

South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project (SSEPP)
2nd Quarter 2017 Summary Report

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I. Brief South Sudan Context Update:

“What do we do now Pastor?” his members asked, after soldiers killed one of their church elders.



South Sudanese Refugees Gather for Worship in the Midst of Tragedy.

They wanted to give their elder a proper burial, yet an attempt to retrieve the body, meant risking another life. So, they turned to the pastor, “What do we do now?”

Their pastor, Rev. Jacob Karaba, vice-chair of RECONCILE Peace Institute’s (RPI) alumni chapter, recently visited with Nancy and Shelvis Smith-Mather. He told them stories about the time when fighting between government and opposition forces reached his church grounds outside of Yei.

“It was difficult to get the bodies of those killed,” he explained. “We were afraid to reach them during daylight, because soldiers may see us and shoot us. It was best to go at night to gather bodies for burial.”

He described carrying the dead, their blood pouring over his skin. With disbelief, he listed the inhuman ways civilians are tortured and killed in “this war.”

“My brother lost three children in one week to malaria,” Rev. Jacob lamented. About a year ago, malaria treatment was readily available in local hospitals and pharmacies in Yei, now medicine and food are scarce as roads into town are blocked. “I watched my mother die, without even a paracetamol (ibuprofen) to give her,” he grieved.

When soldiers arrived at his church, they asked him why he was absent the last time they came. He responded, “I was born in war, I grew up in war, I had children in war, when I hear gun shots, I am afraid and I run away.”

The day they questioned him would surely be his last, he thought, yet his life was spared. They set fire to his house, next to the church, and the flames spread, burning down many neighboring homes.

Ten months after civil war recaptured the country, after burying his mother, brother and several church members, Rev. Jacob crossed the border and registered in a Ugandan refugee camp. Upon entering the camp, the administration informed him that they could provide him security in the camp, but to forget his title of “Reverend”, he is now a “refugee” like everyone else.

With all he endured, it would be understandable if Rev. Jacob was unable to think about helping others in his current situation. Yet, he continues to serve. His training at RPI helps makes him resilient. “If not for the things I learned at RECONCILE, I do not know if I would have reached to today,” he testifies. The Sunday before we met, 800 people attended the church service Rev. Karaba organized in Imvepi refugee settlement, last Sunday 46 were baptized. Currently, he is seeking ways to reach people with psycho-social support.

As Rev. Jacob continues to labor in exile, pastors, teachers, parents, and administrators continue to work within the borders of South Sudan. One PCOSS school in Juba recently approached Education facilitator, Leisa Wagstaff, eager to improve the quality of education in their local church school. “They are committed and ready to work hard,” Leisa shared. Currently, these 170 students meet under a tree, committed to learning even without walls.

The context in South Sudan is overwhelming and desperate. A recent Washington Post article stated, “The (2015) peace agreement is dead... and neither the peace accord nor national dialogue have hope without a cease-fire.” So, the fighting, suffering and starving continue. Education and peacebuilding must continue too. UNICEF Chief of Education Josephine Bourne explains, “At no time is education more important than in times of war. Without education, how will children reach their full potential and contribute to the future and stability of their families, communities, and economies?”



Education Stakeholders Meet in Kasera Community, Juba.

God, give your church in South Sudan and around the world perseverance to press on in the midst of war, courage to work in insecurity, patience when faced with many uncertainties, and love to live out Your call to be light in darkness and a balm for the hurting.

II. EDUCATION Update:

- Training Teachers: Juba-based head-teachers and their deputies participated in intensive training in pedagogy, counselling, administration, conflict resolution, and supervision. This is the first of several trainings for teachers scheduled for this year.
- Visiting Schools: Three pedagogic, administrative, and conflict resolution visits made.
- Equipping the PCOSS School System: To improve records and supervision in schools, PCOSS designed a report card and a parents/learners' handbook. The prototypes are being tested in two schools with the hope of expanding to all PCOSS schools.
- Resourcing with Water: The department gave logistical support and guidance to Mission co-worker Jim McGill and the water project supported by the PC(USA) Presbyterian Women. The process for providing a school with water is still ongoing, and uses easily and cheaply-manufactured equipment.
- Networking with other organizations: Through the Ed. Facilitator, PCOSS wrote proposals to other agencies to help provide education in PCOSS schools within South Sudan as well as in the refugee camps. For example, a proposal was written for Mission 21 for the period 2018-2021.
- Mobilizing Communities: A new church community in Juba, called Kasera, shared with PCOSS Ed. Dept. about their educational efforts, their desire to build a school, and the ways in which they can contribute to providing greater educational opportunities in their area. A School Management Committee was elected and held several meetings. The pastor of the local congregation that started the school is the recently-elected General Secretary of the Equatoria Presbytery. She is the first woman to hold this position. PCOSS Ed Dept. looks forward to working with her, the church and the community in the coming months.
- Constructing and Maintaining Schools: PCOSS Ed Dept. secured funds to build a classroom for a school that is very active in supporting education. Construction is in progress. The majority of the 400 students came from other parts of the country when violence broke out in 2013. The community started classes in the church, which is made of bamboo and zinc. They have already participated in PCOSS' head teacher training and School Management Committee (SMC) training.



