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Monica Kiden lives in Bidibidi refugee camp. She sees the Peer Counselors trained through SSEPP working hard to bring healing.

I. Brief Context Update:

Recently, BBC global news aired a heartbreaking update about Bidibidi refugee camp in Uganda. The suicide rate is going up.

The story focused on the additional stresses brought on South Sudanese refugees by the pandemic. It noted the negative emotional effects of social distancing, and the fact that underfunding has decreased food rations, causing hunger. Psychosocial services are extremely limited, the reporter explained.

Through the South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Program, by God’s grace, peer counselors in Bidibidi and Rhino camp are equipped to serve at this critical time.

The effects of the pandemic are also increasing conflicts in the camps. So much so, that the UNHCR and OPM (Office of the Prime Minister) called together peacebuilding organizations at the end of May to provide them with an update and to request their assistance. RECONCILE’s implementing partner in Uganda, YWAM (Youth With a Mission), attended the meeting and shared the report.



RECONCILE Program Manager, Geri Moses, trains peacebuilders in the refugee camps in Uganda

In summary, there are conflicts between South Sudanese refugees related to food rations, which have become violent. There are conflicts between refugees and host communities, mainly concerning struggles for limited resources, such as water, firewood and land for agriculture. In Rhino Camp, there is a conflict between South Sudanese refugees and Congolese refugees who live together in one settlement. The recent violence in Jonglei State, South Sudan has also increased tensions between Murle and Nuer groups living in Uganda.

The following message came from the meeting’s conveners: “the role being played by [peacebuilding] organizations ... was pivotal in promoting peace and holding the settlements

together. The termination of peace building and reconciliation ministry activities [due to the COVID lockdown] in



“We have benefitted from this program... It has helped us to work together with the host community... I want to thank RECONCILE.”
- Elias Wudango, Bidibidi camp

the refugee camps and host communities created a huge gap that has given room to all the above conflict issues.”

Thankfully, by strengthening the peacebuilding skills of refugee and host community leaders, the SSEPP’s support helped ensure local leaders can address some of the life-threatening conflicts, even in the absence of peacebuilding organizations.

While the coronavirus currently restricts travel for RECONCILE’s staff to Uganda, the work of conflict resolution and healing in the camps continues. The work goes forward because RECONCILE focuses on capacity building and relationships, preparing others to build the peace they long to see. Through a follow-up phone call with a trained refugee leader, RECONCILE’s program manager heard the following update and narrated it for PC(USA) churches:

“I talked to one of their chairpersons, [a pastor trained through the SSEPP in Eden Zone, Rhino Camp]. Things have been difficult. Things are expensive. There was fighting between the host community and the refugees. One of the sons in the host community was suspected to be a thief. He was beaten, then died... The father [admitted] his son was a thief, but the sister of the thief said that the refugees [who killed him] should be poisoned. The sister was found dead the next morning. No one knows how she died.

The host community was ganging up on the refugees, but the police intervened. The leaders trained [by RECONCILE] in both the host and the refugee community wanted to bring the two sides together to address the matter... The pastor said that... the group that were trained helped to resolve the conflict, so things have calmed.

[Those trained] became a part of the solution. They merged the citizens and the refugees. They were really together, and they tried their best, for the sake of peace.”

In both the areas of peacebuilding and education, the SSEPP supports capacity building. This focus allows transformative efforts to carry on, long after implementing partners move to another community to multiply the number equipped. Such a strategy makes sense in a context of instability. While the usual cause of such instability for South Sudan has been violent conflict, now we witness that there is fruit born even during a pandemic. And for that result, even while incredible challenges remain, let us give thanks.



Community leaders, of various ethnicities and faiths, trained as peacebuilders

II. PCOSS Update:

- SSEPP activities were limited this quarter due to coronavirus restrictions, yet the PCOSS General Secretary, Education Department Director, and Finance Director met to discuss the way forward at the end of June.
- The PCOSS is one of several PC(USA) partners in Africa who received funds from Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA) and World Mission (WM) to create awareness about and address the effects of the coronavirus. Altogether, about \$406,000 reached the continent through PDA and WM for partners.
- Due to coronavirus restrictions, the PCOSS General Assembly, previously scheduled for April, was moved to November 2020.
- PCOSS General Secretary, Rev. John Yor, described the current context with these words: “...the situation facing us in Juba and South Sudan as a whole: news of death and killing every day; raping looting and destruction.”
- PCOSS staff recently lost family members in Juba, and hundreds have been killed in Jonglei State. PCOSS is involved in peace mediation regarding the conflict and requests prayers for peace. Concerned PC(USA) constituents circulated these requests, including a call to prayer on the violence in Jonglei issued by the Stated Clerk of PC(USA), Rev. Dr. J Herbert Nelson: <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2020/7/17/stated-clerk-issues-call-prayer-south-sudan/>



