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Revenge vs. Positive Healing – Rev. Tibi, RECONCILE ED

I. Brief Context Update:

“The weight is on whom?” Rev. Peter Tibi, executive director of RECONCILE International, asked those gathered at a church in Uganda’s Omugo Refugee Camp.

“Who is suffering?” he continued, pointing to a triangle drawn on white flipchart paper. The top of the diagram listed the names of the highest political leaders in South Sudan. The middle section represented bishops, church leaders, and mid-level government positions. The bottom, he told them, symbolized “you, you, you, you, and you.”

Pointing to the 70-plus members of the group sitting on plastic chairs with their feet resting on a dirt floor, he said, “The weight of the political conflict rests on you... If you want to solve the problem at the top, you must start at the bottom. If the political leaders call you and tell you to fight, and you say ‘no’, do they have any force? Can they do anything?”



A strong voice, a committed peacebuilder

The triangle illustration was a response to the concern that the ongoing rivalry between President Salva Kiir (from the Dinka ethnic group) and Vice President Riek Machar (from the Nuer ethnic group) continues to cause fighting among South Sudanese at the community level.

After Rev. Tibi addressed this matter, a woman stood up and said, “the people at the top are not our people. We deny them, because they are not suffering in the refugee camp with us...” Another woman said, “If God has sent you (Rev. Tibi) to reconcile us (a Nuer community) with the Dinkas, why don’t we accept, so we can get the blessings?”

Her words brought the room to a silent pause.

In 2018, a young man left his seat in a crowded hall showing the World Cup in Uganda’s Tika refugee camp. Another man, from a different ethnic group, sat down in the empty chair. When the first man returned, he

demanded his seat. Hate speech and threats lead to weapons. Lives were lost. The chair simply served as a trigger to reveal deeper conflict.

“When the conflict started while watching the World Cup football match, were the top political leaders there? Did they come to the refugee camp?” asked Rev. Tibi. The question was not meant to be answered. Everyone knew the response was “no.”

The UN responded to the tragic incident by relocating one ethnic group from Tika to distant Omugo camp. Later, RECONCILE was asked to facilitate a path towards peaceful co-existence.

“We don’t expect that the UN will put the two communities back together,” one RECONCILE staff explained to the gathering, “but that you will feel free to visit one another and eat together. There is intermarriage between these communities. You should be able to visit your relatives without fear.”

A few months prior to the meeting in Omugo, RECONCILE traveled to Tika to meet with the Dinka community involved in the conflict. The people in Tika agreed to reconcile with the forcibly removed Nuer community. The next step will be to bring leaders from both communities to a neutral place to discuss what took place, to agree upon justice, offer forgiveness, and heal the broken relationship between the communities.

A young man in the crowd asked if a meeting might just be a way to ambush and get revenge, acknowledging that in the conflict the Nuer killed more Dinka.

The two-day gathering calmed fears, concluding with a commitment to inter-community dialogue. Then RECONCILE took the message two hours down the road and delivered it to a group of Dinka community members who were also gathered under the roof of a camp church.

“You came with a good message today,” an elder responded. “I am very happy you have come with a message of peace... We came here (to the camps) because we did not want to fight... It is not we who fight in South Sudan, it is the government with the rebels, it is not the Dinka against the Nuer... but we cannot reconcile ourselves unless someone comes in between us, so it is very good that you have come.”



Fighting between South Sudanese young adults in a Ugandan refugee camp caused the UN to move their two communities apart. RECONCILE was asked to bring them back together to help heal their relationship.

II. PCOSS EDUCATION Update:

- Last quarter, the Kasire II PCOSS School construction finished and the school officially registered. Another exciting update is that one of SSEPP scholarship-funded teachers who completed a certificate at the teacher training college now serves as the head teacher. Leisa Wagstaff explains his important role: Head Teacher Samuel Balentine Amala “will be instrumental in the recruitment of pupils, teacher training and mentoring.” He will work “hand-in-hand with the school's education board to solicit support from NGOs and the Jubek State Ministry of Education. Samuel is no stranger to the community in that Kasire II's pastor-in-charge (Rev. Awadia Aggrey) was his pastor where he grew up in a neighboring community. When she sought to start a worshipping community in Kasire II where there was no Presbyterian congregation, he worked with her as a youth leader and lay preacher, and he helped with starting and teaching the children's Sunday School. The school grew out of the Sunday School.” The school currently offers nursery to Primary 2 classes and has 3 teachers.
- Quarterly 2-day training, mentoring and networking gathering held for Juba-based headteachers and deputy headteachers. The two graduates of the teacher training college provided facilitation on the importance of exams, setting exam questions, and integrity in the implementation of exams. Other topics covered included: assessing school needs, connecting with agencies that support education, and fostering community involvement in schools.
- Lead teachers were assigned to schools, mentored and supervised through school visits and informal gatherings.
- A 2-day training for Juba-based teachers on conflict resolution, leadership development in the classroom, trauma healing with a focus on handicapped children and former child soldiers, and the teacher as a role model and mentor. Attendees included 2 newly recruited volunteers and 3 female teachers.
- Exam questions reviewed and validated. Over 8,000 exams printed for the end-of-year exams.
- The girl's empowerment program continues, this quarter 140 girls attended the inspiring meeting.



