

Addressing Protection of Women and Girls with NP's Outreach Workers

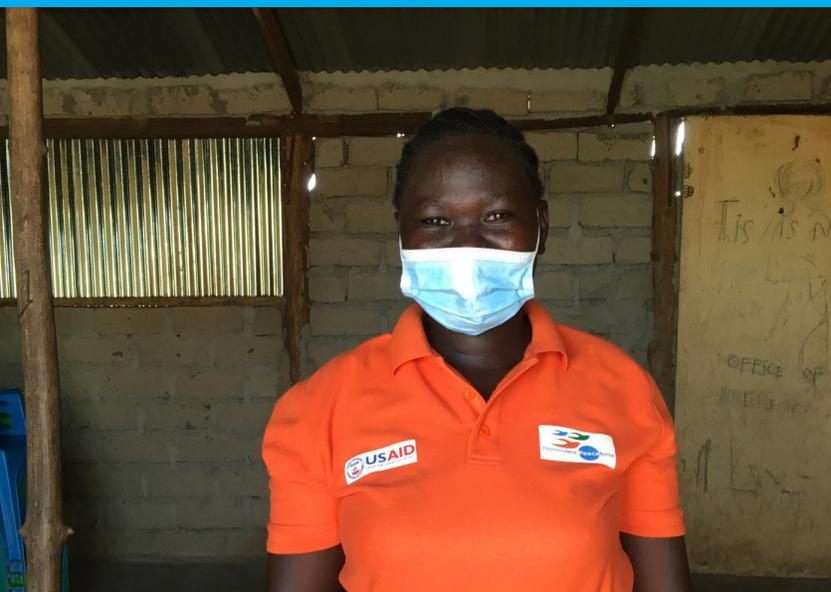


Photo: Rose, one of NP's COVID-19 Outreach Workers, Juba, South Sudan 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated already existing structural inequalities, especially those impacting women and girls across every sphere—from health to the economy, security to social protection. In times of crisis, fragility and conflict, when resources are strained and institutional capacity is limited, women and girls face disproportionate impacts with far-reaching consequences. In South Sudan, and more specifically in densely populated areas like Juba, pre-existing gender inequalities, discriminatory social norms, intercommunal violence, cattle raiding, and poverty, among others, are likely to be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and further limit women and girls' access to health and other essential services. According to the discussions held with the community leaders at the beginning of project implementation, the vulnerabilities of young girls and women increased as they have been more affected by sexual exploitation and abuse as a result of economic strain created due to the pandemic.

To strengthen women's protection and security, Nonviolent Peaceforce selected community outreach workers, all of whom are members of those new communities that NP started to engage. Prior to its engagement, NP assessed that the local community at New Site, a highly populated neighbourhood in Juba with deficient provision of basic services and presence of humanitarian actors, lacks knowledge on protection issues, particularly around Gender Based Violence (GBV). Among them, domestic violence and early and forced child marriage were highly present in the community.

According to Rose, one of NP's community outreach worker in New Site, positive change was observed when relating to the incidences of GBV after months of awareness raising, community engagement and empowerment on related topics. In one of Rose's outreach diary entries she mentioned: "Women and girls were able to understand about women's rights and how important these are for their day-to-day life. People within the community particularly the women were dominated by the culture and religion to be under their husbands' power - even though women are strong enough to stand by themselves. After the awareness raising sessions conducted by NP, not only women but also the men accepted to respect for the rights of their women and girls. Several women have come with an idea of starting self-employments to avoid asking for money from their husbands which is one of the root causes of GBV cases at the domestic level."

Rose's engagement in the community has been constant. By conducting several patrols and engagement sessions with community members she was able to notice a behavioural change not only in the increase of self-

confidence and empowerment of women, but also in questioning masculinities and the role of men in their community. “I have observed and also a few women reported to me that their husbands have changed their daily routing and now more attentive to the children and their wives while some of them have abandoned their drinking habits. This has reduced the number of domestic violence incidents in the community.”

Seeking to promote behavioural messaging targeted at key groups and individuals to promote social change and reduce the impact of violence on civilians, specific messaging was developed to discuss early and forced child marriage among parents and girls. Through her interactions with members of her own community in new site, Rose believes that: “NP’s awareness raising sessions on early marriage to the community has also enlightened the attitudes of their parents. Parents were able to understand the importance of sending their girls to the schools rather than giving their daughters to men for the bride price as an income-generating activity. The girls did not know the side effects of child marriage and now their eyes have opened and they understood the importance of child education for them and as well as to the society. Parents have learnt the rights of the children and are now taking care of their children and discouraging child marriage.”

Rose feels very happy about her new role in her own community. People now trust and resort to her guidance when something happens. But according to her, her work and determination are long from being gone, she plans next to engage directly with youth groups, often associated with cases of sexual abuse of girls, to

change their attitudes towards the protection of their own community. Inspiring many resilient women in South Sudan, Rose concludes by saying that for the future,

“I hope to become a chief in my community and they will listen to me. I know that I can do it”.

*Nonviolent Peaceforce’s work in New Site, Juba, South Sudan is possible thanks to the support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and generous supporters like you.

Photo: Rose, one of NP’s COVID-19 Outreach Workers, patrols in New Site, South Sudan 2020.

