



**South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project (SSEPP)
4th Quarter 2018 Summary Report**

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“Let us work together to make it the best school in the country... We can continue to go forward because we are children of God.” – Leisa Wagstaff at Nyakuron South Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCOSS)

I. Brief Context Update:

We stepped out of the taxi and received a warm welcome from Rev. James Kon, the pastor in charge of Nyakuron South Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCOSS). Then he gave us a bit of context for the upcoming worship service. “The seats used to be full,” he explained, “but many families recently went to Uganda to the refugee camps.”

“Have you been in communication with your members who left?” I asked, curious about their assessment of the situation in the camps, “I have heard many say there is not enough food there.”

“Even if the food is small in the camp,” Rev. Kon said, “here (in Juba) they have no food and no way to get any.”

During the worship service, an elder stood to thank the congregation for praying for his eyes. The medical treatment failed, came the update. He still could not see. “But don’t worry about me,” the elder urged. With something larger on his mind, he made a heart-felt plea, “please embrace the newly signed peace agreement, so that it can take hold and not break.”

A national level peace agreement signed in August 2018 set out to end the current Civil War. Many feared it would not. As the elder spoke, Leisa Wagstaff leaned over and whispered, “He is a member of the Parent Council for the church’s school.”

After the service, the school’s head teacher, Santo Mading, reflected on his congregation’s history. “These people are displaced from Upper Nile,” he shared. “They started to meet for church under a tree. Then they collected a little money each week and built the church. Then they went to the training (facilitated by the PCOSS Education Department), and it helped them understand their responsibility to support their children’s education. We thought, ‘what should we do for our children, some don’t have parents. What should we do for our children, so they don’t sit in the road?’ We decided we should do a harambee (pulling together) and everyone contribute, every Sunday to raise the money for the school.” Pointing at two buildings with bamboo walls and tin rooves, he enthusiastically stated, “They came back and built those two classrooms!”



The two classrooms on the left built by committed parents

The parents constructed two classrooms, then the PCOSS Education Department raised funds for one cement classroom. The three rooms hosted Primary 1 through Primary 3 (the equivalent of first to third grade). As a word of appreciation for PCOSS and PC(USA)’s accompaniment of the school, Santo Mading said: “When you are swimming, and you get tired, and you want to drown, and someone comes under and raises you up. You cannot forget.”

At present, Rev. Kon envisions the future “We hope the school will go from Primary 1 to Primary 8 and even secondary (the equivalent of high school).” His sermon that day lifted up Jesus’ pairing of disciples to minister together, a strategy he hoped his congregation would embrace. “We need to work as a team, so we do the work successfully,” he encouraged his members.

While national level peace agreements and ceasefires come and go, the teamwork of South Sudanese churches

demonstrates a different pattern. The displaced Christians in Rev. Kon’s church echo a testimony heard in other congregations as well in which people who were displaced by war: gathered in a new place with limited employment opportunities, gave something small each week in the offering basket, built a church structure, and constructed a school. Often young adults from the church volunteer as teachers.



Hard working Nyakuron South Parent Council members

The Presbyterian Church of South Sudan encourages, guides and supports her local congregations. Together they struggle to ensure a generation does not miss out on education. The PC(USA) is grateful to be a long-term partner in this teamwork.



Sharon Kandel encourages a PCOSS church who opened a school for their children, including orphans in their community

II. PCOSS EDUCATION Update:

- School management trainings facilitated in 3 school communities, with over 50 participants at each, including parents and church and community leaders. An overwhelming majority of attendees were women. Traditional leadership attended two of the trainings.
- Traditional leaders granted community land on which to build a school and in collaboration with church leaders, secured legal land documents. Community members cleared the land for construction.
- Chalkboards and 35 desks provided to 4 schools, and 2 schools received mini libraries.

- The PCOSS Ed. Dept. newsletter circulated to all PCOSS schools and PCOSS General Assembly constituents. The newsletter focused on inclusive education.
- One school's water tank was repaired and secured against another theft. Without water, it is extremely difficult for a school to function.
- PCOSS Education Board met and discussed ways to improve PCOSS schools.
- Assistance provided to 5 schools for sourcing and supervising end-of-school examinations and the South Sudan Primary Leaving Exam. The PCOSS Ed Dept printed over 6000 exam papers.
- Regular participation continues in the afterschool capacity building program. Teachers noted an improvement in participants' behavior and eagerness to engage. There are plans to add 3 more programs in 2019.
- PCOSS met with 4 school communities and 2 headteachers to discuss plans to overcome current challenges and possible inputs from the Education Dept.
- The PCOSS Ed. Dept. met twice with representatives of 3 Pibor PCOSS-related schools to discuss their connection with the PCOSS school system.