Teachers in Pochalla creating schemes of work

III. Across Education Update

- 19 education managers and 19 teachers in Pochalla increased their skills through 4th quarter trainings. The education managers came from the County and Payam education departments and built their capacities in county and school development planning, school cluster management systems as means of addressing pressing challenges, and community mobilization. The education managers supervised teachers in a local school during the training.

- The teachers’ training focused on: intensive English language, life skills, peacebuilding, primary school subject content, instructional and learning aids (with emphasis on low cost teaching and learning materials from the local environment), lesson planning and schemes of work, classroom records and child social and financial education (CSFE). Teacher observation took place for 3 days in the respective primary schools, resulting in constructive feedback for teachers participating in the training. Teachers created potential school club projects for their schools as well as implementation plans.
- 26 teachers and 38 local authorities celebrated International Teachers’ Day in Pochalla. The event focused on the important role teachers play in educating society and brought together teachers from 4 primary schools (Presbyterian Education Complex of Pochalla (PECP), Kudobate, Tierlul and Pochalla/Gilo). Local authorities gained a new perspective on their role in collaborating with actors working to promote quality education in greater Pochalla. The County Commissioner of Greater Pochalla’s remarks appreciated teachers’ efforts in



County Commissioner thanks teachers at an International Teachers’ Day celebration

equipping children to help the community and the coming generation. The authorities emphasized that ACROSS’ effort is bringing hope for Pochalla and should be strongly supported. Currently, the government is not able to retain, supervise, or regularly pay teachers, making Across’ efforts highly appreciated.



Students demonstrate educational games on International Girl Child Education Day

- 101 girls from 4 primary schools and 38 members of the local authorities celebrated International Girl Child Education Day. The first of its kind in Pochalla town, the event raised public awareness about the discrimination from which many girls in Pochalla suffer. It also emphasized girls’ fundamental freedoms and right to education.

The event called the community to act on:

1. Elimination of all forms of discrimination against girls.
2. Elimination of negative cultural attitudes and practices against girls.
3. Promotion and protection of the rights of girls and increased awareness of their needs and potential.
4. Elimination of discrimination against girls in education, skills development, and training.
5. Elimination of discrimination against girls in health and nutrition.
6. Elimination of the economic exploitation of child labor and protecting young girls from work.
7. Eradication of violence against girls.
8. Promotion of girls’ awareness of and participation in social, economic, and political life.
9. Strengthening of the role of the family in improving the status of girls.

IV. PEACEBUILDING Update

- Having received commitments to dialogue from both communities, RECONCILE has been mobilizing for a reconciliation conference set for the first quarter of 2020. The conference seeks to bring together 100



Ready for reconciliation

leaders from Omugo camp and 100 leaders from Tika camp for 3 days, providing an opportunity to discuss the violence carried out by their young adults. In order for such an event to take place within the camps, both the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) in Uganda and UNHCR must authorize and commit to support the effort. In addition to coordinating with the OPM and UN, RECONCILE is collaborating with two other faith-based organizations, YWAM and Borderlands, to strengthen the overall effort. Please keep this conference in your prayers. An outcome for forgiveness and peace would not only impact these two communities, but the many others in the camps and host community aware of the tragedy.