South Sudanese children’s education interrupted too many times

III. Across Update

- While SSEPP activities are on hold, Across continues to carry out other essential programs in the midst of coronavirus restrictions, including additional COVID 19 programs. One example of a way the virus is affecting activities, is that Across now provides refugees with three months of rations at a time. Consequently, the need to gather for distribution is less frequent. Also, program trainings are now done in smaller groups. Even in the mist of the pandemic, Across remains committed to both relief and development programs, viewing them as critical in South Sudan.



Program participants in Uganda continue their work while communicating with RECONCILE by phone

IV. RECONCILE Update

- RECONCILE staff are currently not allowed to enter Uganda to implement SSEPP programs due to travel restrictions. They have, however, remained in touch with program participants in the camps as well as with YWAM, their implementing partner based in Arua, Uganda.
- Like PCOSS, RECONCILE received a grant from PDA and WM for coronavirus programs. They have

been raising awareness about the virus and distributing soap and hand washing buckets in Morobo, Lasu, Tore, Lainya, Wonduruba and Yei.

- In addition to COVID 19 efforts, late in the quarter, they were able to travel within South Sudan to Morobo for other peacebuilding and trauma recovery programs.



James Salah and his wife stand proudly in front of the home they built in Bidibidi Refugee Settlement with the support of an IGA group loan

V. Testimonies of Impact

- James Salah John participated in both the peacebuilding and income generating activities trainings in Bidibidi refugee camp. As an income generating activity (IGA) group member, he was able to borrow from the group that created a savings and loans business. With the funds, he and his wife worked together to make bricks. They used a portion of the bricks to build a home for their family and sold the rest to pay back the loan.

Community members noticed James' nice home and were impressed with his initiative. They then decided, even though Salah is considered a youth, to select him as the village leader. He is now proud to be the Chairperson of Village 13, Zone 1, Bidibidi settlement.

In his new role, James holds the responsibility of helping solve community problems. He does not feel alone, however, in addressing such matters. "I know the peer counselors, so as a chairperson in the village, if there is a problem, you bring in the peer counselors," he explains. His testimony speaks to the benefit of RECONCILE's strategy to train both peer counselors as well as equipping community leaders with conflict resolution skills.

- Continuing to show resilience in the face of a pandemic, many of the IGA groups in Eden Zone, Rhino Camp have changed their businesses to goat rearing. The number of goats has increased from 36 to 45 as several have given birth to twins.
- Rev. Simon Anyamu, IGA group leader

- The group rearing goats in Bidibidi, has given 2 goats to each member and maintain 15 together as a group. They have sold some goats, using a portion of the funds to buy medicine for the goats and dividing a portion of the profit among the members. - Rev. James Loruba, IGA group member

- "The Peer Counselors are working hard in helping the communities through counseling,



Baby goats born to IGA groups are a big blessing

as they face the traumatic situation caused by COVID-19 in both Camps” – Geri Moses, RECONCILE Program Manager

- “The peace building group in Eden Zone helped to resolve the conflict between the host community and the refugees... The reconciliation has been done very successful and the communities have forgiven themselves.” - Rev. Simon Anyamu, IGA group leader



Pray for peer counselors as they address the rise in domestic violence

VI. Challenges/Opportunities

- With the increased stress caused by the pandemic, domestic violence has increased in both Rhino and Bidbidi camps. Consequently, this is the area in which the peer counselors are most involved. Some of the counselors in Eden Zone, Rhino Camp, however, have left the camp.
- The COVID-19 restrictions on movement in the refugee camps posed a challenge for some of the IGA businesses, decreasing their profits. For this reason, many began to focus on goat rearing and agriculture instead of selling items in the market.
- There is high level of theft in the camps. Ten goats were stolen in Bidibidi from the Rock United IGA Group.
- In the first quarter of 2020, the Office of the Prime Minister [OPM] in Uganda decided not to allow RECONCILE and YWAM to bring together the two communities in Omugo and Tika zones who were preparing for a reconciliation forum. The communities were ready to discuss the violence and loss of life which took place between them, which resulted in the UNHCR moving the groups far apart from one another. RECONCILE planned to meet with both communities and the OPM to discuss this situation further in the second quarter, hoping to advocate the forum go forward, yet coronavirus travel restrictions canceled the plans. Sadly, the tension between these communities began to rise again this quarter. Please pray for the situation and for an opportunity to continue the reconciliation process.



