

**South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project (SSEPP)  
2nd Quarter 2018 Summary Report**

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PCOSS General Secretary, Rev. John Yor (left), with Head Teacher Matthew Kwach (center)

**I. Brief Context Update:**

When he returned to South Sudan in 2017, after living in Iowa, Matthew Kwach found his community's school closed. The fighting of 2013 triggered the cessation of classes, yet, with Matthew's help, the doors re-opened in January 2018.

"Everyone jumped in joy when we made the idea of the school, because it had been a longtime without school," he recounted. When classes resumed, about 100 students registered. Four months later, the number reached 130.

"When you brought those desks, it stirred up their spirits, and more started coming," Matthew related to mission co-worker Leisa Wagstaff, who was visiting the school with Rev. John Yor, General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCOSS), and mission co-worker Nancy Smith-Mather. "You came to visit today," Matthew continued, "tomorrow there will be more children who will join the school."

Church elders, deacons, and community members greeted the visitors, showing their support for the school, even while it faces many challenges. "The problem is parents don't have jobs," Matthew, the head teacher, explained, "I asked every child to pay 300 pounds (the equivalent of \$1.15) every three months, and about ten came forward with school fees." If school fees are not paid, teachers are not paid, and retaining instructors becomes difficult.

"I do my time and effort for free, because I want them to know what I know," Matthew shared. The day after requesting students pay fees, many remained at home. Matthew asked the children to return to school. "I don't want them to stop coming, but I am going to keep asking for school fees."

Then Martha, another teacher, spoke up, wanting to confess something to the group: "I am displaced from Yei, my children attend the school, and I didn't pay school fees."

Leisa quickly pointed out, "but you are teaching. You are working for free."

"And she does a lot," Matthew added.

Rev. John Yor took the opportunity to encourage the gathering, "I was a teacher in Malakal," he started, "and the government said school was free, but the government did not pay for the services. So, I had to call the parents together." While affirming the need for the parents' participation, he also acknowledged their unique context. "In the village," he reflected on pre-war times, "we could bring milk, chickens, and goats (to support the teachers), but now we are displaced." While times are desperate, the General Secretary, urged parents to continue promoting the education of their children, not waiting until the conflict ends. "There is no peace, but we must push forward. We use any chance we get as an opportunity."



Teacher Martha's Baby Holding Leisa Wagstaff's Thumb

Wearing both her hats as PCOSS Education Facilitator and PC(USA) mission co-worker, Leisa recognized the efforts of the teachers, parents and church leaders. "We know you are suffering, but we are together," she affirmed.

The meeting closed with prayer and a visit to each of the three classrooms. The students' energy and aspirations radiated through cracks in the mud-walls, as they sang joyfully from their new desks. Only one student carried a notebook. Acknowledging its value and rarity, she hugged the treasure tightly against her body.

Passing the blue tent homes which mark their residents as displaced, the PCOSS car distanced itself from the waving community. "These are our children, our brothers and sisters, we can't run away," one teacher had said, describing their students. Let the wider church family, also remain near.

*Please pray that the ceasefire which began on July 1 will be upheld, and the continuing national peace talks will bear fruit. Please also pray for the key role of the South Sudan Council of Churches in the peace process. May God give them wisdom and bring lasting peace. Amen*

## II. PCOSS EDUCATION Update:

- One of the two schools which received desks this quarter is Good Shepherd Presbyterian Nursery and Primary IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) Camp school located at the UNMISS Juba compound. This

school serves 1,000 pupils. The PCOSS Ed Dept. visited the school to discuss ways their host congregation can support education within this unique camp setting.

