uniformed or armed. Some interviewees expressed a desire for BLC members to be armed so that they could play an effective undercover law enforcement role.

The futility of entrenched cycles of violence was movingly described by a female respondent:

If the government could hear me, I wish all cattle in the world should all be killed. It is cattle that bring death here. The cattle conflicts have resulted into countless court cases. It is because of cattle conflicts. Our conflict with the Didinga is all about cattle, nothing else. When you see people fighting and killing one another, it is because of cattle. Let all animals be taken I don't care; let them also take all guns away.

Between 1992 and 1998, NGOs, churches, rainmakers, elders, and the SPLA held several peace reconciliation meetings across the Kidepo valley to bring peace among raiding tribes of the Buya, Lotuko and Logir. Unfortunately, all the resolutions reached at those meetings did not hold due to retaliatory raids and killing and absence of formal structures of law and order.

Manna Sudan, an indigenous NGO working to promote peace in the Kidepo valley¹⁴ has not given up on working to bring peace among the local communities. At the time of this field research, it was setting up a radio service station between Buya (Budi County) and Bira (Ikotos County) to preach peace in local languages. It hopes to use radio programs to strengthen gun control regulations, educate people on the dangers of raids, and create awareness on HIV/AIDS, vaccination programs and other community services.

¹⁴ www.mannasudan.org

The local Peace and Justice Committee is a body formed with consultation between the local authorities and the church. It was charged with a duty to conduct a survey that would inform the actions to be taken by the commissioners of Torit, Ikotos and the administration at Imotong, in order to foster reconciliation among the conflicting tribes.

The building of Manna peace village was also envisaged as a partial solution to the problem with the Didinga. The peace village was to be constructed at Kamulach, astride the frontier between the Didinga and the Lango tribes. It was meant to bring antagonistic tribes together, to provide positive opportunities to interact with one another through shared music and dances and a trading space. It was also hoped that a school would be built for children from the feuding tribes to interact and study together, hopefully providing a harmonious example for their elders. The project was not successful as it encountered funding difficulties and soldiers assigned to protect the village had no food. When the peace village was being built, it was alleged that an armed Didinga group came and dispersed people, even going so far as killing people in the local hospital.

3.1 Dealing with Alcohol

When *guu* became a problem and driver of violence in Ikotos, people complained to the commissioner and suggested the need for a ban on its sale. Respondents said that it was clear to the community that youths were dying due to drunkenness, while women witnessed their husbands die as a result of conflicts resulting from heavy drinking.

In South Sudan, Christian churches exert much influence on personal behavior, even though communities still hold dear to many pre-Christian cultural beliefs. The churches, with the help of their international mother churches, have been at the forefront of providing relief—as well as spiritual assistance to the communities. When alcohol became a threat to the social fabric, churches became the most vocal advocates for prohibition in order to protect individuals and families from violence. Initially, the local authorities were loath to support the ban as they saw alcohol as a livelihoods opportunity. Churches thus came together to form a lobby group to make the authorities change their view and control alcohol consumption. A religious leader noted:

We even met the commissioner who is now the governor of Eastern Equatoria State (Mr. Alosio Ojetuk). So we talked so much on the area of beer which was being brought from Uganda. There was a disagreement between the local authorities and the church, with the former saying that the beer was bringing income. But we as a church opposed it, saying now: it is bringing income but it is also bringing death. So we as a church, we don't want because when people become drunk, they pick their guns and start shooting. Especially here in Ikotos, somebody hurled a hand grenade and killed the officers, and some body blew up the whole family here out of the influence of beer. And somebody also sprayed people with bullets in the market, you see. It is all the influence of the beer.

