

Building peace and addressing gender-based violence in Agok through women protection teams

Case study | October 2019

Agok town, approximately twenty-minute drive from Wau town, has been severely affected by conflict. Cumulative effects of years of violence, insecurity, livelihood disruption and insufficient basic services have had a prolonged negative impact on the residents of Agok. This already dire situation in Agok is further exacerbated by the continuous influx of internally displaced people. Since 2016, the large number of IDPs that have fled violence in Wadadel, Mapel and Kuajiena have put a strain on scarce resources and caused resentment among the already vulnerable local population. Over the years, the tension between the host community and IDPs became so high that both groups were unable and unwilling to come together for a dialogue.

In August 2019, members of Wau City WPT Council learned about the high number of protection concerns in Agok area and decided to conduct an awareness session on gender-based violence (GBV) for the communities there. During this session, the members of Wau City Council learned that relationships between IDPs and host communities were tense and consist mostly of negative interactions. NP also learned that domestic violence is frequent in some households, and IDP women are afraid to leave their informal settlements fearing GBV. IDP women also confirmed that they have an informal women's group in Agok, but it is inactive, and its members do not meet regularly. Seeing the IDP women's group as a potential bridge that can bring together IDPs and host communities and facilitate peaceful co-existence, the Wau City WPT Council decided to support the women in Agok by passing them all the knowledge and skills they once gained from NP training.

In its monthly meeting, members of Wau City Council collectively discussed the way forward and envisioned what the mentoring of Agok women would look like. Wau Council members were convinced that uniting women from both the IDPs and host communities would lay the foundation for peace between the two groups. Thus, they decided to propose to the community to establish a formal Women's Protection Team (WPT) in Agok. The members of Wau City Council firstly visited Agok to first meet with the chiefs of both the IDPs and host communities as well as women from each group to discuss their willingness to engage in this initiative.

The meetings proved to be fruitful. The chiefs, community leaders and women all welcomed the idea of having a WPT that would unite the two communities. The sub-chief of the IDP community acknowledged that: "The conflict between the two communities makes it hard for the chiefs to settle, so with a women's group, it will help a lot because they will be leaders and have good relationships among themselves and can also support the chiefs with such conflicts."

The following week, Wau City Council members came back to Agok to form the WPT. Over a hundred women from both communities were present to welcome the Wau City Council in Agok that day. After the City Council members explained the nature and purpose of a WPT, and shared their own experiences as peacebuilders, the women from both communities enthusiastically accepted the proposal and were registered to form a WPT in Agok.

As a result, ninety women - forty-five IDP women and forty-five women from the host community - became WPT members in Agok. A focal person and a deputy were chosen to represent both groups.



Photos (from top): 1. Women in Agok, the Chief, Wau City Council members, and NP discussing formation of WPT in Agok. 2. Member of Wau City Council speaking to women in Agok 3. Women registering to join WPT/Agok

“I joined [the WPT] because it will teach me how to speak in public, unite people, and protect ourselves...We as women who have experienced a lot of trauma, now free to sit together and talk”.

Rebecca Silverio, Agok WPT Focal Point

In her speech delivered to the WPT, the newly elected focal point of the group shared her personal feelings with other members saying: “I joined [the WPT] because it will teach me how to speak in public, unite people, and protect ourselves...We as women who have experienced a lot of trauma, now free to sit together and talk”. Similarly, the deputy of the WPT remarked: “This team has united us in Agok and we will learn a lot of things as women.”

Speaking on behalf of community leaders, the Chief of Agok also pledged their full support to the WPT by saying: “We are here to support women to feel empowered and feel free to express themselves in the community.”

The Wau City Council will continue to build the capacity of newly formed Women’s Protection Team in Agok through mentoring and extensive training in GBV, peacebuilding, and protection. With this initial training, the women will be more independent in conducting patrols and other activities in the community.

Photo: Wau City Council and members and the newly formed Women Protection Team in Agok/ September 2019

