

Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) Case Study – April 2017

Women Intervening to Prevent Intercommunal Violence: An Update on the Kook WPT

In March 2016, Elizabeth Achol Kurang, the Chairlady of the Women's Peacekeeping Team (WPT) for the Kook community, detailed how the support and training that NP provided has helped their community and **promoted women's role in peace building and gender-based violence prevention in South Sudan**. Since then, the team has continued to work tirelessly within their community to ensure that the hard won peace is maintained and strengthened.



Members of the Kook WPT conducting community engagement meetings.

By way of background, the Kook Community of Rumbek East were originally a united and peaceful community that shared cattle camps and common resources. However, due to a falling out between two chiefs, the community was split into the Kook Awach and the Kook Paceur. In early 2012, tensions mounted when a man from the Kook Paceur built a monument on land belonging to the Kook Awach. Anger and resentment amongst the Kook

Awach built until it culminated in the destruction of the monument by a young man from the Awach community. This led to the outbreak of conflict, in an area with a very high concentration of firearms. In the ensuing years, revenge attacks and ambushes between the two sub-clans led to many deaths and women from opposing communities were targeted for sexual violence.

The Kook WPT were formed to include women from both the Kook Awach and Kook Paceur communities. When peace was negotiated between the two communities in 2016, the WPT were instrumental in sensitisation efforts by holding a series of peace rallies to promote the peace. Throughout 2016 and 2017, the WPT and NP have continued to engage with the community – in particular the armed youth – training them on topics including gender, prevention of gender based violence, women's protection and unarmed civilian protection. The WPT have been active with advocacy efforts such as writing songs about peace and reconciliation which were recorded and now play on the local radio station, 'Good News Radio'. In late 2016, the WPT conducted a second intake and now approximately 60 women from the Kook community are trained and active members of the team.

The strength of the peace agreement between the Kook Awach and Kook Paceur was recently tested which had the potential to reignite the conflict.

Following the peace agreement in 2016, prominent members of the Kook community returned to the area after a number of years in enforced exile due to fear of revenge killing. The son of the chief of Pacong (Paceur), who left in 2015 believing he would be targeted for revenge killing, returned to Pacong in December 2016 as peace was prevailing and the situation was calm. Tragically, he was killed on 28 February 2017 in a revenge attack committed by a person from Kook Awach. As a result, tensions in the area were very high with many expecting that this would cause the outbreak of fighting between the two communities once again. All NGOs and agencies operating in Rumbek were warned not to travel to the area.

Despite these tensions, and at great risk to themselves, three WPT from the Kook Awach – the sub-clan of the alleged killer – intervened to de-escalate tensions. The three courageous WPT met with the family of the Pateur chief of Pacong and advocated to the family to not continue the cycle of revenge killing. They convinced the chief and his family to treat the killing as an isolated criminal event, committed by an individual and not to view it as reigniting community conflict. These efforts were successful in convincing the family of the deceased.

In the wake of these events, tensions have reduced and movement to the area recommenced. The Kook communities continue to live together peacefully and have started working as one to clear common land in preparation for cultivation during the rainy season.



NP team meeting with the Kook WPT