- A meeting held with the Salvation Presbyterian Nursery and Primary School Parents' Council, Management Committee and church elders planned for greater implementation of school policy, strengthening enrolment, and payment of teachers.
- The PCOSS Quarterly Newsletter included a heart-felt article from Rev. Yor (PCOSS General Secretary) describing three key stakeholders in education: parents, teachers, and the hosting congregation (pastors, elders, church members, and the church development committee). To the third group he pleaded: *"If you stop from this work of school construction and maintenance, supervision, and general overall support to wait for others to do, these children will be street children."* He then addressed all three groups, saying: *"We need to use the opportunity we have while these children are still young, for we do not know what will happen, only God knows."*
- The School Management Committee of Kasire Two School designed a school handbook which was approved by PCOSS Education Department, who also provided the school with a teacher's table.
- Pedagogic and administrative visits to two schools supported the implementation of a school garden to help feed unpaid teachers.
- The PCOSS General Secretary and PCOSS Ed Facilitator met with Across leadership to discuss the mobile teacher trainings in Pochalla and Pibor, and they also made a follow-up visit to a "Developing Children's Capacity" afterschool program in South Nyakuron.
- Maintenance for doors and windows and provision for plastering walls was provided to a PCOSS School in Bor.
- The Ed. Dept. facilitated a meeting with the PECP (Presbyterian Education Center in Pochalla) school community (teachers, administrators, parents, church leaders, and graduates) discussing their school fee schedule and ways to maintain teachers. PCOSS Ed Dept. also appreciated the parents for their good work and commitment to educational advancement. PECP has started its own garden project which has a multi-layered impact on the school community: teaching the pupils the art of farming and self-sufficiency, providing foodstuff to improve the nutrition of the pupils, providing teachers a source of income, and setting an example on the importance of farming to the community.



Working in the School Garden in Pochalla

### III. Teacher Training Update

#### A. Teacher Training College

- The PCOSS Education Department found another good option for college level teacher training while Yei Teacher Training College (YTTC) remains closed. Solidarity Teacher Training College is located in Yambio, South Sudan and offers both in-service and pre-service teacher training. The college has 15 instructors from 9 different countries, and about 125 students from across South Sudan and also Sudan.
- The college agreed to allow the PCOSS teachers who were in their final year at YTTC to finish their certificate after two trimesters at Solidarity TTC.



- Six PCOSS teachers plan to start at Solidarity TTC in September, and if all goes well, PCOSS hopes to send additional teachers for training.



## B. Mobile Teacher Training in Pibor and Pochalla

- Teacher Training in Pochalla: Across facilitated a follow-up training for twenty-six teachers (including five women) and ten school heads/administrators for three weeks in April. Topics included: lesson planning, schemes of work, teacher-centered and learner-centered teaching methods, classroom management, record keeping, creating a child-friendly learning environment, leadership, and management skills.

*“I am now better in preparing and delivering lessons than before I attended the trainings.”*  
*- Teacher Achim Apay Ogalla (Pochalla)*

*“It was evident from participants’ responses that a teacher-centered approach to teaching and learning is still the dominant approach. Teachers need more professional support and mentoring if a learner-centered approach to teaching and learning is to become institutionalized in the school culture.” – Across Education Staff*

- Follow-Up: Two trainings of three-four weeks have now been conducted in both Pochalla and Pibor, so this quarter focused on following-up with the teachers and administrators trained. This included follow-up visits to five schools in Pochalla and five in Pibor, eighteen teachers and six head teachers in Pibor and thirty-two teachers and eight head teachers in Pochalla, and twenty-one education managers in Pochalla and fourteen in Pibor. Twelve teachers in Pochalla and ten in Pibor also received mentorship.

As a result of the training, education officials are monitoring and supervising schools and starting to monitor teachers’ performance. After learning about school management, the head teachers started delegating authority to other teachers and keeping school records. The head teachers also noted improved interaction between the school and the community. Teachers are now able to mobilize parents and help them understand their role in supporting education.

- Teacher Observation: The ten lesson observations in Pibor and twelve in Pochalla indicated improved teaching practices after the trainings. A significant majority of teachers (80% in Pibor and 75% in Pochalla) developed good lessons with clear learning objectives and delivered the lessons very well. Teachers received feedback on their lessons as well as guidance on other relevant teaching topics.
- Mobilization for Education: Four community mobilization and awareness campaigns in Pochalla and six in Pibor encouraged enrolment and retention of children, especially girls. Generally, parents and teachers agreed that access to education is the right of all children and discussed strategies for overcoming obstacles to school attendance. The importance of school and community partnership was emphasized as well as the key roles of teachers and parents. The issue of violence in school came up



Meeting Education Officials in Otallo - Pochalla

strongly in Pibor, and the group concluded that the school should be an island or space of peace, development and love. Teachers were encouraged to be ambassadors of peace.