In 2004 and 2005, the churches held a number of meetings in collaboration with the local authorities, starting with interchurch rallies to which NGOs were invited. Alosio Ojetuk was

supportive and involved. The rallies discussed how to combat the sale of illicit alcoholic beverages like *guu* and *kasesekasese* from Uganda. Church and state actors overcame their initial disagreement and agreed to jointly tackle the scourge of alcohol. The churches also organized peace meetings in Bira (a village in the north east of Ikotos) in collaboration with the local commissioner. He outlawed alcoholic beverages in the area and ordered security officers to confiscate and destroy alcohol moving on all the routes leading to Ikotos from Agoro and Seretenya. This has resulted in a significant reduction of alcohol in the area. The church has been able to work with chiefs and even military personnel to help address the alcohol problem.

While tribal chiefs keep an eye on those brewing and selling alcohol in the communities, the army personnel in Ikotos have been instructed to secure all the roads leading to Ikotos and impound any alcohol being smuggled. They have undertaken this duty with diligence. Those arrested are then fined and their property confiscated (including vehicles used to ferry the drink) as a way of enforcing the ban on the sale and use of alcohol. Judging from the interviews conducted with the key members of the community, it was clear that the communities have also supported the ban.

Unfortunately, even though the sale of *guu* is banned in Ikotos County, it continues to be transported to Torit County where it is sold. The transporters apparently use bush routes. Most of this is consumed in the villages around Ikotos town, where the police are yet to be effective at controlling sale and consumption of illicit liquor and holding of guns.

3.2 Tackling the Problem of Bride Price

The research team was informed that there have been initiatives from within the community to deal with the problems arising from bride price. The larger Lango community in Juba organized a five day conference in May 2006 to tackle the issue of compensation for pre-marital pregnancy, especially among schoolgirls in Ikotos. They discussed how to:

- standardize bride price and fines between tribes
- respond to schoolgirls' pregnancies
- address the problem of pregnancies of women whose absentee husbands are not in the community

The conference in question was sponsored by the PACT in conjunction with the County Peace and Justice Committee. PACT organized a similar workshop in Torit to discuss the issue of cattle raids in Imotong and Torit counties and devise ways of resolving them.

3.3 Women at Forefront of Campaign to End Armed Violence

Interviews conducted with women leaders revealed that women have played an important role in bringing about security changes in Ikotos through their continuous and outspoken advocacy. For example, following the killing of a pregnant woman along side her 11-years old daughter by bandits in June 2003, the Kamosing Women Group (a group involved in peace building, supporting women's self reliance activities, and gender advocacy) organized a

meeting with the County Commissioner in which they strongly urged him to strengthen gun rules and bring culprits to book. Women from various groups in the County, in collaboration with the Commissioner, then embarked on a strong campaign against violence against women. These courageous women were willing to go into villages that were in 'no-go zones' to bring their message of peace and the need to stop violence against women. A member of the Kamosing Women's Group described their campaign:

After presenting our petition to the Commissioner, three of us from the women's group and representatives of other groups were selected and brought together. We went to a number of villages talking to men and women to stop killing. We spoke to the people in Imotong against illegal killing. This prompted Commander Asai to instruct the communities to report cases of raids. Right after that, one of the raiders was arrested in Ngaluma after robbing cattle in Ikotos... From that time, cattle raid stopped a bit. Then we went and spoke to people in Ngaluma and they were very receptive. We told the young women to ask their husbands where they are going, should they see them dressing in fighting attire at night, preparing to leave the house. We told them to ask their husbands what would happen to their young children if they died during the raids. We also asked them to seek assistance from their mothers-in-laws or other elders if they were not able to do so [prevent the men from raiding] themselves. We told the women to put their husband down and ask them 'What they had married their wives for?' and 'what would happen to the wives if they were killed?'

Women bear a large percentage of the consequences of violence in the county and have been at the forefront of advocacy against it in Ikotos County. They are well placed to appeal to the combatants, especially male youths to stop violent acts, which they do through using 'emotive tactics'. Women have shown how they can collaborate with each other and the authorities to help end the violence.

