



South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project (SSEPP)

3rd Quarter 2017 Summary Report

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I. Brief South Sudan Context Update:

We saw the five usable pit latrines servicing the 7,752-displaced people now living in Mahad, an informal settlement in South Sudan's capital city, Juba. Then we saw ten pit latrines with locks on their doors, no longer usable. These latrines overflowed into a pool of sewage and trash, with children playing and laughing next to the waste.

Walking through rows and rows of tent homes, we greeted women sitting in tarp doorways, washing clothes, cooking food, fixing hair, and caring for young children.

As we walked, several Presbyterian church leaders sat in an office, with walls made of bedsheets, waiting to receive us. Our group of visitors included Rev. Chris Ferguson, the General Secretary of the World Council of Reformed Churches, as well as PC(USA) Africa Area Coordinator, Rev. Debbie Braaksma, and Mission co-workers Sharon Kandel and Rev. Nancy Smith-Mather. We arrived at the church office with sweat pouring down our faces, shook the elders' hands and joined their circle.

"We understand that in most places," said Rev. Ferguson, "the people that God has placed to do ministry in the very local level are the best people to lead us to peace. You are the ones who can lead us," he said, seeking counsel from those living in the camp.

One PCOSS pastor responded, "We need the church to be empowered. Church leaders, women, and youth need to be empowered to advocate for the peace initiatives in South Sudan. The church has already started it, they have done a lot for peace, especially at the grassroots. At that level, they can play their role."



Behind Sharon and children stand 10 locked latrines

“What would a more empowered Presbyterian Church look like?” asked Rev. Ferguson.

“The initiative of the Presbyterian schools, is one of empowerment,” the pastor said, giving one example, although there is not currently a school serving the children in their camp. He went on to explain that building the capacity of the church in different areas and at all ages, equips the church to participate in efforts for peace.

“You are saying,” Rev. Ferguson clarified, “‘yes,’ there must be specialized grassroots peace ministry, but that only works, if the whole ministry of the church is working, (like) schools, evangelization, and so on?”

“Yes,” affirmed the pastor, and other church leaders agreed. One young camp resident, also a student at Nile Theological College, added: “Most youth are loitering, without (a place) where they can learn.” He next posed the question: “Where do we put these small kids?” And after lamenting further, he circled back to a common theme of the meeting, “Let us ask God to give us peace.”

We did not leave the gathering before one of the church mothers stated that, “Even though we are living in a hard situation here in Juba, God who created us did not leave us.” The women then tied beaded bracelets on our wrists, one with a beaded message stating, “God is good,” and they poured us cups of tea.

We drove away from the camp, with the challenging images of bodies craving food etched in our minds, with the affirmation that grassroots education and peacebuilding initiatives remain a top priority for the church, and with the reminder that, even in places which seem too desolate to sustain life, God’s love and radical faith survive.

II. PCOSS EDUCATION Update:

- Two-day training held for 12 teachers within Juba-based schools on the methodology of teaching reading. To help implement a reading culture in schools, each school received a mini-library which included several “Big Books” donated by Dr. Mac Brown and Trinity Presbytery.



A gift of books to schools.

- A trauma healing training held for 10 Head Teachers and Deputies with a special focus on working with traumatized children and in traumatized communities. The school administrators also learned strategies in caring for themselves as caregivers. Resources were provided to help school administrators train their staff.
- A new school building was constructed with funds raised by the PCOSS Ed Department through another partner organization. This good collaboration strengthens both the PCOSS Education Department and local schools.
- The quarterly *PCOSS/S Education News* brought updates and encouragement to stakeholders in the PCOSS school system. This publication highlighted ways that parents can be engaged in their child's educational development and provided a school profile of the Good Shepherd Nursery, Primary and Secondary School in Renk. The school was forced to close after the conflict of December 2013, yet it re-opened in February of 2016 with 900 students.
- The PCOSS Education Department is providing organizational, logistical, and facilitation support to the PCOSS General Assembly Office departments as well as other religious bodies such as the South Sudan Council of Churches and Norwegian Church Aid.



III. Teacher Training Update

Mobile Teacher Training:

- Pochalla: The Education Officer [Mobile Teacher Training in Pochalla.](#) recruited to remain in Pochalla and follow-up with teachers is active and sees improvement in the quality of education in the classrooms of the newly trained teachers. Teachers are now creating lesson plans which they were not doing previously.
- Pibor: Across is currently establishing an office in Pibor and making plans for mobile teacher training.

- Across developed a partnership with UNICEF to add additional support for teacher training and classroom materials in both Pochalla and Pibor. This shows the multiplying effect of the project as it enables our partners to leverage additional funds. With SSEPP funds alone, materials and support would not reach all the schools in these marginalized areas, so the partnership is a huge blessing!



School materials distributed in Pochalla.