VII. Financial Update

The economic situation in the US and around the world has been extremely difficult for many. It is humbling to see that even in such dire circumstances, people continued to give to support education and peacebuilding in South Sudan. This quarter, the amount in the SSEPP account increased by \$3,544. With Westminster’s match, that comes to \$4,890. Thank you for your incredible generosity.

Even with interruptions and challenges, South Sudanese students remain committed to education

VIII. Mission Co-Workers Update:

Sharon and Lynn Kandel:

"We are of course in the USA due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope to return to South Sudan soon but realize that 2021 may arrive before that happens. We continue in our other role as Regional Liaisons for the Horn of Africa but from a distance from our assigned location.

I did receive a phone call from Rev. Stephen Nyang, the PCOSS Education Department Director, the other day while I was shopping at Walmart. What a surprise! He was in good spirits, and we had a pleasant conversation. Due to the ongoing pandemic in South Sudan, SSEPP activities are very limited the same as school activities here in the USA, only exponentially more so in South Sudan because of communication costs and difficulties.

We continue to pray for what we hope will be an end to the pandemic soon. Sometimes, as God's people, we are called to wait on His timing instead of forging ahead on ours." - Lynn Kandel



Remaining in communication with South Sudanese partners helps the Kandels give current updates to PC(USA) constituents

Leisa Wagstaff:

"So many of you have reached out to inquire of my wellbeing as well as that of our South Sudanese friends and colleagues. I cannot express how much your ministry of walking alongside means to so many people. Thank you.

Although the news coming out of South Sudan exposes additional new challenges each day, the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCOSS) members express hope for a better tomorrow and are working towards easing the detrimental effects of these challenges. In the midst of their own tears and discomforts, they have not forgotten the power of prayer and continue to keep the mission co-workers and all members of the PC(USA) in their thoughts and prayers. May we continue to be partners in looking out for one another.

Because of the coronavirus and/or communal fighting, educational activities are limited. We know that generations have already missed out on opportunities to be educated. It is my fervent prayer that another generation does not lose out as well.

I have temporarily relocated to Atlanta, Georgia. Being back in the area is both exciting and frightening; frightening in that so much has changed since my college and seminary days here "several" decades ago and exciting in that I may have opportunities to reconnect - within COVID-19 restrictions - with people and locations that have helped to shape and strengthen me over the years. I continue to struggle with technology and many hours are spent just trying to figure out how to share a screen on Zoom, connect music to a PowerPoint presentation and so on. Bit-by-bit, though, I am becoming more comfortable with the intricacies of my new reality: virtual communication." – Leisa Wagstaff



"It's not working but I know this is how the YouTube video showed to do it!"

Shelvis and Nancy Smith-Mather:

“Our family continues to exist in an interesting space between the emotions of stress/chaos and of gratitude/grace. Remaining on the UK school calendar means summer break begins on 22 July. So, we do our best, with a large portion of grace required, to balance work and communication with colleagues located on three different continents while also homeschooling our three young children daily. A day can feel like a relay race, our responsibilities passed back and forth between us, as both parents need computer time, and all kids need supervision and attention.

Yet a spirit of thankfulness permeates all the chaos. In May, we moved in with family in Charleston, SC. In addition to more family support in our quaran-team, we are grateful for good health, food, shelter, family, meaningful work, and a faith that uplifts and connects us with friends across the globe.

In homeschooling news, Nicole (age 3) is starting to recognize small word families, Addie (6) is learning French, and Jordan (7) just mastered his 12 times tables. Shelvis completed and submitted 70 pages of theory research on social anthropology to Oxford. With this major step complete in his program, he now has approval to shift his research focus specifically to exploring an “anthropology of peacebuilding in South Sudan.”

We are also excited to share that Nancy is pregnant! God willing, a baby girl will join our family in October. The kids can’t wait to meet little sister and teach her so many things.” – Shelvis & Nancy Smith-Mather



Shelvis helps Jordan learn multiplication tables using sidewalk chalk



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