During interviews, informants expressed confidence that they are better placed than men to end violence. They noted that they can influence their husbands and sons in private through persuasion. Female respondents revealed that because of their advocacy initiative the SPLA was compelled to enhance security on the Ngaluma-Ikotos road after hunting and arresting criminals responsible for a spate of robbery, rape, and harassment of women. Increased security on this road has helped to enable women to go about their business with less fear of harassment or assault. The women proudly took credit for their contribution to the improvement of security situation in Ikotos Town and its environs.

3.4 Role of Churches and NGOs

Members of churches and community-based organisations have also brought pressure to bear on state authorities to take action. At the peak of gun violence in the area in 2004, the Ikotos Interchurch Committee—an alliance of the African Inland Church (AIC), the Catholic Diocese of Torit (DOT), and the Episcopal Church of the Sudan (ECS) in collaboration with NGOs—held many meetings on how to address this violence after being granted permission to do so by the local authorities. In all their meetings they urged the local authorities to crack down on misuse of alcohol and weapons. It took the Interchurch committee almost three years to persuade the government to implement the gun control rule.

NGOs like Manna Sudan have also worked closely with the members of the local communities to bring about peace among them. Manna's multi-lingual radio program, which is in the process of being established, is expected to talk with communities to consider the harms of cattle raids, the abuse of alcohol and banditry, as well as bring the various ethnic groups together through exchanges of information.

Members of the community have also participated in the gun control process through the Ikotos County BLC whose volunteers liaise with ordinary members of the community to monitor security threats within villages. In many cases, members of the community volunteer information about people holding guns illegally. Such information is then forwarded by the BLC volunteers to the police. The BLC acts as a kind of community policing unit, filling the current deficit in conventional law enforcement. However, BLC members put themselves at risk by publicly speaking out against criminals. The government should ensure there is adequate protection for BLC volunteers if they are to continue with this service.

4. The SPLA/GoSS Role in Gun Control

Currently, law enforcement is carried out by the police and SPLA, who impose a curfew and night patrol in the towns as deemed necessary. The soldiers arrest whoever fires his gun unnecessarily. A curfew was enforced in all areas within six kilometers of Ikotos town when the SPLA started to implement gun control rules. According to the police officers interviewed, the curfew enables them to arrest more rapists, murderers, and other criminals. For the first time high-ranking officers in the police and the SPLA, such as the base commander and senior members of the military intelligence, are seriously addressing violence. At the grassroots, the authorities depended on cooperation of the civilian population whose role was to report cases mostly through the BLC. Even though they cannot arrest suspects because they are not armed, they assist the police in arresting gun rule violators through provision of information.

Once an offender is arrested, he is taken to the police cells where he is detained while a decision on what to do is made. Currently there are (theoretically) set penalties for specific offences, including detention for a certain period of time, corporal punishment, and confiscation of weapons or payment of fine by the culprit. Since the culprit is not taken to a court for sentencing, the police serve as the judge and, if found guilty, carry out the punishment and serve as jailors. This is clearly very problematic.

Interviewees revealed that if a person is arrested for firing a gun in the air, he could receive 20-50 strokes of the cane or could be jailed for between a week and a month during which time he would have to work for the police (e.g., digging gardens or clearing undergrowth) and his gun would be confiscated. Interviewees further pointed out that the level of punishment depends on the whim of the particular officer on duty and how he judges the culprit's character. Another respondent pointed out that the police often give those they arrest a thorough beating before taking them to the station. The same respondent reported witnessing two such cases. This kind of brutal treatment by the police seemed to have scared some of

the people living in the town. A member of a local group working for peace recalls his memory of the punishment given to an offender who fired in the air:

