

South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project (SSEPP) 2nd Quarter 2019 Summary Report

Report Outline:

- I. Brief Context Update
- II. PCOSS Education Department Update
- III. Teacher Training Update
- IV. RECONCILE Peacebuilding Update
- V. Testimonies of Impact
- VI. Challenges/Opportunities
- VII. Financial Update
- VIII. Mission Co-Worker Update

I. Brief Context Update:

“Where are you?” Rev. Debbie Braaksma asked Rev. Peter Gai Lual, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCOSS).

“I am under my bed,” came the Moderator’s response.

When Malakal became a battle ground for the 2013 outbreak of Civil War, many civilians took cover under beds, praying the bullets would pass them by.

Even though their phone conversation took place almost 6 years ago, it remained fresh in the Moderator’s mind. Behind his desk in the PCOSS Juba office this May, he reflected on the significance of the international call. “When the fighting broke out in Malakal, I was under my bed, and you called me,” Rev. Gai said to Rev. Debbie Braaksma (PC(USA) Africa Area Coordinator), the authenticity of his appreciation and the recognition of the tragedy endured stilled the room.

“This is the kind of relationship we want,” Rev. Gai continued. “When we are in trouble, Bill (Andress) used to ask us, ‘how are you?’” Came another example, shared with the same spirit of gratefulness.

His description of the PCOSS’ partnership with the PC(USA), ended with four statements, “We are friends. I like the way you treat us. You value us. Our life is very precious to you.”

In May, Rev. Gai and the PCOSS Department heads met with a group from the PC(USA). Two came from Peaks Presbytery in Virginia, two from Des Moines Presbytery in Iowa, two from the PC(USA) national office in Kentucky, one from Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis, and four were Mission co-workers. The trip allowed us to connect with our partners and to see some of the schools touched by the South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project.



The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCOSS), Rev. Peter Gai Lual, laughing with a group of PC(USA) visitors in Juba

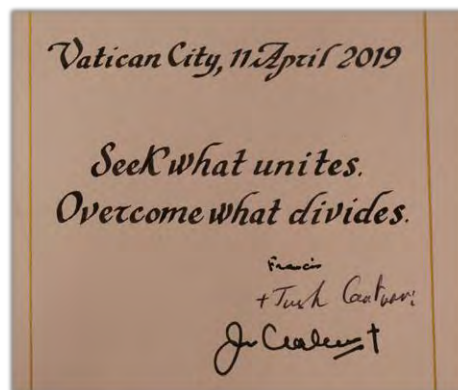


Rev. Ekram Kacha seeks guidance on ethnic division

Even more than partnership and education, ethnic division among South Sudanese in the diaspora weighed heavily on the heart of one visiting US church leader. Rev. Ekram, originally from the Nuba Mountains, now pastors a PC(USA) church in Iowa. Many members of her flock live far from their beloved homeland of South Sudan, yet they still feel deeply wounded by the war and painfully divided by its ethnic dimension. Desperate for something hopeful to carry back to her congregation, Rev. Ekram humbly laid her burden at the feet of the (PCOSS) Moderator. She asked him, "What is your message to Sudanese in America?"

"My message is that the church is neutral. We talk with one voice. Let us be united as the church and not separate. (In the war) the country was segmented along tribal (ethnic) lines, we don't want the church to do the same," Rev. Peter Gai stated clearly. The Moderator pointed one by one at his colleagues in the PCOSS national office, revealing their ethnic affiliation. While the color of each person's skin was quite similar in tone, each came from a different "tribe" or race. "Sixty-four tribes belong to South Sudan, and we *all* belong to South Sudan," he added. "My message (to South Sudanese in the diaspora) is consistent: Please help us to heal our land."

Rev. Gai then shared about the strategic role of the church in building peace in South Sudan, about the ten presbyteries that make up PCOSS, and even about his recent peace promoting trip to Rome to meet with the Pope. Rev. Ekram left the meeting inspired by the diversity within the cloud of witnesses in our sister denomination. Bumping down the road, she held tightly to the message to be delivered back in Iowa, a call for the church to speak as one, a call to intentionally represent peace. Even though the PCOSS meeting was the first of the trip, Rev. Ekram felt, if her visit was limited to just this first day, it would have been worth the effort to come. She sat in a circle with PCOSS leaders, all different ethnic groups, and witnessed herself, their courageous commitment to peace. There is power in sitting together, hearing one another, valuing each other, and being reminded God calls each of us to represent radical unity, wherever we live.