Teachers appreciated on International Teachers' Day in Pochalla

V. Testimonies of Impact

- The active participation of the education managers “clearly indicated that their understanding of the issues discussed has significantly improved compared to earlier trainings... Participants urged more trainings to be provided” - Across Education Facilitator
- “Participants engaged in 3 days of teaching practice to check whether they could use their schemes of work, lesson plans and teaching/learning aids efficiently and effectively in the classrooms. The (teaching practice outcomes) confirm that the training has been effective to some extent, regardless of participants low education background and being untrained.” – Across Facilitator
- The project created awareness among teachers and education managers that solutions to the problems faced by the education system in Pochalla can only be generated locally, and that they have the intelligence to address challenges that schools and the society face. – Across Education Facilitator
- “All participants and 3 commissioners from Burator, Ajwara and Pochalla counties extended appreciation to ACROSS so-so much for standing by their side in the education of children. Without (ACROSS), nothing much would be done. Previously, teachers didn't respect school supervisors employed by the state due to the lack of support given to the teachers, but currently the two are cooperating and collaborating to strengthen and support fully the huge population of school aged children out of school.” – Across Education Facilitator



Practice teaching during training

VI. Challenges/Opportunities

- “Although the training contributed in improving teachers' knowledge, skills and attitudes, more intensive trainings are required if quality learning and teaching is to take place in Pochalla schools” – Across Education Facilitator

- The education of girls is not a priority in Pochalla, “As a result, girls are expected to generate money through their marriage and hence the girls run into early marriages and forced marriages.” – Pochalla local representative at the Girl Child Education Event
- “Girls in Pochalla are seen as assets to their parents, a mentality which government and traditional leaders (Kings and Chiefs) should challenge.” – Across Education Facilitator
- Across would like to reach more teachers in the mobile trainings, yet the budget will not allow.
- Most parts of Greater Pochalla flooded making it impossible to bring training participants from some locations as well as to provide mentoring support to teachers in some schools.
- Flooding in Pibor cancelled all activities scheduled for the quarter.
- Greater Pochalla lacks a training center, so the training took place under trees near a church (in case of rain) and teachers were accommodated in family homes.
- Some participants speak mainly Arabic or a mother tongue, so the training incorporated Arabic as well as employing other methods like use of visual aids and pairing Arabic and English speakers.
- Teacher, Parent Council and school administration trainings could not take place as scheduled in Bor due to insecurity surrounding the parish’s land ownership issue.



Making plans for school clubs

VII. Financial Update



Joining hands for education

We thank the Lord that \$66,852 was raised last year and with Westminster’s match, that comes to \$92,256. Thank you for your generosity. Please continue to keep this program in your prayers and please continue to share about this collaborative effort with others. The South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Program strongly aligns with the Presbyterian Mission Agency’s call to be a Mathew 25 church and our commitment to alleviate poverty. Research on South Sudan confirms that educational attainment increases a family’s income. In 2020, let’s continue to support our partners in fighting poverty and promoting peace through education!

VIII. Mission Co-Workers Update:

Sharon and Lynn Kandel:

“It has been such a joy to see the school at Kasire II being built and now in use! This time we were able to add a water tank and a pit latrine to the site and it all looks so good. We take great joy in seeing children able to learn in a new building and to see the community’s pride in what they now have. While things do move slowly here,

there are times when things really come together, and when they do, it is because the local community is involved.

Please continue to pray for the people of South Sudan, for the volunteer teachers and the students who have to walk a long way to school.”

Leisa Wagstaff:

“It has been a challenge adjusting to the cold temperatures here in the USA. Some days I long for the South Sudan heat, and I do miss my friends, colleagues and congregation there. However, I am enjoying being in the USA and meeting so many supporters during this mid-Interpretation Assignment (IA) period. You have embraced me in the warmth of your fellowship and support. Your interest in the South Sudanese is tremendous, and I so appreciate how you seek to share in their joys and tears. Thank you!”



Leisa and Nancy with Presbyterian friends in Juba, South Sudan

Shelvis and Nancy Smith-Mather:

Similar to Leisa’s update, the cold, rainy Oxford weather has been a difficult adjustment. “Surely God could not have called us to a place this cold all the time!” my seven-year-old son recently declared. We all miss friends in East Africa as well, and the sadness seems to pass around our family, everyone taking a turn.

While in England, Shelvis and I are doing our best to seek out opportunities to strengthen the work we feel called to in South Sudan and Uganda. Shelvis’ research on South Sudan started at Oxford University, commencing a 2-4-year collaboration with members of the university’s Social Anthropology Department to develop peacebuilding resources, and we both have begun to engage with Oxford’s Africa Society. The society is made up of several hundred African leaders from across the African continent who are conducting research to produce more innovative, relevant and sustainable ways to address various issues on the continent. We thank God for this unique opportunity.