My friend, that kind of beating! There was a boy who fired in the air here in Ikotos, just when the rule was first introduced; I think it was in 2004, I can't remember the month exactly. This boy was seriously beaten. He was beaten right after arrest, in the police cell, and again in the morning. He was taken around Ikotos town and was told to say repeatedly, "Firing in the air are bad, let people not do it". His face was swollen beyond recognition. There were two cases of such beating here in Ikotos, after that, people became fearful. Although the authorities were also taking the guns of the offenders away permanently, mostly it was really the beating that scared people. Secondly what reduced gun violence in Ikotos town was the ban of guu. I think that alcohol has bangi [cannabis sativa] in it. Because when people drink, they behave as if they were mad. There was a man just near the NCA compound after taking a lot of that alcohol decided to tear his shirt and removed even his trousers. He only remained with his juani [Arabic for underwear]. I think the ban of guu played a big role in reduction of violence here.

One interviewee had the following comment regarding Commissioner Ojetuk's role in addressing insecurity in Ikotos town:

Oh, Ojetuk has done that one, that is why you came and found Ikotos is now better. What was happening, actually, those soldiers [SPLA] they forcefully rob peoples' properties; you find a person organizing himself, when he sees some one having something, he just goes and kill the person and he takes his properties. Now when Ojetuk came, he ordered that no gun should be fired without any reason. No soldier should move with guns within the town unless on duty. When you are found moving with a gun within the town, you are arrested and brought here to the army barracks. Because of this, many were arrested; even some of the criminals surrendered themselves.

Another interviewee explained:

It was the time of Ojetuk when things improved...when Ojetuk came to the chair [when he was made the commissioner]...he approached the NGOs, churches, all groups of people in the County and then he brought the military near. Now soldiers follow any person who escapes with a gun. He also imposed a night and day curfew that covered up to a radius of six km of Ikotos town. They arrested many criminals around the town...Now you can go to Ngaluma road [one of the deadliest roads before] you find children are moving, coming with their greens [green vegetables].

4.1 Use of Excessive Force by the Police and SPLA

Interviewees seem resigned to police brutality as a price they have to pay for security in the town but do believe that the police are right. Arbitrary judgment and punishment by corrupt police is leading to miscarriage of justice. The police have usurped the function of the judiciary and the prisons, understandably leading to widespread resentment. Corruption and abuse by the police is also very likely to involve confiscation of livestock as a way of enriching

themselves at the expense of the community, and interviewees at times reported that influential members of the police force were benefiting from livestock they had confiscated from them.

Complaints of heavy handedness have been leveled against the SPLA. When punitive attacks occur, innocent people are abused and lose their livestock. Corrupt officers launch such expeditions to grab cattle for themselves. Though SPLA expeditions are meant to force communities to police themselves, they can backfire. A number of people remain bitter and see the SPLA as an enemy rather than a liberator.

4.2 Ongoing Rural Insecurity

However effective Ojetuk's measures have been in Ikotos town, they could not be implemented beyond it due to rural insecurity and ongoing rampant use of weapons. Informants report that gun control rules have not worked in the villages because police and SPLA patrols are limited to the outskirts of Ikotos town, thus making it easy for criminals to seek refuge further afield. The night curfew only applies for six kilometres around Ikotos town, ensuring that the sale and consumption of *guu* remains widespread in villages.

Interviews with the police force confirmed that soldiers do not venture outside towns to help enforce the gun rules. Therefore, there are allegedly more guns in the villages than in there are in Ikotos town. Villagers are said to be careful to keep their guns away when they venture into towns. One of our interviewees commented:

Well, although the rules introduced by Ojetuk worked, it was only in the Ikotos town. In the periphery of the town, the people are still living like cowboys. Everywhere you go, everybody is carrying a gun; in a short quarrel, they rush to guns and start shooting at one another.

