

South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project (SSEPP)  
2nd Quarter 2016 Summary Report

**Report Outline:**

*I. Brief South Sudan Context Update*

*II. EDUCATION Update*

- 1. Capacity Building with Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCOSS) Education Department*
- 2. Teacher Training through Yei Teacher Training College (YTTC)*
- 3. Mobile Teacher Training*
- 4. Community Mobilization for Education*

*III. PEACEBUILDING Update*

- 5. RECONCILE Peace Institute*
- 6. Collaboration with Partners*

*IV. Testimonies of Impact*

*V. Challenges*

*VI. Financial Update*

*VII. Mission Co-Workers' Update*

**I. Brief South Sudan Context Update:**

It finally happened. Many wondered if it ever would, many doubted, many hoped. In April, former vice president and opposition leader, Riek Machar, returned to Juba for the first time since December 2013. The President welcomed him, he was sworn in as vice president, and the two leaders expressed commitment to forming the government of National Unity described in last year's peace agreement.

What would his return mean for the country? At first, it brought an end to fighting in some areas, but not in all. Fighting in Wau, Kajo-Keji and Raja displaced tens of thousands this quarter. Ethnic tensions remained high. "Are there any Nuer on this bus?" or "Are there any Dinka children in this orphanage," (and similar questions) were asked during the past few months by armed men seeking revenge.

Machar's return did not turn the economy from its downward plunge. Mission co-worker, Rev. Shelvis Smith-Mather, described the situation by saying: "neighbors have become so thin and so desperate." The problem is further complicated by local soldiers who have not received pay in months. "They are angry, hungry, feel disrespected, and they have guns... so it is easy to see how tense situations become volatile quickly." The UN states that 4.8 million are food insecure. With such desperation present in the nation, the crime rate climbed rapidly.



Children playing on a tank in South Sudan.

Then it happened. Perhaps, “the unthinkable,” or perhaps just the possibility everyone tried to push out of their thoughts, because it was too devastating to contemplate. Mission co-worker Leisa Wagstaff described the situation from her experience, “Whether trying to evacuate or shelter in place, barrages of bullets from tankers, gunships, machineguns, RPGs, and other weapons of war invaded our lives. Even the air we breathed trembled.” “South Sudan Back at War,” read the headlines, as forces loyal to the president and vice president claimed lives in the capital city again.

Our PC(USA) partners in Juba including PCOSS and Across staff, Leisa Wagstaff, and many sisters and brothers who call South Sudan home, lay on the floor in various parts of the city, trying not to get hit by stray bullets. “Shelter in a safe location, away from doors and windows, and avoid non-essential movements,” came the advice of the US embassy to citizens. After 4 days of fighting, a ceasefire brought a longed-for quiet to a traumatized people, who began to emerge from hiding.

The inevitable ripple effects across the nation are still unfolding, and whether fighting will resume in the capital remains uncertain. What is certain to many of our sisters and brothers, colleagues and friends, is that God is present with them. “What are your next steps?” Rev. Shelvis asked a RECONCILE colleague right after her evacuation from the training center to the UNHCR compound in Yei, “we monitor the situation, and we trust in God,” came her response.

When the smoke settles, the South Sudanese church will work to heal the wounds of young and old who survived the fighting yet carry fresh and painful memories in their hearts. There is a long road ahead, yet the church’s history is one of perseverance, and the message of God’s radical forgiveness and incredible hope can not be silenced, even by the sounds of bombs and deafening gunfire. Somehow, the whispered prayers of those lying on the ground echo much louder and hold much more power in this God-created universe than any man-made weapon. And for that miracle, we give thanks.

## II. EDUCATION Update:

### 1. Capacity Building with PCOSS Education Department:

- Upon completion of his studies, Rev. Stephen Nyang Bang, PCOSS Director of Education, received a diploma in School Management from Daystar University on June 25, 2016. He was among the 897 overall graduates and the 38 diploma students under the CoratAfrica program.
- Pedagogic and administrative visits were made to 4 schools, 2 of which were visited twice.



Future Qualified PCOSS Teachers

- The PCOSS Education Department took occupancy of their shared office space at the new PCOSS GA headquarters in Jebel. This transition from a “mobile” office to permanent space will greatly enhance the efficiency of the department.