#### IV. PEACEBUILDING Update

- Children’s Trauma Healing: RECONCILE led a children’s trauma healing training with adults in Eden Zone, Rhino Camp, Uganda for two days in May. After the twenty women and fifteen men were trained, they helped to facilitate a three-day workshop with one hundred children (fifty-nine girls and forty-one boys). The children had the opportunity to share their experiences with each other, and they developed new friendships through the workshop.
- Refugee and Host Community Forum: One forum was facilitated in Bidi Bidi Refugee Camp, Yumbe District in May. Fifteen nationals and forty-one refugees acquired skills and knowledge in conflict transformation and peace building. Like the forum held last quarter in Rhino Camp, the refugee and host communities in Bidi Bidi openly shared about their ongoing conflicts. Given the huge refugee population, refugees and nationals struggle over scarce resources such as water, firewood, land, education, and health services. By the end of the training, both communities understood the importance of peaceful co-existence. Participants also recognized that genuine peace starts within a person and is extended to family, neighbors and communities. As a result of their time together, they agreed to share resources, and the host community provided the refugees a piece of land for agricultural activities free of charge. The peace building forum was the first of its kind in the area.
- Peacebuilding and Conflict Transformation Training: Twenty-two women and thirty-six men living as refugees in Bidi Bidi camp came together to acquire skills in peacebuilding in June. It is rare to bring



Community Mobilization Meeting in Pibor



Reconciliation Conference Ends Cycles of Fighting

together members of the Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups for peacebuilding training in the camps. The Dinka and Nuer are the most stigmatized by other tribes as the cause of the crises in South Sudan. At the training, they shared their testimonies and realized that they were both confused by politicians, who wanted them to hate each other. During the training, members of different South Sudanese tribes, including Dinka and Nuer, agreed to forgive each other and work together for peace within the camps in Uganda.

- Community Peace Dialogue and Reconciliation Conference: The conference took place in Duony County of Gok State, South Sudan in June. Over five hundred community members participated the first two days, and even more on day three.

On the fourth day, the signed peace agreement was celebrated by over one thousand men and women. The agreement between the five clans was to end the fighting in their two communities. “This part of the Dinka community has been notorious (for) killing themselves... (they) killed themselves in thousands,” explains Rev. Peter Tibi, the chief mediator in the conference,

“we are grateful to witness and facilitate this process.”  
 Rev. Tibi met with these communities at the end of 2017 to lay the foundation for the reconciliation. Once he left, a disarmament process took place. After the peace agreement was signed, a committee formed to monitor the implementation of the signed agreement.



Traditional Chiefs Signing the Peace Agreement

## V. Testimonies of Impact

### Peacebuilding

- Reconciliation Conference: *“(From) the start of planting the seeds of peace and disarmament, I can see the happiness in the eyes and hearts of the people. I don’t see people (carrying) arms now. People move freely. Young people whose arms have been collected are wearing certificates around their necks to show that they are free and handed their arms to the authorities.... The community is in jubilation, and the Inter Church has sealed the agreement with prayers while the customary sealing was done by (the) traditional leader... The community leaders are very grateful to RECONCILE and all their partners who are supporting this people to people peace and reconciliation conference. I would like to thank you all for your prayers, material and financial support. May God bless you all richly.” Rev. Peter Tibi*
- RPI Testimony: *Rev. Alice, RECONCILE Peace Institute Alumni (RPI), is now working with Care International as a counselor in her refugee camp. She has five-six counseling sessions a day and supervises other counselors. She said that she qualified for the position because of her training at RPI. Rev. Alice is grateful to be putting her skills to use to help her community.*



Mission co-worker, Rev. Shelvis Smith-Mather, and Rev. Alice at a Training

### Education

- PCOSS Test Results: The Presbyterian Education Center of Pochalla (PECP) received the distinction of a 100% pass on the South Sudan Primary School Leaving Certificate. It was the first time the PECP school sat for the exam, and the first time that any school in Pochalla has taken the exam. Also, Akatgol Presbyterian Nursery and Primary School ranked second out of all the primary schools in South Sudan on the 2017 primary school leaving exam.
- Mobile Training: *“There was overwhelming consensus among all the head teachers and teachers in both Pochalla and Pibor that the education supplies and textbooks that the project distributed are contributing to the improvement of instruction and learning in schools. Teachers said the education supplies and textbooks are greatly helping them prepare lessons, write reports and keep records, (and) that the textbooks have greatly improved teaching in the schools as every teacher and class have access to the required textbooks. For example, the head teacher of Langachord mixed primary school in Pibor said that availability of textbooks has encouraged teachers to report regularly to school.” – Across Staff*