Monitoring of gun violence and related cases is done by the local authorities, the police and, to a lesser extent, the military intelligence. The community reports the violators, often through the BLC, who in turn report their findings to the police to file and forward in a monthly report to the police commissioner's office. During an interview with the members of the police force, we were allowed to peruse records of cases of gun violence in the county. Such transparency is a step in the right direction, but monitoring is yet to penetrate the villages. Therefore, until the villages are provided with appropriate protection by police and military forces and gun ownership and violence are curbed, there is little that can realistically be achieved. Controls will remain confined to Ikotos town. So long as the villages are not secure, the town cannot claim any sustainable security since Ikotos town heavily depends on the surrounding villages for its sustenance. There is a serious risk that guns held freely in the villages can find their way into Ikotos town.

While the research team was in the town of Ikotos, there were no reported or witnessed cases of gun carrying by civilians, gun shots or murder. However as the team was traveling away from the town, it saw people carrying guns and young girls carrying *guu* just as they had in the bad years when violence was endemic and gunshots commonly heard at night. Armed violence was also very common in the area.

4.3 Factors Constraining Implementation of Gun Rules

Gun laws are mainly resisted by those who benefit from lawlessness such as raiders, gun hunters, unscrupulous SPLA soldiers and commanders and criminals. Interviews with members of the police force revealed that all reported rape cases were done at gun point, in which the offenders reportedly used guns to subdue their victims. Control rules have not gone down well with cattle owners who are out in the villages. If unarmed while herding their cattle, they feel most vulnerable to attacks by other armed tribes. The cattle owners also feel that because they bought their guns with their own money, they should not be controlled. Those attempting to enforce the gun control rules report that when they go to the cattle owners without guns they are looked down upon as the cattle owners have more powerful guns, and hence those trying to enforce the laws are not respected.

The police also reported that village elders are highly insecure because some areas are not yet disarmed. Also, women who have lost their children, husbands and or property to armed raiders or bandits and youth who are responsible for the feeding and watering of the animals are uneasy without the security of guns. Women also reported feeling vulnerable if people in neighboring counties and in Uganda are not disarmed. The youth are concerned that disarmament is being selectively implemented.

Additionally, many of the inhabitants of Ikotos believe that the main objective of the SPLM war against the Arabs from the north was to liberate the South, to totally expel the Arabs and their rule from the region and achieve self-determination. However, many key informants are now disappointed and concerned that the SPLM has embraced the Arabs, the very people the war was waged against. They do not see the SPLA caring for the orphans and widows of the war and feel the objectives of the war have not yet been achieved. They wonder why they should be disarmed when the struggle is not yet won. Many have been concerned by the apparent closeness of senior SPLA officials to the Khartoum regime. To make matters even more unstable, the CPA is yet to be fully understood by the people on the ground and the SPLA has not done the outreach that is necessary to inform people about the agreement.

Some of the villagers are also yet to feel the impact of the police force since many criminals are able to successfully hide there after committing crimes. The members of the BLC do not carry arms and as such could not execute any arrest. Although arming of the BLC may enable them to arrest armed offenders, it also would bring them into direct clashes with the offenders and their communities and would likely result in increased violence.

5. Addressing Ongoing Insecurity in Ikotos County

Throughout the interviews, it was clear that opinion leaders in Ikotos County want something done to improve security. They are united in wanting widespread disarmament to reduce the number of crimes. They are anxious that the semblance of security being experienced in the six-kilometer wide zone around the town of Ikotos has not been expanded and that under-protected agents of the state fear venturing into rural areas where they are out-gunned.

Acute lack of maintenance of roads is a consequence of the civil war which must be addressed. Some interviewees suggested it is imperative that the roads are opened up so that the security apparatus (police force and the SPLA) can quickly respond to cattle raids and bandit attacks in all corners of Ikotos County. Such quick response, if carried out professionally, could endear the villagers to the security forces and over time, hopefully, induce them to put down their arms. Most interviewees indicated willingness for armed civilians to give up their guns if the state could guarantee their security. The state cannot do so as long as the road network is so dysfunctional.