Yei Teacher Training College:

- YTTC opened satellite campuses in Juba and Aweil, enrolled 152 new students, and held in-service training this quarter. The current plan for previously enrolled students is to complete their studies when the campus in Yei re-opens. In the interim, YTTC faculty have developed modules to accompany their 2016 shift to offer certificates and diplomas in affiliation with the University of Juba (UoJ). They also created disaster preparedness policies, which did not exist previously, and continue their role in education policy development at the national level.
- The PCOSS Education Dept. held a mentoring session with 9 of the 14 currently enrolled YTTC students.
- While waiting for YTTC to reopen, two students successfully passed their first year of university studies and another her high school level exam, thus, strengthening their skills and knowledge to be better teachers. Two other students are making use of the time away from the teacher training college to engage in studies at the presbytery's Bible College.
- Two of the Pochalla-based students have been appointed as Head and Deputy Head teacher at the school recently constructed by SSEPP in their area. Under their leadership, the quality of education is improving and the enrollment continues to grow at every level.
- Students are still committed to becoming teachers and are currently serving in their home schools, and as a result, the schools are experiencing positive changes.
- The Education Department provides administrative, pedagogical, material, and psycho-social support to help each continue to grow personally and professionally.

IV. PEACEBUILDING Update

- The PCOSS Education Dept. staff provided coordination, logistics, and chief facilitation in a series of trauma healing, conflict resolution, and peace and reconciliation events between ethnic groups sponsored by the PCOSS General Assembly Office, South Sudan Council of Churches, Norwegian Church Aid, and Northwest Jonglei Presbytery.
- Leisa Wagstaff served as a chief facilitator for 15 PCOSS General Assembly peace mediators as part of the SSCC's Action Plan for Peace (APP) "home-grown and church-led strategy for peace and reconciliation (in) addressing the root causes and long-term effects of conflict."
- PCOSS Education Dept. Director, Rev. Stephen Nyang, played an instrumental role in the organization of three peacebuilding workshops for the Pigi, Atar, and Khorfulus communities of the Northwest Jonglei Presbytery. Leisa served as the chief facilitator for these workshops which included Dinka and Nuer chiefs, church, government and civic leaders, business owners, and community members. The total participation was over 420 participants (1/3 of whom were female).



Working together for peace.

"Education does not exist in a vacuum. The community in which it operates must be prepared to play a vital role in its growth and development. When a community is in turmoil, quality education cannot be established and sustained. Thus, the PCOSS Education Dept. seeks every opportunity possible to engage with the school community so that its members can resolve its issues, understand the need for education, and support its schools." – Leisa Wagstaff

- RECONCILE International has recently hired a Program Manager, a Psychosocial Support Officer, and a Program Officer to accompany the ongoing work of the organization. We are hopeful that SSEPP funds will reach RECONCILE and activities push forward next quarter. RECONCILE remains active in peacebuilding within South Sudan training church and community leaders in trauma healing and peace building.



Teachers making alphabet blocks.

V. Testimonies of Impact

- Yei Teacher Training College: YTTC’s 2016 Annual Report reached partners this quarter and shared that in 2016 the college completed an impact assessment. Two key findings of the assessment:

- “In 90% of the schools visited, the trained graduates were supporting their untrained peers in the schools, building their capacity in lesson planning, teaching methodologies, and alternative forms of discipline.
- YTTC graduates increased participation of girls in schools by 10% over the last 3 years. (YTTC uses enrollment, leadership positions held, and participation in debates to measure ‘participation of girls’ in schools)”

- The UN openly shares that, with the huge influx of refugees into Uganda, the UN falls short in providing aid and services to the multitude of people. Praise the Lord that displaced YTTC graduates are standing in the gap and teaching in schools in both Bidi Bidi and Rhino refugee camps. For example, YTTC students opened 3 schools in Rhino camp to reduce the 5km walk for children to attend classes.

- PCOSS Teacher Training Workshop: Participants in the reading training experienced the writing and illustrating of a three-page story using a list of the basic sight words they had been given. For all, this was the first time to hear about sight words and for many to have this experience of writing for pleasure and using crayons. Another activity was making alphabet cubes for word construction.

“I never knew that so much was attached to the teaching of reading. This is something that our teachers never received during their past trainings, be it in the teacher training colleges or in past workshops. We need to do more trainings like this.” (Rev. Stephen Nyang in reference to a training in the methodology of teaching reading)

“I am so excited! We have never had this (type of training) before. This is what we need...the skills to do the work that we must do in the classrooms. If all our teachers could be trained in appropriate methods, especially in how to teach reading, our pupils would excel in all subject areas. But you see, we do not have these skills; therefore, we are backward in all that we do. Now, I can share what I have learned with my colleagues who were not able to attend this training.” (IDP Camp teacher participant with two years of teaching experience)



Building words.

