



**South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project (SSEPP)
1st Quarter 2019 Summary Report**

Report Outline:

- I. Brief Context Update*
- II. PCOSS Education Department Update*
- III. Teacher Training Update*
- IV. RECONCILE Peacebuilding Update*
- V. Testimonies of Impact*
- VI. Challenges*
- VII. Financial Update*
- VIII. Mission Co-Worker Update*



Lucy Awate, Geri Moses, and Shelvis Smith-Mather singing at the Peer Counselor Commissioning Service in Rhino Camp

I. Brief Context Update:

“This is what is killing us there (in South Sudan),” Lucy Awate said as she facilitated the gathering in Rhino Refugee Camp. “Often, if it is my child, I will defend him, without seeing my child has done something wrong... We see our tribe is doing something wrong, but we defend it. That is what is killing us there,” she lamented to the twenty peer counselors being trained through RECONCILE International.

Next, Awate applauded David, the older gentleman whose actions contradicted the theme of defending one’s own. David’s son created a problem with his neighbor, which led to insults and quarreling. Then, the neighbor’s son cut David’s son with a machete.

“It caused a lot of chaos in my family,” David explained, “I told my son he was wrong.” Humbling himself, David worked towards reconciliation. When concluding the story, David stated “my neighbor said I, and my children, are forgiven.”

The first and second phases of the counseling training took place in October of last year, the third in January 2019. Between phases, the counselors practiced their new skills. Once back together again, they spent a full day discussing both the successes and challenges they faced while counseling others. Their stories were numerous and diverse:

“One farmer had pigs, and another cassava. The pigs destroyed the cassava. The second farmer showed up at my door early the next morning, angry, asking me to help solve that problem”;

“My brother got drunk and started untying the straw on my roof at night... my kids woke up and started crying... if not for this training I would have [fought] him”;

“there is an old mother who came to church and said she has a problem with her neighbor. She had a small piece of land to grow crops, now the neighbor is using it as a road for his car... I brought them together for a meeting... they have forgiven each other, they are living well now.”

Their encounters with domestic disputes brought up strategies for addressing: physical abuse, problems created by marrying multiple wives, as well as the situation of one spouse testing positive for HIV and the other negative. The stories began to fill up the space inside the mud-walled church, then themes and counseling techniques began to connect them.



Peer Counselors Discussing Different Theories of Personality

“I met an angry man who was on his way to beat his wife. He said every time he buys a new phone, his wife takes it away,” one woman shared. “After I talked with the man for a while, he calmed down and decided not to beat his wife, but what do I do now to help solve the problem?”

“That one is still hanging,” Lucy Awate said, putting her two hands out in front of her body, one slightly higher than the other, mimicking a scale. “It is not balanced,” she explained, pointing out the need for the counselor to hear the wife’s side of the story as well. Discovering the wife’s reason for taking the phones should reveal the source of the problem.



“Now we are looking at the leaves, the leaves are the wife taking the phones” Lucy continued, hands swaying above her head like tree branches. “We need to dig down to the roots,” Lucy reached towards the ground, “the root cause must be addressed for the problem to be resolved.”

Their eagerness to share their experiences as well as their numerous efforts to practice their new counseling skills, testified to the group’s commitment. In the refugee camps, the effects of trauma are widespread and the number of people in need of psychosocial support overwhelming. One zone at a time, RECONCILE equips counselors from within the camp and the host community to become wounded healers. May God continue to give them strength and wisdom for this important ministry.

**Lucy Awate (above) will be traveling in the US in September and October representing South Sudan as one of the 2019 PCUSA Peacemakers. Please consider inviting her to share with your congregation. <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/story/peacemakers-will-tell-churches-about-matthew-25-work-around-the-world/>*



Head and deputy Head Teachers examining the effects of trauma on children

II. PCOSS EDUCATION Update:

- Over 50 parents and education stakeholders attended each of the full-day trainings for 2 school communities. The morning included training on: the roles and responsibilities of the Parent Council members, the relationship between the PCOSS Education Department and the local school, and the ways to help children succeed in school. In the afternoon, the Parent Councils held a meeting, guided by PCOSS Ed. Dept. Their meeting covered the processes of: goal setting, making work plans, working through conflicts between members or with leadership.

