

Youth Protection Team (YPT) Outreach in New Site to Raise Awareness on Gender-Based Violence and HIV

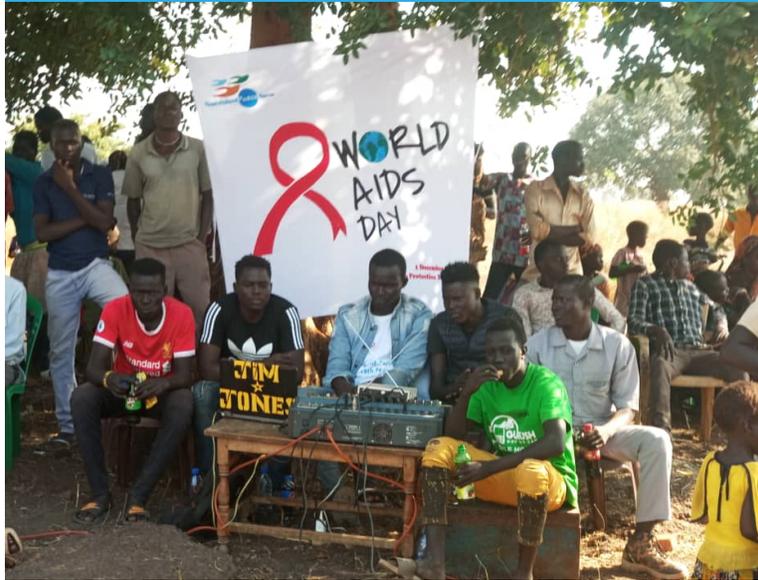


Photo: Youth raising awareness on GBV and HIV/New Site, Wau/ December 2019/NonviolentPeaceforce

On 1 December 2019, the Youth Protection Team in New Site organized an event in commemoration of World AIDS Day. This event brought together over 118 members of the community to raise awareness on gender-based violence (GBV) and HIV prevention. The youth composed songs and prepared role plays and drama performances to deliver key messages on the link between GBV and HIV, early marriage and forced marriage, and methods to reduce the risk of HIV transmission. NP, members of the WPT and YPT, and local leaders gave speeches on peace, GBV, and the importance of the community to work together to provide an enabling environment for the reduction of violence.

The event began with a speech from a member of the YPT who discussed the importance of the WPTs and YPTs working together to support peace and protection in their communities. Then the youth and members of the community sang three songs focused on the importance of working hand-in-hand to promote peace in New Site, another song regarding the importance of HIV prevention, and finally a song on unity for both the community and the country. After the songs, members of the YPT and WPT gave speeches introducing HIV and GBV as well as a discussion on the 16 Days of Activism followed by two dramas on the need for the community to address the issue of early and forced marriage and a third drama on condom use to prevent HIV. The event closed with a speech by the chief who discussed the importance of the WPTs and YPTs work in the community and the need to continually provide sensitization on HIV and GBV, especially on early marriage and forced marriage.

The YPT's initiative was positively received by the community and the leadership of New Site with a number of community youth conveying their interest in joining the YPT. The event also served as the first time the youth advocated and fundraised for a youth center in New Site that would be used to provide a safe recreation and training space for youth. Further, YPT members from Hai Masna, a community approximately 3 KM away from New Site, also attended the event and expressed their motivation to replicate similar outreach activities in their area of operation.

The NP Wau team has been engaging with the youth in New Site, a boma in Wau, since May 2019 due to high rates of GBV and school dropouts in the settlement. During NPs initial engagement with the community and prior to the establishment of the YPT, NP conducted a series of meetings with youth to learn more about the protection risks the youth face in the settlement and identified active youth representatives who would be trained by NP in protection, GBV prevention and response, conflict resolution, and peacebuilding.

Since its establishment, the New Site YPT, comprised of 25 women and 21 men, has become a positive community mechanism for peace in the New Site settlement, actively promoting non-violence, advocating for the needs of young and vulnerable people, and raising awareness on GBV and harmful traditional practices. The New Site YPT has also been working closely with the Women Protection Teams and other the YPTs in Wau, regularly sharing information and knowledge, and complementing one another's interventions. The relatively new YPT has already demonstrated initiative, proactivity, and independence which NP will continue to support through training, workshops, and mentoring sessions in protection skills, advocacy and communication to amplify the group's positive impact on the safety and security of their communities as well as to ensure the group's sustainability.

A male member of the New Site YPT said the training he received from NP was lifechanging: "Before [the training] I often used violence and could hit other students. Now I can resolve conflicts with fellow students at school peacefully. The school management appointed me as a class prefect – this a great change." Deng added, "Being a YPT member gives young people a platform to challenge old harmful cultural norms without being negatively singled out by elders."

Similarly, a female member of the YPT who participated in the three drama performance during the event, also acknowledged the value of the YPT to the community saying, "Being a member of YPT means being a part of a group where challenges faced by youth in the New Site can be discussed collectively and solution can be found."