Pope Francis gave Rev. Gai a Bible with these words written inside

A PC(USA) group from Minnesota, Virginia, Iowa, and Kentucky visited their PCOSS partners in Juba in May





Rev. Debbie Braaksma gives Mr. Peter Mama Oleyo the *Teacher of the Year Award*

II. PCOSS EDUCATION Update:

- Over 3,700 workbooks, 3000 pencils, and 1100 pens as well as other teaching/learning aids supplied to six schools. The financial contribution was from well-wishers, and PCOSS facilitated purchase and distribution. Another school received 2 chalkboards in addition to workbooks.
- 100 girls attended the initial gathering of an empowerment and self-esteem roundtable. The activity gave them an opportunity to discuss issues affecting them, encouraged them to stay in school, and equipped them with skills to serve as role models.
- 80 Big Books purchased this quarter for an upcoming training on reading methodology.
- More than 50 parents, church leaders, and community members in attendance at each of the full-day trainings for two school communities, increasing local capacity to support education.
- 30 PCOSS schools in South Sudan, Uganda, and Ethiopia, have now provided the PCOSS Ed Dept with statistics, representing more than half of the total number of schools.

- 28 schools participated in the PCOSS' nomination process to recognize outstanding teachers. Five female teachers received this distinction, affirming their value.
- Several school communities are now actively engaged in the running of their schools, including activities like student recruitment, strategic planning, and attending Parent Council Trainings.
- 8 PC(USA) visitors introduced to 4 PCOSS school communities. The group heard from teachers about challenges and successes, as well as enjoying the songs of welcome from students.
- 7 schools were strengthened by pedagogic, counseling, and administrative visits this quarter. One meeting examined current challenges and conflicts, and moved the school towards greater efficiency and harmony, as well as clearer administrative policy.
- 3 meetings held to discuss the implementation of SSEPP activities and the roles of the education department, mission co-workers, and General Assembly leadership.
- This quarter's PCOSS Newsletter focused on the return of the child soldier to the classroom. The letter sought to equip school communities to play a role in helping soldiers reintegrate into society. The newsletter included the following instruction: *"When asked, "Who is a child soldier?" simply answer, "My child!" for every child belongs to each of us."*
- 2 classrooms and an office for a school which began meeting under a tree, are almost complete. The new building will provide educational opportunities for kindergarten and primary-age children whose parents opted to keep them at home as opposed to having them make a treacherous walk to the nearest school several miles away.



PCOSS teachers warmly welcome Scott Smith to their school, the school with the highest test scores in the State.



The children either walked for miles or attended class under a tree (when it was not raining). Soon, the Kasire students will study in these 2 classrooms and their teachers will prepare lessons in an office.

- PCOSS held their 2nd headteacher and deputy headteacher training/networking meeting. They discussed strategies for building a good school.
- The headteacher and deputy headteacher’s exchange program allowed school administrators to visit other PCOSS schools. This activity gives an opportunity for teachers to share successes, challenges and advice, as participants seek to strengthen each other’s capacity as school administrators.
- Another mobility device was delivered to a teacher with physical disabilities, a connection facilitated by the PCOSS Ed Department.
- The PCOSS Ed Dept met with Africa Development Aid (ADA) regarding water and other school needs.
- A school community designed their own uniforms and tailoring is now underway. Uniforms help pupils feel a part of something and serve as a reminder of the value of education.

III. Teacher Training

- After having their studies interrupted by war and later resumed at a new college, two PCOSS student teachers persevered with their coursework, graduating from Solidarity Teacher Training College as certified teachers in May. They are currently assigned as part-time lead teachers in PCOSS schools, developing their colleagues’ capacity.
- The PCOSS national office leaders long to reach the areas of the country from which they were displaced in the 2013 Civil War with services in education development. Towards that end, a teacher training was implemented in the North Upper Nile State. The PCOSS Muhaba Center’s teachers were included as part of the training at their request. The center is a home for orphaned children.