"It's a tough job!" Leisa using Jim's locally-manufactured well-digging tools.

III. Yei Teacher Training College (YTTC) Update

- While awaiting the reopening of YTTC, many of our student teachers are engaged in sharing their new skills within their home schools and/or studying for secondary levels or additional studies.

IV. PEACEBUILDING Update

Peacebuilding is embedded in each component of this project. During this quarter, grassroots peacebuilders, trained through RECONCILE, continue to facilitate trauma healing and mediate conflicts in South Sudan and in Ugandan refugee camps. RECONCILE’s plan to officially open an office in Uganda to support work in the camps is still underway.

The PCOSS Education Department also takes the role of a neutral mediator when conflict arises among school communities. We thank God that local schools trust the PCOSS staff to have their best interest at heart, and call on them when reconciliation is needed. The PCOSS Ed department facilitated conflict resolution in a local school this quarter.



The PCOSS Ed Dept. is embedding peacebuilding skills within their broader school system. Towards that end, the recent head and deputy teacher training highlighted reconciliation. “The teachers realize there is a lot of conflict in their community, and they see the negative impact. They see people are hurting, because they have not had an opportunity to sit down and talk through their issues. The teachers know they cannot move forward without breaking down the barriers keeping the schools from being productive,” explains Leisa Wagstaff. When describing the recent teacher training, she went on to say, “When the teachers come together, you

Headteachers and Deputy Headteachers Finding Solutions.

would not know they are from different ethnic groups. They share openly with each other about ways they are able to overcome conflict in their communities. They are eager to find ways to help bring communities together, so that they can realize their educational goals.”

V. Testimonies of Impact

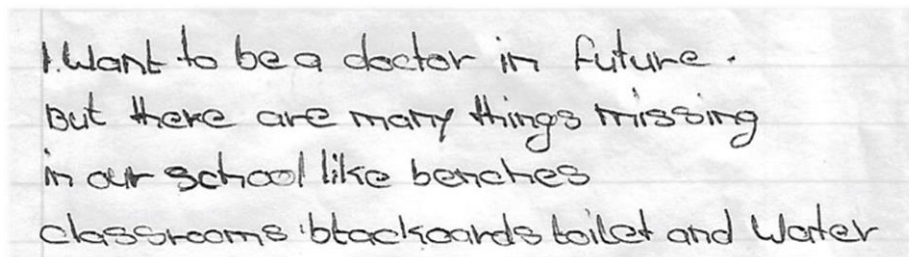
- Teachers: “We are doing well in Pochalla and PECP [Education Center] is going on well...the pupils are enrolled at the school including the whole family [children and parents]. [Teaching] is more enjoyable than we thought...Most of all, the training conducted in Juba raised us to the level of tutors. And we are now recognized in the community due to your [and SSEPP’s] effort in mentoring us through YTTC Tutors.” - Omot Mam

- Peacebuilders: *“What makes me to be strong even though all this has happened to me, it is through the training that RECONCILE International has given me. That training is the one which made me to be strong (and) helps me to help those who have the same problems as me...”* explained Rev. Jacob Karaba. He shares a message of peace in the refugee camp, and asks the question: *“Are we going back [to South Sudan] with our anger? Are we going back to loot ourselves? Are we going back to fight? Or we can go back and begin a new life and develop and build our nation in a way that people will see themselves as... brothers and... sisters of one father and one nation.”*



Vice Chair of RPI Alumni Chapter, Rev. Jacob Karaba and RPI Principal Rev. Shelvis Smith- Mather.

- Students: After visiting a PCOSS school in Juba, Nancy Smith-Mather received a letter from a 13-year-old student, which included the following words:



While the student’s words are a lament, they are written on paper which deserves praise. In her country, 86% of women cannot read and write, so there is struggle and triumph etched in her letter.

- The Multiplying Impact of the Project: PC(USA)’s partner organization, Across, was asked to facilitate mobile teacher training in Pochalla and Pibor. These counties are marginalized, with few services reaching community members. While implementing the project, Across recruited another partner, UNICEF, to provide further teacher training in Pochalla. Across also engaged the four teachers who received training at the teacher training college through SSEPP, to help UNICEF in this effort. Praise God for an opportunity to provide more training for teachers!