### 2. Teacher Training through Yei Teacher Training College (YTTC):

- 4 women and 2 men received scholarships for teacher training at Yei Teacher Training College (YTTC). They returned safely after their first two sessions with excitement, determination, and insight. *“Our new friends and study mates cried with us as we prepared to separate for the school break. It didn’t matter that we are from different ethnic areas of the country; we*

*are all striving together to be good teachers.”* Each is anxious for the next term to begin. While there, they were welcomed to YTTC and assisted in their adjustment to the social and academic setting by the 8 senior SSEPP scholarship students.

- The senior YTTC scholarship recipients from Pochalla humbly asked that PCOSS and PC(USA) consider supporting some of them for the diploma course at YTTC. With the additional training, they would be qualified to teach both primary and secondary school. Their current training prepares them to teach primary school, yet they hope a secondary school can be developed in Pochalla, so that children in their community will not be forced to leave home in search of a high school level education. At this time, funding limitations make this request difficult to answer, however, if more funds are raised, it may be a possibility in the future.

### 3. Mobile Teacher Training

- In June, PCOSS, Across and PC(USA) representatives sat together in Juba to discuss the progress of the mobile teacher training. Fighting caused delays in last quarter’s plans for training in Pochalla, yet Across staff feel the situation in Pochalla is now stable enough to resume. During the meeting, PC(USA) shared that the funds raised for the project will not be able to cover the 3-year teacher training certificate in both Pochalla and Pibor as originally planned. This is unfortunate as these are some of the most marginalized areas of the country with teachers already serving with no training but for whom enrollment in YTTC is not possible. Due to commitments made to the community and leadership in Pochalla, when asked to choose, the PCOSS decided to move forward in Pochalla. If funds remain, beyond what is needed in Pochalla but not at the level to reach Pibor, or if security prohibits training in Pibor and Pochalla, then PCOSS recommended training their many teachers in Juba, who do not qualify for YTTC but are currently teaching. A training in Juba is less expensive due to reduced travel and transporting costs. At this time, the available funds for Across’ activities are less than half of what was originally planned, but if more are raised, then training in Pibor could go forward, which would greatly enhance the children of Pibor’s education and the community at large.

### 4. Community Mobilization for Education:

- A one-room church building that served as a classroom for four different classes was renovated using local building materials (bamboo and mud). Each of the classes is now enclosed for greater pupil attention, classroom management and noise reduction. An existing bamboo and mud classroom block (two classrooms) was renovated to keep out rain and dust and benches made for pupils to sit on. The school population is comprised of 475 pupils, the majority of whom are IDPs in Juba.



From a shed to a classroom



- SSEPP collaborated in the construction of a classroom block out of local materials and benches for a PCOSS school in Yei.
- Training for 25 PTA/Parents Council members representing nine PCOSS schools was implemented. A variety of teaching methodology and didactic materials were used to help equip PTA/Parents Council members to increase their understanding of the vital role they play in the successful functioning of



Parent Council Members with a Student Teacher identifying their roles in Education

PCOSS schools. Each school was given a binder of resource materials to be used in analyzing, planning, implementing, and monitoring the effectiveness of their schools and developing plans to meet the school's needs. The evaluations done by the participants will help the department plan for future trainings. *"Now I am very improved (as a PTA member)"* and *"I think that my Parents' Council will be more effective"* were two comments by participants.

- Four of the senior SSEPP teacher training scholarship recipients were in attendance at the workshop and shared in leading group discussions, translation, and setting up the training space. Their insight, experiences, and ability to work with a variety of personalities were greatly appreciated by facilitators, Parents Council members, and the education department.
- On June 21, 2016 the builder constructing the PCOSS school in Pochalla was finally able to send one of his workers back to Pochalla to finish the building which was interrupted by the fighting at the end of March.

Bishop Emeritus Paride Taban, an internationally recognized peacemaker, with RPI students



### III. PEACEBUILDING Update

#### 5. RECONCILE Peace Institute 2016

- The final 2 of 6 modules and RPI graduation were held during this quarter. At graduation, RECONCILE honored legendary South Sudanese

peacebuilder and United Nations' Peace Prize Laureate Bishop Emeritus Paride Taban. Bishop Taban received an award honoring his lifetime commitment to peace and also encouraged the current graduates as their keynote speaker.