Many also pointed to the crucial linkages between poverty and insecurity in the county. During the war nearly all businesses, large and small, collapsed and have yet to recover. It is vital that people have legitimate means of earning their livelihood. People want state assistance to start small businesses, such as sales of second hand clothes. Grants and loans should be given to those with entrepreneurship interest and skills, particularly young people. Training in financial management could also be prioritized to help them realize their business ambitions.

The idea of reviving the Manna Sudan peace village was suggested by some interviewees as a project that could improve security while providing a viable business environment for members of different communities. Such an initiative would enable members of different communities to exchange goods ranging from cattle to household goods in an environment that fosters friendship and mutual understanding. Such sanctuaries from conflict would have to be protected by the state.

The civil service in South Sudan collapsed during the war as did the region's economy. As in other developing countries the civil service used to account for a significant proportion of employment in the formal sector. Its collapse therefore meant that many people lost their source of income. For the duration of the war, the main employers were international relief NGOs. Now the war has ended the SPLA does not need volunteer recruits and most soldiers are redundant. As the civil service is yet to fully pick up, the unemployed have to look for other means of earning a living. Many respondents therefore think of NGOs first when the issue of employment comes up. As one of the respondents pointed out:

The raiders could be legitimately occupied through provision of work by NGOs or the government. Currently jobs are hard to get as most people never finished high school, yet all the jobs advertised by the NGOs require that one must have finished high school. The youths are therefore deprived of opportunity to earn a living.

Such sentiments indicate that opportunities for employment in the region are still quite restricted. It is therefore important that as the new government implements reconstruction of South Sudan. Employment creation should be one of the main priorities, both in the civil service and also to encourage the development of the private sector as the South opens up to a market economy.

Education, both for adults and children, was identified by some respondents as a means of reducing insecurity in the area. Those who suggested introduction of adult education pointed out that it could be used to keep the minds of the raiders busy. They also called for establishment of more primary schools in the area as a means of instilling into young children the importance of education. A police officer movingly noted the connection between education and tackling insecurity:

There is only one message, let us create projects and get the raiders busy. These raiders, we need to bring projects in order to confuse their minds [meaning to divert their attention from raids]. Build them school and teach their children against raids, let the children get the message when they are young, the children in turn will pass the message to their children.

There are able-bodied youth who have passed school age and who may not be interested in formal education. Such youth can still be engaged in profitable projects. Vocational training in areas such as carpentry, masonry, brick-laying and other skills which are lacking in South Sudan is urgently needed now so that reconstruction can start in many parts of the country. Such skills could be used by herders on a seasonal basis. If raiders acquired marketable skills and could earn enough to buy cattle, it is hoped that they would stop raiding.

Another form of education that was suggested by some respondents to help improve the security situation in the region is security advocacy or peace-building work. From the interviews with the Kamosing Women Group, it was clear that there is already some measure of this kind of advocacy by women. However, the women in their discussion felt that they should be allowed and enabled to do more. As one noted:

The women of Ikotos, Budi, Kapoeta County, and all other places, should unite and select six women from all the counties in the area. The team could move all over the County for four months talking to men and raiders preaching against raids and violence. The activity should be a women affair, but if it must include men, then three quarters women. It would reduce resistance. Shooting women is not as common as shooting men.

The women further stressed that for their advocacy against raids and gun violence to succeed it is important to target the group that is most active—the youth. One woman recommended that:

The raiders, especially the youth, from within the community should be made to realize that when they go to raid, they come back with the loots to excited ululations by their sisters in celebration of their success in the raids. However, they forget that their brother has killed the

owner of these cattle he has looted and the victim's relatives are in a funeral as they celebrate here.

Others also suggested that the media should be used to educate people in the region on the importance of stopping the raids. Specifically they pointed out that the radio station being built by Manna Sudan could be used to pass such information to the Buya and Bira tribes so that they may stop raiding each other.