- Head Teachers and Deputy Head Teachers held their quarterly networking meeting. Each administrator shared great moments from 2018, current challenges, possible

opportunities, and words of wisdom for greater success. At the meeting, one school decided to share extra textbooks with another school. The topic: “The return of the child soldier to the classroom,” was also covered. This training focuses on the identity of child soldiers, ways they became child soldiers, the effects of child soldiering, and the school community’s role in helping them to reintegrate into society.

- Church and community leaders met with the PCOSS General Secretary, PC(USA) Mission co-worker Lynn Kandel, and PCOSS Ed. Dept. to discuss construction. The community continues to prepare the land for a school building, including grading and filling in low-lying areas.
- A school received 3 teachers’ tables and 2 other schools received school stamps to certify important documents.
- PCOSS Ed. Dept. made administrative and mentoring visits to 4 schools.
- Discussions in Pibor, along with the Trinity Presbytery South Sudan Mission Team, government, community, and church leaders focused on greater educational inclusion and output in the state, reducing the number of girls out of school and reducing early marriage.
- The PCOSS Education Director and Ed. Facilitator held a one-day working retreat to plan for the year.
- Comprehensive 2019 statistical data was gathered in 10 schools.
- PCOSS Ed. Dept. attended the NGO education cluster meeting in Juba.
- To encourage the education of girls in rural communities, scholarships covered the school fees for 77 girls this term (30 in Pochalla and 47 in Pibor).



One girl (purple shirt) in this fourth-grade class in Pibor, South Sudan

III. Teacher Training Update

- Two student teachers returned for their final term at Solidarity Teacher Training College after a month-long teaching practice. One of these student teachers died due to illness. Please pray for his family as they mourn.
- The PCOSS Ed. Dept. mentored teachers this quarter and facilitated the process for a teacher who is physically disabled to receive a hand-powered mobility chair.

IV. PEACEBUILDING Update

- Meetings held with 3 IGA (Income Generating Activity) groups in Rhino Refugee Camp. All the groups are earning a profit in their businesses, yet the monitoring visits revealed that further mentorship would be beneficial for the members as they practice their new skills.
- The third and final phase of Dynamic Peer Counselor and Peer Educator Training was carried out in both Rhino and Bidi Bidi Refugee Camps.
- Commissioning events took place for the 39 trained peer counselors (11 women and 28 men) which church, community, refugee, and local government leaders attended. Participants received certificates as well as bicycles to facilitate their activities in their respective camp zones.



Ready to ride across many miles of refugee settlements, facilitating healing through counseling and peer education

V. Testimonies of Impact

Education

- School administrators are requesting that their teachers receive training in the Developing Children's Capacity afterschool program and the program be implemented in their schools. The Head Teacher at

one school, where the program was implemented last year, stated: *“These children practice the activities done in the afterschool program at home with their parents and playmates. This makes them all interested in wanting education, either for themselves or for their children. The children come to school on a more regular basis because they do not want to miss out on anything, especially the days of the afterschool gathering. Their attitudes are changing, they are repeating what they have learned in the program, and they are thinking of things other than the hardships they are facing or of getting a job or even getting married (in reference to the girls).”*

Peacebuilding

- One pastor confessed that before the counseling training, he was only preaching at people when they came for help. After the training, he realized his role in counseling was to ask questions which will help the individual or group find solutions to their own problem. *“I am now a good counselor”* - Rev. Charles stated with a smile.
- *“I didn’t know how to help someone who has a disease, before I would just point and say, ‘that person has that disease’, now I come close to the person and talk to them”* – Peer Counselor Bidi Bidi Camp
- *“Before, I was harsh on certain situations, but the sessions reduced my anger. If you counsel with anger, it will cause problem. I now know the difference in counseling and advising. People are now praising what I am doing. By now, I am a different person than the previous one.”* – Hamid – Peer Counselor from the Ugandan host community near Bidi Bidi Camp
- *“Before this training, I found that we normally use the negative way of solving problems, this training paved a (new) way. Before, it was revenge first, then reconcile later, but now you solve (the problem) first.”* – Peer Counselor in Bidi Bidi