- 3 South Sudanese leaders received scholarships through the project to attend the full 3-months of RPI, including a SPLA army chaplain (Major Machar Malual Deng), a volunteer counselor serving an IDP camp for 39,000 people (Rev. Jacob Kunyuat Jany), and a female PCOSS pastor (Rev. Elizabeth John Chuol) who serves three congregations in refugee camps in Uganda.
- In addition, several other leaders received funds to attend select 2-week courses. This group included government and military officials who took a course entitled *Good Governance and Leadership*.
- 2016 RPI Participants joined alumni in hosting a community forum which brought together representatives from Yei's various ethnic communities. The forum allowed, participants, graduates, and grassroots leaders to openly share obstacles to peace in their communities while committing to work together.

#### 6. Collaboration between PC(USA) Partners

- In June, the Director of the PCOSS Education Department met with RECONCILE's program staff in Yei. They had a good discussion about the possibility of creating peace clubs and training peer counselors in PCOSS schools in Juba. We look forward to seeing how these ideas develop.



Rev. Khamis of RECONCILE and Rev. Nyang of PCOSS shake hands after a good meeting.

#### IV. Testimonies of Impact



RPI Participant Colonel Abraham and former RPI Alumni Chairperson Rev. Emmanuel share a smile.

- *"I have become a new person with a new mind which is full of ideas" –PCOSS Pastor Elizabeth Chuol, 2016 RPI Participant*
- *"What I received has changed me, and I am going to change my community." -Major Peter Wol Biel, SPLA Officer & RPI Participant*
- *"I'm going to apply all that I have learned, ...because if you don't heal yourself you will not be able to help others. You have now opened our eyes to heal our trauma and help others. "-Christine Ismaili, Peace & Justice Commission Member & RPI Participant 2016*
- Less than a month after graduation, several alumni held a training for military soldiers, police officers and young adult leaders in Yei community. These audiences were combined because of their previous involvement in starting and stopping community violence. The workshop focused on providing participants with skills in conflict analysis, good governance and leadership. In addition, the training provided participants with strategies for mobilizing communities to



peaceful action. The 2016 alumni leading the training included the Chief of Police, 2 military chaplains, 1 community mobilizer and the head of the Greater Bhara Ghazal Youth Group.

- PCOSS Pastor Andrew Mayien and SPLA Officer, Major Michael Machar, both RPI 2016 participants, played key roles in calming and stopping a planned revenge attack in June. Just months after graduation, the two intervened after ethnic targeting led to the ambush and death of a friend. In early July, a public vehicle was stopped and robbed just after leaving Yei. Several Nuer individuals were singled out during the ambush and killed. Among those killed, was an influential military officer from Upper Nile who was the brother of an SPLA General. In response, the General prepared to send troops from Juba to retaliate. Rev. Mayien, (the deceased officer's pastor) and Major Michael Machar (one of the deceased soldier's commanding officers) met with military forces as well as angry members from their ethnic community. Their involvement helped to calm a tense situation and persuade leadership not to carry out a revenge attack which would have led to the loss of more life.

## V. Challenges

- Insecurity on roads: We are thankful to God for protecting the new YTTC students during their time away from families and home communities. One of the students, who had to delay her travel back to Juba, was among the passengers in a bus that was attacked by bandits. Two of her fellow passengers were the target of ethnic bias and murdered. In reflecting upon her ordeal, she states, *"I did not give up. God protected us. I am as determined as ever to succeed."*
- Food availability and the value of the South Sudanese Pound have decreased this quarter.
- Crime is increasing.
- With the outbreak of another conflict (July 7-11), the PCOSS school population again shifted, the communities that support education weakened, school buildings damaged and the hard-earned momentum gained during the past few months abruptly stopped. More importantly, many lives and their potential for capacity are lost forever.

## VI. Financial Update

Through the generous gifts of individuals and churches, \$40,375 was contributed to the project this quarter. Praise the Lord! Such gifts represent one way that different members are supporting the functions of the body of Christ, and we pray that with these gifts also come mutual encouragement and strengthening of the faith.