Respondents want advocacy to reconsider the area of customary laws regarding marriage in the whole of South Sudan. They want parents to be discouraged from demanding an unrealistic number of animals and an end to the recent trend of putting many padlocks on the prospective bridegroom's door. An affordable bride price should be fixed by the authorities. The community and the government should sit down and come up with laws that fix the amount of bride price and entitlements of brides' families. A respondent suggested that something like nine or ten cattle could be agreed on for initial payment, instead of 22 cattle that are currently being asked for in Ikotos, with the rest to be subsequently paid.

There is much concern about links among nepotism, favoritism, and cattle raids. Interviewees pointed out that many of the civil authority leaders and administrators are not neutral, especially when it comes to inter-community conflicts. Some respondents therefore suggested that there should be transparent measures put into place to address this so that the administrators could deal with all local communities fairly, equally and transparently. They should desist from supporting raids by members of their communities against their rivals because as civil servants they are supposed to serve all equally. A special stress was laid on the conduct of *payam* administrators for they are the grassroots state representatives whose impartiality is critical in ending raids between communities.

As noted, there is widespread concern that few people from Imotong have influence with the SPLM and GoSS compared with neighbors such as the Lotuko. There is not a single Imotong among the ranks of SPLA commanders. Representation in the army is seen as crucial for it determines whether a community will be punished or assisted after a cattle raid. The SPLA's double standard have infuriated the Imotong and led them to raid the Lotuko in retaliation. Preventing these occurrences requires more Imotong representation in the civil authority and the army and wide respect for the laws of the GoSS.

Informants want action to prevent SPLA soldiers giving weapons to their kinsmen. Some urged the GoSS to closely monitor issued weapons and ammunition and impose harsh penalties on those who mislay, sell or transfer them. Some want the government to confine all SPLA soldiers to barracks when not on duty in order to stop them from encouraging raids and distributing weapons. The impression of state partisanship must be actively challenged by vigorous state action against anybody who engages in cattle raiding.

It is this researcher's opinion that the local authorities should recruit and train a professional, multi-ethnic, and non-partisan standby section of the police to deal with the issue of cattle raids. Kenya and Uganda provide models of such a dedicated force.

Disarmament is at the heart of any endeavours to improve security. The dilemma is how to promote disarmament when state agents have not yet acquired the capacity to maintain law and order, particularly in villages. Should those who hand in guns be compensated or not? Some of the interviewees supported this idea, pointing out that compensation should be considered for those who turn in their guns because many of them bought them with their own money. However, experience from elsewhere shows that people tend to turn in old and unserviceable guns and keep good ones for their security. Weapons buy-back programs tend to fuel arms markets in the area. Given that South Sudan is surrounded by armed groups fighting governments in Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo, it is likely the weapons would quickly circulate into the surrounding regions and countries.

The pattern of disarmament is also an important issue. If not done uniformly, the communities that are disarmed become vulnerable to attacks from communities that are not yet disarmed. An example was given of what took place in Bor in June 2006, where the Dinka community was disarmed without disarming their Nuer neighbors who promptly came and raided their cattle. Likewise, the current disastrous practices and results of forced disarmament in the Karamoja region of Uganda should be heeded.¹⁵

Disarmament has to consider the situation beyond the national borders as the region is awash in small arms and light weapons. To deal with the issue of disarmament that goes across the borders, it is of utmost importance that the governments of bordering countries find workable ways of disarming their people and preventing cross-border insecurity and weapons trading.

Related to disarmament, is the porous nature of national borders. There is little point in South Sudan disarming its people if the status quo remains in eastern and northern Uganda and northwestern Kenya. Some respondents want the GoSS to secure the borders and negotiate with the Ugandan and Kenyan governments to conduct similar voluntary disarmament exercises. As it is apparent that some elements of the UPDF contributed to insecurity in South Sudan by weapons trading, the GoSS needs to urge Uganda to end the criminal activities of its military and the militias they support.

One respondent proposed a way of combating leakage of arms from SPLA military stores.