Rosemary (front left) singing with Peer Counselors at their Commissioning

• *“When the crises started in my country, I ran with my children to Uganda for refuge. Then I was brought to the refugee settlement. I lost interest in life. I didn’t sleep at night. I didn’t have appetite for food. My mind was totally confused because I left everything, including my husband, in South Sudan. So life with my children was very tough in the camp. But, when I was selected to be one of the peer counselors, I was able to share my pain during the trainings. Today, I am happy to share that I am relieved from my pain and I am helping my fellow women in the settlement to develop (a) sense of resilience, for us to gain hope.”* – Rosemary (Peer Counselor)

• *“(The project) has created strong relationship between the (Ugandan) host*

communities and the (South Sudanese) refugees in both camps. This was evidenced by the Area Parish chief who reported significant reduction in the crime rate in his village, Eden Zone, Rhino Camp” – RECONCILE staff

- *“(The Income Generating Activities) help families of the IGA groups to afford a balanced diet. Both host and refugee participants in the IGA groups reported increase in meals eaten from 1 to 2 per day.” – RECONCILE Staff*
- *“I am happy with this business because it was our choice” – IGA group member in Rhino Camp*
- *“(The business) makes a person busy, so it gives hope” - IGA group member in Rhino Camp*



Fetching water instead of going to school in Pibor

VI. Challenges

- *“The deterrent comes in when the community does not see more classrooms. It is hard to grow to another class if the visible classroom is not there.” – PCOSS head teacher*
- It was difficult to recruit women to attend the Peer Counselor and Educator trainings. Many felt they would not be able to attend due to lack of formal education, yet the trainings were translated into a local language. Childcare for the women is also an obstacle, so RECONCILE plans to budget for childcare in the upcoming trainings. The few women who did complete the training have started to encourage other women to attend future trainings.
- The length of the process for transferring funds to partners makes planning activities difficult. This also caused a

delay in scheduled activities.

- Inter-ethnic conflicts still exist in some of the refugee settlements, for example, in Tika Zone of Rhino Refugee Settlement the different groups are not able to co-exist peacefully. RECONCILE plans to target Tika next with upcoming SSEPP activities.

VII. Financial Update

Thank you so much for your gifts this quarter. Please prayerfully discern whether your family, church or presbytery feels led to make a pledge which would help partners plan for future activities. We thank God for each gift and for Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis, MN continued commitment to match 38% of each contribution. Your generosity brings hope and healing to our sisters and brothers in South Sudan. Thank you!

VIII. Mission Co-Workers Update:

Sharon and Lynn Kandel: We continue to be amazed at the work teachers are able to accomplish in the internally displaced camps in South Sudan. Working with very little in the way of materials and often without desks or chairs, these teachers are committed to doing the best that they can. I often wonder how much I would have learned in school if I had had these conditions and yet these students take pride in learning. A good lesson for all of us - we can continue to learn no matter where we are or the conditions we are living in.



Thank you PC(USA)!!!

Leisa Wagstaff: Thank you for your support. Please pray for our safety and good health as we travel into the various school communities as well as renewed vision and commitment to education.

Shelvis and Nancy Smith-Mather:

It was an exciting quarter for the Smith-Mathers. Shelvis was invited to preach during the commissioning of the Peer Counselors in Rhino Refugee camp, and Nancy shared words of encouragement during the commissioning in Bidi Bidi. Nancy also visited with PCOSS in Juba as well as with the IGA groups in Rhino camp. The testimonies we are privileged to hear continue to challenge us and give us strength. Thank you for playing a role in the transformation we witness.



Nancy speaks to the Peer Counselors at their commissioning, telling them that their story will reach the US: “Your willingness to volunteer your time as counselors and bring reconciliation in your communities is an inspiration to people around the world!”



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