While celebrating the gifts this quarter, we also felt the need to discuss with our South Sudanese partners a reduction in activities due to the amount of funding



RPI Students do a team building activity.

received/pledged relative to the original project goal. For example, while mobile teacher training is desperately needed in both Pibor and Pochalla, the funds for Across to facilitate this effort are less than half of the original goal. Consequently, reaching both locations with training is not financially feasible at this time. We hope and pray that partners' activities will continue to receive additional gifts throughout the project's lifespan, so that more teachers receive training, more parents are equipped, more schools constructed, and more leaders trained in peacebuilding, yet we wanted to be discerning and recognize the limitations that the current funding level creates.

Please continue to invite others to join this effort. Beyond the financial blessing, this project is a sign of hope and accompaniment to many sisters and brothers in South Sudan, and for that we give God thanks.

## VII. Mission Co-Workers Updates



**Leisa Wagstaff:** (Below is an update written on July 11, during the recent fighting in Juba)

*"It has been raining quite heavily for the past 20 minutes and I am hoping that the downpour continues and every corner of Juba is receiving it. My prayer is that with the onset of rain, there will be a cessation of battle, for surely the soldiers wielding guns and heavy artillery will not want to continue during it and their machinery will not properly function under it. I have heard enough heavy artillery fire today for a lifetime.*

*Pakwan, a devoted PCOSS Church elder, hardworking ACROSS staff member and longtime friend to all PC(USA) mission personnel who have served in this area of the world, called shortly after midday. I was very distracted during our conversation by the noise and level of gunfire in his background. His community was in the midst of fierce fighting and he and the many people that live under his care (extended family, PCOSS colleagues, tribespersons, and persons fleeing the current conflict) were stretched out on the floor, hoping and praying that they would not be in the line of stray bullets. This is the reality for many residents of Juba since Friday.*

*Othow, a young person committed to change and development in his native Pochalla (but in Juba to facilitate peace and reconciliation discussions between the Anywaa people) was in another area of the capital. The scenario was the same for him.*

*Despite all that they had to deal with, they each (and others) took the time to check on me. PC(USA) Church family, these are the people – the South Sudanese - that you are supporting through your prayer, advocacy, and financial support. Thank you for sharing your lives with the lives of people here."*

After the ceasefire, Leisa was able to take a Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF) flight to Kenya. She is currently in Nairobi and thanks the PC(USA) for the many prayers; *"I have felt your prayers; thank you."* Please continue to keep Leisa in prayer.



**Lynn and Sharon Kandel:** “We are doing ok, although really wondering where South Sudan is headed with the recent violence. We have been on our Interpretation Assignment (IA) and do feel our time here in the USA has been well spent. It is good to get to know those who have been supporting us through their prayers, gifts, and letters.

We want to build up the relationship with churches that have not supported us in the past and have had great visits with them. We visited a few churches that have not had any mission co-workers interact with them for 20 years or more! Building that connection between

Presbyterian World Mission and Presbyterian congregations, which form our support network, without which we could ultimately not do any of the work we have been called to.

There is unfortunately a lot of uncertainty at this time concerning the construction of schools in the future due to the instability in South Sudan caused by recent conflict. Pray for peace in South Sudan as people in Wau, Yei, Juba, and other locations once again try to rebuild their lives.” – Lynn Kandel



**Shelvis and Nancy Smith-Mather:** “Our family gives thanks for the inspiration we gained through the testimonies of this year’s RECONCILE Peace Institute class. When the participants left, we missed listening to their songs of praise at night.

A preschool teacher was hired to teach young children who accompanied their parents to the training. Jordan and Addie joined the class and were so happy to have playmates! Our colleagues’ who live at RECONCILE, send their children to Uganda or Kenya for school, where the quality of education is

higher, so our children miss their company.

Our family left South Sudan to return to the US on July 5<sup>th</sup>, two days before the recent fighting in the capital broke out. We returned for a time of Interpretation Assignment (IA), including speaking at the New Wilmington Mission Conference, and also to welcome our third child, Lord willing, in the fall. Our hearts have been breaking as we continue to receive sad news from South Sudan. Our grief is deepened, as we arrive in our home country at a time riddled with racial division, political protest and tension between police officers and African American communities. We trust God has brought us to the US during this time and strengthened us through our South Sudanese sisters and brothers, to share in ministry that speaks life to churches in both countries. Please pray that God would help us to process and heal during our time in the US.”

*Thank you for your interest in this ministry which uplifts and equips people in South Sudan, for the glory of God! Please keep this project in your prayers and also share it with others!  
Thank you!*