The people dealing with military logistics should not be from the locals. White persons, let's say soldiers from Norway or America should be brought to take care of the military stores for the CPA interim period. They are not likely to sell the ammo to the locals that end up causing violence in the area. It is common knowledge that ammunitions used for cattle raids are in high demand in this area such that there have been cases of intercepted ammo from the

¹⁵ See Darlington Akabwai with Priscilla E. Ateyo (2007), *Scramble for guns, cattle and power in Karamoja*, Feinstein International Center, Medford, MA. <http://fic.tufts.edu>.

UPDF stock meant to be sold in this area in exchange for cows. Use of neutral persons to handle ammo should also be extended to other war torn areas.

That the local people do not trust troops from neighboring countries or their own armed forces to handle arms storage and call for foreigners to do so illustrates the intensity of distrust. On face value, the suggestion may sound ridiculous and unworkable, but looked into deeply it reveals that some community members would be more confident if non-local and non-regional persons were involved in the disarmament process because they are less likely to be driven by local sectarian politics and corruption.

Arms are a massive constraint on peace, security, and development throughout south Sudan and it is unfortunate that so little research has been done in the region and in Ikotos in particular to gauge the extent of the problem. Very little has been done to gauge the effectiveness of the bodies entrusted with maintaining security in the region. Such research, as we have attempted to carry out here, could help to inform policymakers regarding the underlying factors, dimensions, and extent of the problem of insecurity. We have spent time researching and detailing the culturally specific reasons that influence security and insecurity, such as the issue of bride price and cattle raids. The issue of bride price will be contentious and a driver of dispute as long as communities continue to believe that girls are sources of wealth whose returns must be maximized. Again association of raids with heroism is not likely to die soon in the local communities, nor is young men's desire for wives and status.

The Ojetuk rules were said by some respondents to have brought security to Ikotos town. Most of those we interviewed see interventions by the police and the SPLA in a positive light. Their willingness to tolerate extra-judicial activities by the police is limited. It is imperative that law enforcement is speedily introduced and enhanced and human rights abuses perpetrated by state agents are ended. All branches of the security services urgently need to be trained in human rights and their enforcement.

Appendix: Group Discussion and Key Informants

Group discussions were held with:

- Members of St. Joseph Youth Association, Ikotos County—youths aged between 20 and 33 years from Lango, Logir and Lokuwa communities—were chosen because they work with youth groups and were therefore able to appreciate problems around unemployment, lack of bride price, gun violence and cattle raids. Like some other youth they had studied in Uganda during the North-South war and graduated from the Ugandan secondary education system.
- Women from Kamosing Womens Group were chosen because they had taken part in community peace-building through local NGOs and because they had engaged civil authorities in dialogue for peace and other development activities.
- Members of the Police Investigation Department—all of them Sergeants or higher ranks—were interviewed because of their role in peace enforcement and collating statistics of security incidents.
- Members of the business community were interviewed in order to understand the security concerns of those engaged in commerce.
- Members of the Ikotos Peace and Justice Committee were interviewed because they had in-depth knowledge of local tensions and initiatives put in place to tackle them.

Key informant interviews were conducted with:

- A senior priest from the Diocese of Torit who has worked in the area since 1975 and been involved with communities in peace-building activities.
- A pastor from the African Inland Church (AIC), Ikotos County who has participated in peace dialogues to end raiding and urged the government to tackle illicit sale of weapons and *guu* in the county.
- A former Logir cattle raider, turned NGO worker. Having been brought up in a raiding environment, he had much insight into the forces behind cattle raids.
- An experienced and senior Sudan Relief and Rehabilitation Commission's (SRRC) official who lived in Ikotos throughout the war and who has worked alongside many government commissioners. Unable to meet with the research team, he completed a questionnaire which threw light on the government's gun control strategy in the County.

Several additional key informants must remain unidentified due to the sensitivity of their responses and their desire to remain anonymous.