VI. Challenges

The teachers enrolled to become qualified at the Yei Teacher Training College are very discouraged that the school will not reopen this July as had earlier been stated. In a communication from the college regarding a recent assessment of Yei, *“a selection of religious and government (political and technical) leaders were interviewed. In summary, the team found that:*

- All the stake holders met and, apart from one, advised that it was not yet the right time to reopen the College.*
- The main town remains inaccessible by road with barely normal life only within a 2km radius.*

- *There are no reputable banks operating.*
 - *Due to lack of access, food is not enough in the market to feed the students.*
 - *Additionally, the College may not realize enough students to run a fully-fledged teacher training.*
- From these discussions, there was consensus that management gives another 5 months lag to see how things turn out in the Yei area.”*

With this news, we are praying that the SSEPP will retain its student teachers, especially since insecurity is still widespread throughout the country, there are limited opportunities within the country for other studies, employment, and access to basic amenities, and the cultural pressures on young girls to marry. The PCOSS Education Department will continue to mentor these student teachers and ensure that they are a part of any trainings or meetings undertaken by the department or other agencies.

VII. Financial Update

Since the start of the year, \$109,723.28 has been raised in support of the South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project. These new funds include Westminster Presbyterian Church’s matching of last year’s gifts. They are committed to a 38% match for all contributions for the project. We give God thanks for the continued commitment of churches, mid-councils, and individuals who are partnering financially with our South Sudanese sisters and brothers during this difficult time. Thank you!



"Baby Class" at a PCOSS School in Juba.

VIII. Mission co-workers Update:

As Mission co-workers serving alongside church partners, we not only witness God’s impact in the lives of others, we also experience transformation in our own lives. This quarter, we had a unique opportunity to learn

from our partner church in Rwanda, at the continent-wide Mission co-worker gathering. God worked in each of our hearts, and here is one testimony:



South Sudan mission co-workers.

“So much has happened since my arrival in South Sudan in late 2013: two evacuations to safety, living in alert mode almost constantly due to insecurity, witnessing the innumerable sufferings and losses of the country’s citizens, hearing and feeling the expressed and unexpressed helplessness and hopelessness of my colleagues, and realizing that reconciliation would probably never be possible.

“My time in fellowship with the Eglise Presbyterienne au Rwanda (EPR) leaders and Rwandan nationals, however, has revived my hope in the possibility that peace with justice is possible, even in a place like South Sudan. The testimonies to the genocide within Rwanda – either as a survivor or a perpetrator – and the transforming power of asking for and extending forgiveness are almost impossible to believe. Yet, I heard and felt and lived the ‘sad story of the country in which [the citizens] participated in creating’ but also witnessed the transformative power that comes after being reconciled first to God and then to each other. ‘I lost 61 members of my family...but I thank God...I forgive because I, too, have been forgiven;’ and ‘I killed and looted...[afterwards] no longer felt human [but] truth, confession will set you free. As long as I live, I will ask forgiveness from God and all Rwandans.’

“I am returning to my people in South Sudan with greater understanding, commitment, tools, and compassion for all as we continue our long journey towards reconciliation in that country.” – Leisa Wagstaff

Sharon and Lynn Kandel Update:

While the 2nd quarter has not been as busy with students at both Yei Teacher Training College and RECONCILE, it has still been a quarter of doing things. This time of forced change has been a blessing in so many ways. For one, it has given time to focus on teacher training of teachers right here in Juba plus concentrate a little more on head teachers. For us, the Kandels, it has been a time of getting to know RECONCILE better plus a time to

have long talks with the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCOSS) and learn more of their vision for the future.

We continue to be amazed at the level of commitment by the teachers who often are not even getting paid and yet they know that education is the way out of war. We have been given this wonderful gift of living here in South Sudan and walking with our brothers and sisters here. Please keep them in your prayers as hunger, sickness, and fighting continue.

Smith-Mather Update:

The Smith-Mather family greatly appreciated the gathering in Rwanda which included a wonderful children’s program. Nancy and Nicole traveled on to Juba, for baby Nicole’s first venture into South Sudan. Reconnecting with long-time friends and partners in Juba was healing for me (Nancy), as our family continues to mourn the loss of our way of life in Yei. We are deeply grateful for the many neighbors and colleagues from Yei whom we have seen in our new home in Arua. So many South Sudanese are displaced here, and by keeping our door open, we have the unique privilege of hearing their stories and lamenting together.



Children loved the program for mission co-worker families at the Rwanda gathering.

Leisa Wagstaff’s Update:

There are many exciting (and trying) moments in my stay and ministry with the South Sudanese. I am discouraged by the depth of need but encouraged by the faith, tenacity, and generosity of church leaders, colleagues, and neighbors. Some of my downtime is spent in fellowship with members of the congregation I worship with and the PCOSS Women’s groups. A few weeks ago, I helped facilitate a three-day women’s leadership workshop under a big tree. And, it’s a lot of fun to see the young women from the internally displaced people (IDP) camp making cakes and cookies during our Saturday morning baking classes. They are always surprised to see the ingredients (zucchini, carrots, peanuts, cucumbers, beans, etc.) from the open markets that we will use to make “such nice and tasty things.” One day, they hope to start small income-generating projects using the skills obtained.