Two girls (front right) attend the only secondary school in Pibor. The PCOSS Ed Dept. is striving for girls to complete primary school so they qualify for high school (secondary).

III. Teacher Training College and PCOSS Teacher Training Update

- At Solidarity Teacher Training College, 3 out of 4 PCOSS teachers completed a trimester and the fourth did not complete due to illness. PCOSS Ed Dept met with 3 of the teachers for debriefing. One of the students did not perform well academically and will not return to studies. PCOSS also met with the college's director, strengthening the partnership.

- Teachers from 6 schools participated in a 2-day training on reading methodology facilitated by PCOSS.
- PCOSS Ed Dept. visited 3 schools to supervise and mentor teachers.

IV. Peacebuilding Update

A. Across Peacebuilding in Pibor and Pochalla

- To create awareness on peace and build trust among children, School Fun Days were facilitated in Pochalla and Pibor. A total of 601 school children participated in the celebration: 350 from 4 schools in Pochalla (girls and boys) and 251 from 3 schools in Pibor (boys only). Girls did not participate in the activity in Pibor because Pibor Girls Primary School had closed early for holidays. The day created a sense of unity with the different classes, as children focused on their strength as a team. Uniforms, footballs, volleyballs, handballs, and skipping ropes were provided for the event. Students, teachers, and parents enjoyed the day together.



Girls and boys play football together in Pochalla



Referee giving instructions in Pibor soccer game

Promotion of peace was reflected in Pochalla where girls' and boys' teams competed without discrimination. In Pibor, conflict among generation age-sets (similar to gangs in the US) continues to contribute to the loss of lives, including the death of school children. The age-set groups do not usually meet together. The School Fun Day brought different age-sets together to play, which is unheard of in Pibor. Sports can be a tool to develop crucial skills for peaceful co-existence and social cohesion.

B. RECONCILE Peacebuilding in Refugee Camps

- Training in business management for 4 groups in Bidi Bidi Refugee Camp equipped both the refugee and host communities with income generating skills. The 4 groups, consisting of 12 nationals and 28 refugees, received \$500 each in start-up capital for their various businesses.
- Two phases of Dynamic Peer Counselors and Peer Educators training in both Rhino and Bidi Bidi refugee camps equipped 40 participants (16 female and 24 male) with skills and knowledge in counseling and peer education. The Ugandan nationals and refugees who participated are passionate about helping their peers recover from trauma. During the training, they became aware of the effects of trauma in their lives and in the lives of others.



Host community members proudly show Rev. Tibi (Exec. Dir) and Lillian Matingi (RECONCILE) their new animal husbandry business

- There is need to extend these trainings to other parts of the refugee camps within Bidi-Bidi, Rhino, and other camps outside Arua and Yumbe.

V. Testimonies of Impact

Peacebuilding

- *“Charles Wani had a problem with his neighbor. His neighbor’s goats destroyed his sunflowers. The neighbor is very harsh to people around him, so Charles had not tried to solve the conflict. After attending the first phase of peer counselor training, though, he picked courage. He used the knowledge and skills gained from the training, and the conflict was solved. The neighbor apologized and asked for forgiveness. Now they are living in peace.”*
- *“Hamid, a group leader and local Ugandan government official, testified that what RECONCILE has done is what other NGOs have not done in the camps. He has been attending several trainings by other NGOs, but the methodologies used by RECONCILE and YWAM are completely different, including putting host communities and refugees together in doing business. This, according to him, has reduced conflict among the communities. He thanked RECONCILE and also thanked PC(USA) for funding the project and being honest with their promise.”*
- *“Pibor has complex traditional practices like the age set segments and the regular practice of dancing, which in most cases is followed up with a fight. However, during the School Fun Day, young people demonstrated a spirit of cooperation towards each other and to the teachers as well.” – Across staff*



Peer Counselor training in Rhino Refugee Camp, Uganda



PCOSS parent volunteering to improve a classroom

Education

- **PCOSS Schools:** *“Many parents and communities are understanding that they must assist in providing education to their children and are feeling more empowered to act. Their attendance at trainings and meetings seems to have increased, and many are putting forth their suggestions.” – Leisa Wagstaff*
- **PTA Training:** *“We learned that we are the ones to supervise the school and the teachers. If they are not doing well, we need to make an adjustment. If they are progressing well, we give them support.” – Parent from Nyakuron South Presbyterian Church of South Sudan*

- *“When (the parents) went to get training, they were given guidelines. Now they supervise the school. If we are not teaching, they will ask us, “why are you not teaching?” - PCOSS Head Teacher*

