



**South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project (SSEPP)  
3rd Quarter 2018 Summary Report**

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**Mary (green shirt) and friends lamenting life in the refugee camp, with RPI alumni (upper left) facilitating their group**

**I. Brief Context Update:**

Squeezed together with girls about her same age, Mary sat on a bamboo pew in the sanctuary. It was the first morning of a 3-day children’s trauma healing workshop. The list of things written in her new notebook included: too much house work, loss of my parents, and missing school.

Mary’s parents died when she was seven. She is now seventeen, living in Bidi Bidi refugee camp with a woman she calls “stepmother.” Mary was not alone in lamenting the increase in house work in the camps.

“In South Sudan, we cooked with charcoal,” another girl explained, “now we must go very far to cut trees for wood to cook, and we get tired.”

While other grievances included: lack of a good door to keep rain out of the house, fear of the many snakes in the camp, and not having mattresses to sleep on; collecting firewood got the most attention in this conversation.

“If you go to cut trees, the nationals (Ugandans) will chase you away with pangas (large knives)”, one girl said, pointing out the high tension over limited resources among refugees and their host community.

“And there are animals in the forest that will chase you” Mary added, pointing to a bruise on her knee, from one such incident. The children described the different types of animals in the woods; the only one translated into English was baboon.

Fetching firewood proves difficult for many reasons, yet the account of a nine-year-old girl beaten to death for cutting down trees, raised the chore’s level of danger to ‘life-threatening.’ “But we have to get it anyway,” explained Mary, “because if we return home without wood for cooking, my stepmother will be angry.”

Pointing at the list on her page, Mary was asked: “Which one is the most difficult for you?”

Without hesitation, she replied “when I have to miss school.” Looking down, she added “it pains me so much.” Sometimes Mary must stay home to cook, to get firewood, or to fetch water. She longs to remain in class and continue her education. With her sister’s arm around her shoulders, she concluded, “we are really suffering here.”

The first day felt heavy with the weight of tragedy held in the hearts of about eighty children. By the second afternoon, the heaviness began to lift a bit. Sharing painful stories in a safe space, created a healthy release. At the end of the third day, the children “took their pain to the cross,” trusting in God’s love for them, and started to envision a brighter future for their lives.

After the closing session, almost all the children left the church, walking to their different “zones” or “villages” within the camp, but Mary stayed behind. Her beaming smile, and desire to linger with friends, bore witness to a change in her outlook and to the power of the Holy Spirit’s work in her life.



**Laughter and fun, healing for the soul (Mary in green shirt, left side)**

Perhaps the most encouraging part of the workshop, though, was the presence and response of the adult church leaders. The leaders arrived two days before the children to learn from RECONCILE about facilitating trauma healing groups. These mentors were deeply moved by the

stories they heard from the children during the workshop, and now are better equipped to provide psychosocial support in their lives. The church leaders live in the different camp zones, serve various churches, and will be present long after the RECONCILE trainers leave. Please pray for their ministry and their own healing as they seek to prepare the next generation for a healthy and peace-filled tomorrow.

## II. PCOSS EDUCATION Update:

- PCOSS Schools (approximately 15 in South Sudan and 20 in refugee camps) remain open despite the continuing harsh, economic, social, and political climate.
- Approximately one half of the children in the schools in Juba continue to be girls (praise the Lord!)
- Afterschool programs received funding this quarter and their attendance remains steady. The programs help children learn teamwork through play and develop critical thinking skills.
- Seven schools received supplies to assist them in completing third quarter activities and/or finishing the school year. One school was assisted with the production of exams.
- Sharon and Lynn Kandel and Leisa Wagstaff spent time this quarter visiting US congregations and sharing stories of the SSEPP with interested churches and groups, including the South Sudan/Sudan Mission Network. The General Secretary of the PCOSS, Rev. John Yor, traveled with Leisa for some of these visits, allowing US congregations the opportunity to glean from his perspective on peace-building and educational development in South Sudan.

## III. Teacher Training Update

### A. Teacher Training College

- Four PCOSS teachers enrolled in Solidarity Teacher Training College (three senior students and one junior student). The PCOSS Education Dept. facilitated their travel to Yambio, South Sudan, where they eagerly resumed the studies they initially started at Yei Teacher Training College.



**“One little, two little, three little fingers...” primary school teachers in Pibor learn a song to help children count and practice English**

with the New South Sudan Curriculum (NSSC) which encourages critical and creative thinking, communication, cooperation, culture, and heritage.