“There are so many fun strategies to use in helping our children and ourselves to be stronger readers.” (Teacher participant with three years of teaching experience)



PCOSS, PC(USA), and Across staff met in Juba to share the story of SSEPP with Rev. Chris Ferguson of the WCRC.

- Peacebuilding: Rev. John Yor, the General Secretary of the PCOSS, looked down the long conference table, and asked PCOSS Evangelist, Othow Okoti, basically, “how did you do that?” with an obvious wonder and curiosity in his voice. Othow seemed to be blushing a bit as he responded to the inquiry about his recent efforts in bringing a ceasefire and then facilitating a peace agreement between the counties of Pochalla South and Pochalla North. PCOSS, PC(USA), and Across leaders sat mesmerized as Othow retold the event.

Othow took cover the first day the fighting broke out. The second day, he came out from hiding and approached the commissioners on both sides as well as the traditional leader, the king, to ask for an end to the fighting. The third day, gunshots rang out again, so Othow, risked his life a second time, going out into the fighting to meet with both sides. By the evening of the third day, they reached an agreement to stop fighting.

“When I think about it, I say, I don’t know where I got that courage, but I think it is God who gave that courage so that I could convince the two (sides). It is not my power, but I have managed to convince the two leaders in a situation in which they burned down all the houses, they wounded people, people died. I managed to go to the leaders, talk to them and then they have accepted... I think they find trust in me, that trust also leads them to accept what the church is doing. We the church, we are there for the whole community... the service we give, we give to everybody, for all people. So that trust gives them the opportunity to say, ‘ok if the church is coming in (to make peace) let us also accept what they are saying’. Thank God, that God is always protecting us. In a situation that we cannot manage, but God can do something that can touch the heart of the people. And that skill (of people to people peacebuilding), I actually got that from RECONCILE.” (Othow received a scholarship from the PC(USA) to attend the RECONCILE Peace Institute in 2009).



Students by a SSEPP supported school building.

VI. Challenges

- One female Y TTC student has withdrawn from studies to marry.
- Some PCOSS schools are operating without being able to provide water to students and many teachers receive no payment. The PCOSS Education Dept. put the following plea in their recent newsletter: “We still call upon parents to contribute to their children’s school success by paying the small school fees so that teachers may receive incentives and purchase basic supplies like chalk, pens, and exercise books,” yet many parents are struggling to simply provide food at home.
- “The environs of the PCOSS school communities remain unpredictable due to the continuing adverse social, economic, and political climate. This often means that program implementation is delayed.” – Leisa Wagstaff

VII. Financial Update

We are grateful that \$84,130 reached our partners this quarter to facilitate the implementation of various SSEPP activities. We are also rejoicing that Traverse City Presbyterian Church recently committed \$28,500 in support to the project! With Westminster Presbyterian Church’s 38% matching commitment, the gift from Traverse Pres. increases to \$39,330! Thank you to both congregations and to the other

individuals and churches who gave this quarter! Please continue to share about this project with presbyteries, congregations, and individuals interested in supporting peace, education development, and South Sudan. Additional funds raised means additional activities and support reaching students, teachers, parents, peacebuilders, and communities. Thank you!

VIII. Mission Co-Workers Update:

Sharon and Lynn Kandel Update:

We continue to be amazed at the level of commitment of the teachers in our schools. So many of them are volunteer teachers and are working hard to improve their teaching skills even in very tough circumstances. We enjoy talking with these teachers and are so encouraged by their faith. We continue to help in any way that we can, through logistics, prayer, and telling people about what is happening here in South Sudan.



Lynn Kandel brought special guests to visit PCOSS students.

Nancy and Shelvis Smith-Mather Update:

A highlight of this quarter has been the opportunity to facilitate a trauma healing class for South Sudanese church leaders finishing up their last term in theological college. The college was displaced from Yei to Arua in 2016. While the students sleep in bunk beds at the make-shift college campus, their thoughts are with family members residing in Ugandan refugee camps. When they graduate, these pastors and church leaders will be better prepared to serve churches in the camps. We have enjoyed teaching the class together, and we have been honored to listen to our brother's lament and grieve and also start the process of healing.

In addition, Shelvis recently traveled to England to participate in a gathering of policy makers, academics, and peace practitioners at Oxford University. Experts from different fields (i.e.- political science, economics, theology, etc.) presented their findings and ongoing questions regarding South Sudan and other places of war. The conference provided an invaluable opportunity to learn and to cultivate meaningful partnerships.

Leisa Wagstaff's Update:

Your support of prayer, finance, and advocacy mean so much to the day-to-day life and future of the South Sudanese. It gives them, and me, hope, opportunity, and a sense of stability in a place where things seem to permanently be upside down. Thank you so much for your journey in ministry with the SSEPP.



Rev. Chris Ferguson of WCRC, Rev. Debbie Braaksma, Leisa Wagstaff, and Lynn Kandel, pray with PCOSS teachers.