- **A Teacher's Story:** Abwola Okwata Okach, age 27, is a volunteer science teacher at the Presbyterian Education Complex of Pochalla (PECP) primary school. Prior to participating in the trainings, Abwola did not understand the importance of preparing for a lesson or engaging children actively in learning. After the training, he said: *“students learn well when a teacher gives them the opportunity to learn things for themselves. The teacher's role is to guide the students in what they are learning.”*



*“Key to success in teaching is proper planning” - Abwola*

Abwola's classroom management also improved: *“I had difficulty in managing disruptive student behavior in class. I now know that disruptive student behavior has reasons. I try all my best to understand why a student is behaving the way he/she does, and then come up with a better way of addressing the problem. I also use positive discipline in class. It is very helpful. It makes student respect me.”* He also added: *“two partners have brought light to Pochalla community... May the Almighty God continue His blessings to PCUSA and ACROSS.”*



**Guns Collected in the Duony County Disarmament Process**

## VI. Challenges

- During the community mobilization meetings in Pibor and Pochalla, parents identified the following challenges to education: violence, early marriages, hunger, and poverty.
- While teachers' classroom management has improved, managing student behavior remains a challenge to many teachers in both Pibor and Pochalla. Overcrowded classes and open air classrooms also make class management difficult.
- Classroom observations indicated 25% of teachers in Pochalla and 20% in Pibor have poor understanding of subject content, especially in math and science.
- Mentorship for teachers in some schools in Pochalla cannot be carried out during the rainy season.
- Some teachers are not comfortable communicating in English.
- Budgeting for food items for trainings can be a great challenge due to the daily inflation of prices.
- Due to the lack of payment of teachers, some of the teachers trained in 2017 have left the profession.

- In both the children’s trauma healing workshop and the community dialogue, the number of participants were more than what was planned, so adjustments were made to accommodate them.



Two Classrooms as a Result of Parents’ Commitment to Education

highlights, before heading to the US to visit churches, was facilitating a training for pastors and spouses on the topic of child soldiers. The training was organized by the PCOSS Women’s Work Department. Once Stateside, Leisa served as a Mission Advisory Delegate to the PC(USA)’s General Assembly (GA). PCOSS General Secretary, Rev John Yor, accompanied Leisa to GA, where they shared with many about the SSEPP.

The Kandels also traveled to the US this quarter for their Interpretation Assignment. While in the US, they shared with churches about the current situation in South Sudan, and the key role South Sudanese churches play in promoting peace. (They also enjoyed some hugs from precious grandkids!). When reflecting on the project, the Kandels wrote, “we are encouraged to see the teachers, who have been trained by Leisa, so excited about how well new teaching techniques are doing in the classroom.”

Shelvis Smith-Mather was very grateful for the opportunity to travel with RECONCILE to help facilitate trainings in Bidi Bidi refugee camp this quarter, and Nancy Smith-Mather was deeply encouraged by a trip to Juba to visit PCOSS schools and SSEPP partners. While back in Arua, Uganda, the Smith-Mathers also enjoyed facilitating a trauma healing course for a group of South Sudanese church leaders starting their theological studies. One additional highlight, was Shelvis’ opportunity to co-teach a course with an RPI alumni and dear friend from Yei.



Nancy, Leisa, Sharon, Lynn and Shelvis Thank You for Your Support!

## VII. Financial Update

A BIG “Thank You!” to Westminster Presbyterian Church who gave \$96,824 this quarter, and a joyful thanksgiving for all of the churches and individuals whose generous gifts invited Westminster’s 38% match! Let’s continue to work together on this project which reminds many of God’s gracious willingness to multiply resources.

## VIII. Mission Co-Workers Update:

The SSEPP mission co-worker team has been on the move this quarter! One of Leisa Wagstaff’s