

South Sudan Education & Peacebuilding Project 2022 Report

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1. Brief Context Update:

The elections that were to have happened in 2023 have been delayed until 2024. Many feel this election will not happen while others are hopeful that some change is in the air. Government salaries are still not being paid, which causes soldiers to use their guns to get goods and money. Inflation is high and travel by road can still be dangerous. There are goods being imported again, by road, from Kenya and Uganda. Being in any of the big cities, there is a sense of things getting better, security wise, but if you go to the countryside there is still a lot of fear and conflict.

The Ecumenical visit of the Pope, Anglicans and Presbyterians was delayed until 2023. This was a big disappointment to the people of South Sudan who were looking forward to being “seen” by people around the world and to have the opportunity to be heard. There is still hope that this visit will make a change in the hearts of the leadership of the country.

Flooding has continued to be a problem. There have been refugees that have returned from other countries that are now displaced within South Sudan because of floods. This is causing some to return to refugee camps outside of South Sudan. These floods continue to cause hunger, sickness, death, and displacement of people.

The Churches are still working hard for peace. They are also growing and through this growth able to reach out to communities and talk about reconciliation, trauma healing and the need for forgiveness.

2. PCOSS Update

There has not been a resolution to the division among the PCOSS leadership as yet. Mediation sessions have taken place and are continuing. Please pray for the leaders that they can be an example not only to their own church but to the nation.

The Education department has been able to continue with some work but, because of the conflict in the church, there have been no funds sent to PCOSS.

3. ACROSS Update

The Early Childhood Development (ECD) program has been in full swing for the full year of 2022 and they have been excited by the response they have had in the community. One mother commented “my family is poor and this ECD gives my child an opportunity to start learning now so she will do better in school which makes me want to find the money to send her to school”.

The ECD is getting more girls involved in school at a younger age which may mean they will stay in school longer.

An exciting thing is that 2 of the teachers that were trained through the SSEPP in the early years are now teaching either with the ECD program in Pochalla or at the Presbyterian school in Pochalla. Men from the community, returning to the community to give back!

The ECD has also been able to start evening classes for adults and some mothers stay while their children are in class during the day and sit on the sides to learn along with their children. One mother said that when her child comes home from school, she has that child teach her what she learned that day.

While Pochalla does have some political tension around it, the school seems to be a neutral space.

I think it is important to note that the head of the project, Peter Okuwori, lives in Pochalla and personally goes to Ethiopia to buy food for the school and when I have talked with him his face lights up with excitement for the ECD and what it can do for children.

4. RECONCILE Update

RECONCILE had to switch from working in the refugee camps in Uganda (just across the border from Yei) to working in Yei County in South Sudan. This happened because of closed borders due to Covid and then later due to a lot of new restrictions in Uganda.

RECONCILE has held trauma healing and conflict transformation and peace building trainings in Yei River County with over 400 people. This work has given hope to people who have been displaced, that they may be able to return to an area that is more peaceful.

It is clear that the work of RECONCILE is making some changes in certain communities where 1. Movement is safer, 2 people are returning to some areas 3. There is a readiness to let go of the wounds of conflict and 4 a new willingness to be in dialogue with each other.

RECONCILE continues to follow up with each community that they engage with and there is still a lot of work to be done across South Sudan. The work of reconciliation and trauma healing will need to go on for years.

5. Testimonies of Change

A middle-aged man shared that they had conflict with the wife for period of a year; they were not in good terms because he did not have job and money to sustain the family. Which mean he is useless. This insult has traumatized him for so long and he had threatened to kill the woman and resorted to excessive drinking of alcohol and smoking, But through the help from church leaders and a trained person by RECONCILE I was able to calm down and I became born again member of the church. I am now doing some daily paid works like digging etc. I am a driver by profession and am looking for that working still and I believe by Grace of God I will one day get it”

6. Challenges/Opportunities

There are many challenges throughout South Sudan – hunger, flooding, fighting, inflation and distrust.

ACROSS – in Pochalla they have had to deal with very high food cost which causes them to go to Ethiopia (just across the river but a day’s trip to the nearest town) for food supplies. They have also been able to bring awareness of the situation in Pochalla to other organizations.

7. Financial Update

The PC(USA)’s relationships with our South Sudanese partners is an incredible gift. It encourages us in our faith, it inspires us to persevere through challenges, and it reminds us to work towards new possibilities. The South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Program is one way that our denomination connects with the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCOSS), RECONCILE International, Across and we thank God that it is a connection which bears fruit in both countries.

Thank you for your contributions that allow the PC(USA) to join into our partners’ ministries. In 2022, generous Presbyterians contributed \$55,206.30 towards these collaborative efforts. Westminster Presbyterian Church in Minneapolis remains committed to partially matching each gift. Thank you for your continuing prayers, advocacy, and financial support and thank you to Westminster-Minneapolis for your continuing support of this program.

8. Mission Co-Worker Update:

An update on the Smith-Mathers. Shelvis continues to work on the curriculum for the RECONCILE Peace Institute and connecting RECONCILE with people around the world.

The family moved to Kampala, Uganda, in August of 2022 where Shelvis will continue to work on the curriculum review from there and also travel to South Sudan to assist with workshops and trainings as needed. The decision to live in Uganda was based on insecurity in South Sudan and having 4 children. Nancy and Shelvis regularly host people from South Sudan in their home.

Please keep the Smith Mathers in your prayers. For the travel that Shelvis will be doing, for the children in school and for Nancy as she listens for what God is calling her to do next.