- *“As a pastor, I used to go house to house to gather the children... (Then) the school started under this tree. We started from Sunday School, age 5-18 teaching them about the Word of God. We sang together and prayed together. Then, we had a workshop with the parents. Leisa (Wagstaff) and Rev. Pasca (PCOSS Women’s Dept) came. After they came, we started to know how to open the school. The training opened parents’ minds for education, it helped them to have interest in education.” - Rev. Awadiya, Kisera*
- After School Program Training: *“We learned about afterschool programs and developing children’s thinking capacity. We have been having the afterschool program on Fridays, twice a month. We play games and the children learn about teamwork.” - PCOSS Teacher*
- Mobile Teacher Training: *“The teachers are doing a better job teaching now, after the training” – Minister of Education, Pibor*



Rev. Awadiya shows Leisa the selected spot to build a school in Kisera community

VI. Challenges

- In a setting of continuous insecurity, such as in the case of South Sudan, any participatory strategy is a painfully slow process, requiring a long-term perspective for impact results.
- Securing finances from the bank on an expedient basis for activities scheduled during this period was a challenge. This challenge, coupled with the delayed PCOSS Executive Committee meeting and the closing of the PCOSS General Assembly offices for staff to spend time with their families living as refugees in neighboring countries, pushed some activities to the beginning of 2019.



Teamwork at Pibor Girls’ Primary School

- Apart from Pibor Girls’ Primary School, there are very few girls in schools in Pibor. Many cultural expectations of girls make attendance difficult. Lydia Peter, a local government official in Pibor stated, *“People are keeping their girls in their houses, because they are thinking, when they send their daughters to school, they will spoil (not be fit for marriage and the accompanying dowry). So, the only way to keep them is to stay at home, then to get them married early, before 18.”*

VII. Financial Update

We give God thanks for the individuals and congregations who supported this project through prayer and financial gifts in 2018! The total raised for the year came to \$240,746.00! Your generosity is an encouragement to our South Sudanese sisters and brothers. Thank you!

When the SSEPP launched in 2014, a number of churches and individuals pledged support, some through 2018, which helped partners plan their peacebuilding and education development activities. Funds have not yet been pledged for 2019 and beyond, although Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis has committed to match 38% of all contributions. Would your family and/or congregation prayerfully consider pledging support towards education and peace in South Sudan this year, ensuring that these important ministries can move forward? Please contact Nicole Gerkins (Nicole.Gerkins@pcusa.org) or Rhonda Kruse (Rhonda.Kruse@pcusa.org) for more information.

Thank you!



Sunday offering at Nyakuron South Presbyterian Church

VIII. Mission co-workers Update:

Sharon and Lynn Kandel: We continue to help keep track of the project funds and to be of assistance to Rev. Stephen Nyang (PCOSS Education Director) and Leisa in any way that we can. We are slightly removed from the day to day process, but it is always interesting to listen to Rev. Stephen and Leisa tell about the things they have been doing. We must remind ourselves that South Sudan is a country in crisis, so steps forward may seem small



Lynn working hard to coordinate a school building repair

to us, but we know they are large steps for those around us. Imagine not being certain of your future but being willing to invest in the next generation so they will have a better future!

Leisa Wagstaff: “You guys are great! I shared the experience of speaking at the opening of the Primary Leaving School examination at Akatgol Presbyterian Primary School in my last Mission Connections newsletter. I also introduced Yayienen, one of the exam candidates, and there have been so many requests from you for an update. Yayienen, the

entire school community, and I are happy to share that we have a baby boy and together with you, we are working diligently for a better educational start for him. Thank you for the many prayers and eagerness to know of her well-being.”

“Also, I worked alongside the PCOSS Women Work Department as a facilitator during their weeklong leadership and development training for pastors, women, men, and youth. Christmas and New Year’s Day were spent with

my internally displaced community in Juba, and we are praying that this will be a year of tolerance and peace for us as well as for each of you.” – Leisa Wagstaff

Shelvis and Nancy Smith-Mather: One of the highlights of our quarter was the closing worship and send off of the South Sudanese theological students. These church leaders will be serving congregations, mainly in the refugee camps and a few in South Sudan, during their next trimester as part of their supervised ministry. Also, through RECONCILE, we joined a co-op in Arua, Uganda, which brings together ministries working in the refugee camps. The co-op’s purpose is for members to learn from one another and combine efforts when possible. This collaboration encourages us, and we give God thanks for the fresh perspective and strength it brings to those involved.



South Sudanese theological students grateful to receive Trauma Healing certificates at their end of term closing worship service. Shelvis and Nancy Smith-Mather felt honored to facilitate their training.