- Topics for Education Managers included: leadership qualities, roles and responsibilities, communication skills, time management, conflict sensitivity, crisis management, community mobilization and

### B. Mobile Teacher Training in Pibor and Pochalla

#### Pibor Training:

- 26 teachers (1 woman) and 14 education managers (1 woman) were trained in Pibor (2 weeks for teachers and 1 week for education managers).
- Topics for teachers included: classroom management and routine, teaching and learning materials and methods, schemes of work and lesson planning, micro-teaching and school practice.
- The training engaged teachers practically. For example, teachers discussed and then constructed learning materials from the local environment.
- The teaching methods aligned



sensitization, staff appraisals, school development plans, financial management, inspection and supervision.

- Education managers thought strategically through the appropriate activities for a school development plan, including ways to support girls and children who are hard to reach. The managers were asked to prepare school development plans for 2019 and hand them to State Education office.
- During the training, Head Teachers, the County Education Director, Supervisors, Inspectors and Directors of various departments in the State Ministry of Education realized and shared openly that they are not following the principles of good financial management. Analysis and tools for financial management were shared with the group, to build their capacity.
- The education managers visited four schools to apply their new skills in supervision and inspection. Participants were paired to handle two activities per school; one of supervision (lesson observation) and the other of inspection (using a general observation check list). As the participants supervised teachers and inspected schools, they were being supervised themselves by the facilitator. This gave new meaning to the work, leading the Across Education staff to relay: “The exercise generated huge results with a strong belief that the approach is the only tool for better school running... and should be adopted State wide.”



**Education Managers’ training in Pibor**

#### Pochalla Training:

- 28 teachers (4 women) and 15 education managers were trained for 15 days.
- Topics for teachers included: instructional aids, assessment of learning, learning and teaching during early schooling, the role of a teacher in problem solving, teaching for behavior modification and cognitive development, understanding learners, multi-grade teaching.



**Instructional aids swing in the breeze in the ‘science corner’ of the classroom under a tree**

- The training used a participatory method with lots of hands-on learning. For example, the student-teachers learned about assessment, then created tests, and received feedback from the facilitator. The importance of continuous assessment was emphasized, in contrast to the practice of testing at the end of the term alone.

- Topics for education managers included: planning and budgeting, financial

management, resource management and motivation.



**Children in Bidi Bidi refugee camp draw the things they hope to have in their future. Many hope to replace things lost in South Sudan.**

- Education managers in Pochalla admitted that their financial management was poor, and they do not have policies or procedures to guide them. Prior to the training, they had never developed a budget.

#### **IV. PEACEBUILDING Update**

- RECONCILE trained one group of 25 adults on Children’s trauma healing for 2 days in Bidi Bidi refugee camp. Next, they mentored the adults who worked with 85 children in a 3-day trauma healing training. The adults acquired skills and knowledge on trauma healing, helping equip them to provide psychosocial support in their communities. The children took significant steps in their healing journeys

and also developed positive relationships with one another during the workshop.

- Three groups among refugee and host communities in Rhino refugee camp (10 Ugandans and 20 South Sudanese refugees) received training on income generating activities. Each group received \$500 as start-up capital for their various planned businesses.

#### **V. Testimonies of Impact**

##### **Peacebuilding**

- Host communities in Eden Zone, Rhino Camp allocated pieces of land (about 10 acres) for cultivation to the refugee community free of charge to boost their livelihoods. This action resulted from the forum facilitated between the groups in a previous quarter.
- The relationship between the host and refugee communities has greatly improved in Eden Zone, and RECONCILE learned that putting refugee and host communities together to do business is a great strategy to eliminate hatred between the two communities and promote peaceful co-existence. A group leader named Laku, testified that what RECONCILE has done raised their hope for better lives through the business skills training and giving



**A local Ugandan government leader and forum participants including RECONCILE attend the allotting of land to the refugee community**



them a start-up capital. According to Laku, some months back, one of the NGOs promised to help them with business capital, but they did not receive the funds. He thanked RECONCILE and PC(USA) for funding the project and being honest with their promise.

## **Education**

- **PCOSS Schools:** “I don’t know if we will be able to make it through the rest of the school year. Our teachers haven’t received anything during the past several months; not even a (cup of) tea. Some have gone, saying they can’t teach on an empty stomach. And, what about their families?”
- This is a story heard again and again from head teachers as the third quarter of the academic year came to a close. One head teacher passionately stated, “Our pupils didn’t sit for their (third quarter) exams yet. We didn’t have the money to print the papers, not even one. I am losing hope and barely hanging on.”
- Leisa Wagstaff recounts, “As the PCOSS General Secretary, PCOSS Education Director and I heard their stories, we knew that they were true, for even the government schools are having difficulty paying their teachers and with few parents in a position to pay the meager school fees assessed, monies that were collected “ran out during the first few months of school and we all know the situation within the country – everybody is suffering.” Along with this despair came hope, however, as many of the teachers teaching in the PCOSS schools committed themselves to finishing out the school year. “No promises for next year, but we will serve our communities until we are finished what we started,” was the response of many of the unpaid teachers.
- Upon receiving a very small incentive for his teachers, printed exams and basic school supplies, the head teacher who lamented not being able to print exams shared, “We are encouraged and will keep pushing. You have given me hope and I am not letting go.” Headteachers and teachers in other school communities also received basic supplies intended to help them complete the academic year.