“We are happy to see our leaders today. Welcome, welcome, welcome,” sang the students. Then, standing proudly in their uniforms, they posed for a photo with Rev. Ekram Kacha from Des Moines Presbytery and Rev. Alanna Tyler from Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis.

IV. PEACEBUILDING Update

- A follow-up community dialogue and reconciliation conference took place in April in Duony County, Gok State among communities engaged in cattle raiding and cycles of revenge. The participants included church, women’s and youth leaders, as well as community elders and chiefs, traditional leaders, and local government officials. Over 700 delegates, men and women, attended the conference. The resolutions passed during conference, stated that future perpetrators of conflict within the community will be subject to due process of the law when peaceful means fail. The representatives resolved to denounce any form of violence, including hate speech, and pledged to live peaceful co-existence.



Chiefs, elders and local government officials sign conference resolution and peace pack.



Women dance during the signing of the resolutions.

- After receiving requests for intervention in Tika, a refugee settlement in Uganda, RECONCILE carried out an assessment focused on issues of conflict and trauma among both the South Sudanese refugees and the Ugandan host community living in that area. The people interviewed included religious, women’s, and youth leaders in both the host and refugee communities, as well as administrative leaders for the camp. The objectives included: assessing the general conflict management strategies in all the settlements in Tika; identifying both existing and potential conflicts, and assessing psychosocial rehabilitation needs as well as the capacity of community leaders to respond to traumatic events.
- The results of the assessment led RECONCILE to conduct a training in conflict transformation in Tika Refugee Camp for both the South Sudanese and their host community. Of the 67 total participants, 40 were men and 27 were women.
- One monitoring and evaluation visit to the Income Generating Groups (IGAs) in Bidibidi Refugee Camp, brought together 4 groups, a total of 60 participants (39 male and 21 female).

V. Testimonies of Impact

Education

- *“The headteachers and teachers are so eager to learn. Coming together for an occasional training is such a big highlight for them. It seems they are inspired by just knowing that their school isn’t the only one without basic needs such as chalk and teacher salaries. They arrive punctually for trainings, despite the culture of lateness, with excitement and heartfelt thanks for being given the opportunity.*

Their evaluation of the trainings has moved beyond an “everything was good” to one of empowerment and understanding. They identify their needs that, if met, will help them become better school



Mission co-worker, Leisa Wagstaff, introduces the PC(USA) visitors to teachers and schools in Juba.

allowing us to train at his school, show us his work, and give us good food. I will be back to visit with him, and I am waiting for my chance for all of you to come to train at my school and learn from me. You will also give me good advice.”

“I have learned much and am hoping that I was able to give this headteacher and his deputy, who has welcomed us today, some good advice on how to solve the challenges of this school. We can help one another. And we should come together to do fundraising, because we see the bad situation of this school (stream overflowing when it rains, and the entire school buildings flooded). It is not good to have to dismiss the children or cancel classes every time it rains. This is the rainy season. How many days will be lost (from study)?”

Peacebuilding

- *“The project has given unique opportunities for participants to open up and share the traumatic events that happened to them during the long wars in South Sudan that have been characterized with brutalities against civilians.” – RECONCILE staff*
- *“The project has enabled willingness among the Dinka communities (in Tika Camp) to recognize the reconciliation process as the only way to open a new page of forgiveness for healing the wounds of war which resulted in their displacement from South Sudan to the refugee camps” – RECONCILE staff*
- *“What’s even more exciting about RECONCILE’s engagement in Tika Refugee Camp, is that it is being done in collaboration with several other NGOs. As I speak, land is being purchased and ground is being broken to build a family center in the camps, which will be staffed by counselors to serve the local*

administrators, educators, facilitators of trauma reduction and conflict resolution, mobilizers of parents and the school community, and promoters of wholistic development.” – Leisa Wagstaff

- Comments of 2 PCOSS headteachers during the recent networking/training event and the launch of the exchange program:

“I am a headteacher at a Presbyterian school here in Juba, but this is the first time to know another church school. It is good to make exchange visits with one another; not isolate yourself. We can learn so much from being in another’s environment. We can also share our ideas with the headteacher who is hosting us. He has done a good job today of



Flooding at Jabarona PCOSS School in Juba.

community. The NGO building, the family center, hopes to hire many of the leaders RECONCILE is training as counselors.” – Rev. Shelvis Smith-Mather, MCW

- “The IGA (income generating activities) initiative has helped raise hope among the beneficiaries by providing some basic needs to their families as their businesses pick-up slowly.” – RECONCILE staff
- “The IGA initiative has helped us to contribute to the welfare of our families, and the bricks we burn are used for the construction of the schools in the camp. I am so happy that we are also contributing to the wellbeing of the community.” – IGA group participant, Bidibidi Refugee Camp
- The work of the brick making IGA group has encouraged other refugees to burn bricks as well, increasing their productiveness and income while in the camps.



Brick burning in Bidibidi Refugee Camp

VI. Challenges/Opportunities

- Rain prohibits some schools from offering classes due to flooding or the lack of proper facilities.



Rev. Awadia Aggrey, the first woman ordained in the PCOSS, shows the visitors her church in Kasire community. The floor floods when it rains.

- Movement daily from Arua town to Tika made the training start late each day and was tiresome for the facilitators. Currently, there is no accommodation for visitors within the camp.
- The number of participants was more than what was budgeted, this was a challenge in terms of feeding but also it was an opportunity to create wider consultation among the communities.
- New arrivals to the refugee camp need some training on how to co-exist with others in the settlement.
- The capacity of grass roots leaders needs to be developed to organize local forums and to identify, plan, resource and implement their own peace building and

rehabilitation initiatives.

- Recreational activities for the youth like sport should be supported in the camps and used to unite the youth together.
- Vocational skills for young people like tailoring, carpentry, and driving could help them become actively involved in supporting and sustaining grass roots conflict transformation initiatives.
- Awareness on sex education and early marriages especially for young girls and boys must be carried out to empower the remaining young girls in the refugee settlement.

VII. Financial Update

Thanks to the generosity of many individuals, churches and presbyteries, \$166,734 has reached partners in 2019 for the implementation of activities. These funds facilitate trauma healing, reconciliation between neighbors, training teachers, equipping parents, and preparing children to be transformative leaders. Please pray that God continues to multiply these efforts. To help our partners plan the next steps in their programs, we ask your congregation to prayerfully consider making a pledge to support their efforts. We also give thanks to Westminster Presbyterian Church for continuing to match 38% of each gift. To God be the glory.



Glad to be in school –
Jabarona PCOSS School
in Juba

VIII. Mission Co-Workers Update:

Sharon and Lynn Kandel: We are excited to see the third school building completed! Kasire school was finished in 2 1/2 months and looks wonderful. Seeing the excitement on the faces of the students was so much fun and a reward by itself. We continue to see small changes in communities and in the teachers and it is these changes that give us hope for a better future for the children of South Sudan.



Lynn Kandel overseeing the construction of a new school

Shelvis and Nancy Smith-Mather: Shelvis and Nancy were deeply grateful for opportunities to witness God at work both in East Africa and the Middle East. Nancy loved being with the PC(USA) group in Juba, especially watching the visitors experience PCOSS schools with fresh eyes. Shelvis took the stories of RECONCILE to a peacebuilding conference in Oman, a great place to connect with likeminded organizations. These new relationships fostered mutual encouragement and new partnerships for RECONCILE.

Leisa Wagstaff: I was privileged to attend the pilot Aspire Africa Teacher Learning Circles Conference in Kigali, Rwanda where I was challenged and inspired by educators, social pioneers, and human rights activists and equipped alongside other teachers working in crisis environments. I look forward to sharing my experiences with these teachers scattered throughout Africa. Thank you for accompanying me in this experience through your prayers. Please continue to support our South Sudanese Presbyterian school communities. There are so many challenges and, yet, the learners and teachers continue to push forward. It is because you are that “great cloud of witnesses”.