**Leisa Wagstaff encourages parents and teachers at a PCOSS school in Juba**

Leisa concluded, “We cannot solve the massive challenges within the country’s education system, but we can continue to give hope and help our children and school professionals to move one step closer to the finish line.”

- **Mobile Teacher Training:** “The teachers are doing a better job teaching now, after the trainings,” the Minister of Education for Pibor, who is also a primary school teacher, stated after the teachers completed their third training session.
- “(the) majority of the participants are young (between 25-35 years old). This is so good... Looking at their age and duration of service provision as per public service laws, these teachers will serve for a long period of time... Hence, there is need to invest in them fully.” – Across Facilitator in Pibor

## VI. Challenges

- Education managers in Pibor listed some of the challenges facing education in Boma State, including: ethnic cycles of violence, hunger, youth engaging in conflict, cultural barriers to girls’ education (such as early marriage).
- Teacher trainees in both Pibor and Pochalla have low academic background in the subjects they teach.
- Education managers in Pibor had difficulty understanding English because they have an Arabic background, while some participants in Pochalla have background in Amharic and the local language (Anyuak). Consequently, a lot of time was spent in translating from English to either Arabic or Anyuak.
- “The majority of the trainees in Pochalla acquired their education in Ethiopia where English is used as a medium of instruction in secondary school, but Amharic in primary. Most of these teachers were not able to complete primary school or they only reached the first or second year of secondary. With such a low level of English fluency, it may be best to provide them with an intensive English Course, or sponsor them to complete their education, so they are better equipped to facilitate quality education in English in the classroom.” – Training Facilitator in Pibor
- Life skills, peace building, and psychosocial support are needed for education managers and teachers. This will reduce the trauma caused by the conflicts which have plagued the state for ages.
- One of the challenges facing teachers in Pibor and Pochalla, is multi-grade teaching, when students in one class represent two or three grade levels. This may be caused by the lack of teachers in rural areas, a limited number of classrooms, or a teacher’s need to be absent from class, often to pursue income-generating work to support him/herself financially. Multi-grade teaching strategies were covered in the mobile training to help address this challenge.



**Very few girls in Pibor finish primary school and most are at risk of early, forced marriages**





Smiling Teachers, Big Books, Little Sister

## VII. Financial Update

We give thanks that this year, \$129,030 has reached our South Sudanese partners for SSEPP activities, and an unexpected, generous gift of \$33,300 was received in October from a family very committed to this project - what a blessing! Westminster Presbyterian in Minneapolis continues to match 38% of each gift, so please continue to prayerfully consider supporting this collaborative effort.

## VIII. Mission co-workers Update:

**Shelvis and Nancy Smith-Mather Update:** The Smith-Mathers continue accompanying RECONCILE staff when they travel to the Ugandan refugee camps for SSEPP activities, as well as teaching courses at a South Sudanese theological college displaced to Uganda. Nancy travelled to South Sudan at the end of September, visiting Juba and Pibor. "Listening to parents and teachers trained by PCOSS in Juba and Across in Pibor, I could feel an energy around education. An energy which pushes back despair, while pressing on towards a better tomorrow. It challenged me, and at the same time increased by gratitude for the many people and churches who support this project. Thank you for your commitment and generosity."

**Leisa Wagstaff Update:** "I am so grateful for all the warmth and support received during my Interpretation Assignment (IA) in the USA. I have so many wonderful moments from our time together that I am sharing with my Church community here. Thank you."

**Sharon and Lynn Kandel:** "I made flight arrangements for the students that started attending the Yambio Teacher Training college... and saw them off at the MAF office close to the airport. They were enthused about going to Yambio which was an uplifting experience. We are also in the middle of some renovations of one of the classrooms at Akatgol. The school at Akatgol seems to continue to forge ahead which is encouraging to see. Sharon is still involved with the finances of the project and encourages Leisa in her efforts." – Lynn Kandel



Sharon and Lynn Kandel with PCOSS parents ready to clear land for the construction of a school building