

# NP SOUTH SUDAN



Photo: NP and humanitarian partners raising awareness on Covid-19 in Ganyliel/ May 2020/NP

## PROTECTION IN HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES

### UTILIZING COMMUNITY-BASED PROTECTION MECHANISMS FOR EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY PROTECTION AND

### RESPONSE TO COVID-19 IN GANYLIEL

GANYLIEL, UNITY STATE | June 2020

After the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a pandemic on March 11, 2020, Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) South Sudan swiftly adapted its activities and programming in line with WHO-

recommended mitigation and prevention measures to enable continued response to the protection needs of communities. NP's teams across the country have implemented innovative strategies to disseminate pertinent information on COVID-19 prevention and response and protection concerns exacerbated by COVID-19.

In Ganyliel, Southern Unity State, NP has developed an effective awareness raising and information dissemination method that utilizes its existing community-based protection mechanisms, especially the Women's Protection Team (WPT). The WPT in Ganyliel was inaugurated in July 2019 and currently has 50 active members throughout the five blocks of Ganyliel Town. WPT members have been trained on NP's Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP) methodology including prevention and response to gender-based violence (GBV), child protection, and early warning/early response. As WPT members are already mobilized and trained to identify and respond to the protection needs of their communities and have gained the legitimacy and trust of community members and leaders, they are uniquely poised to support the dissemination of pertinent COVID-19 awareness and related protection information at the grassroots level.

Capitalizing on the existing WPT structure, NP Ganyliel aims to achieve three primary goals with its awareness raising and information dissemination strategy. These goals are to monitor and assess ongoing protection concerns (especially SGBV incidents) in the community related to or exacerbated by COVID-19; to strengthen the capacity of WPT members to develop community-based and community-driven response to protection concerns, including response to protection concerns that could be exacerbated by COVID-19; and to engage in rumor control and the dissemination of accurate information about COVID-19 prevention and response strategies.

To implement this, NP, the WPT leader, and five representatives (one from each block in Ganyliel) met on April 24 to assess and discuss the community's awareness of COVID-19, current and anticipated protection concerns as a result of or exacerbated by COVID-19, and potential solutions to address identified concerns. NP staff also informed

WPT representatives of essential COVID-19 information including the signs and symptoms of COVID-19, important prevention measures to prevent the spread of the disease, and the importance of rumor control. The meeting was held in accordance with recommendations set by the WHO and the High-Level Taskforce on COVID-19: all participants washed their hands thoroughly upon entry to and exit from the compound; the maximum number of participants did not exceed eight persons; seating was arranged to adhere to social distancing measures; and no physical contact or greetings took place.

During the meeting, the primary concern shared by the WPT was the lack of appropriate medical facilities and testing capacity, especially with the withdrawal of International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and closure of the hospital. Given the lack of treatment and testing, solutions focused on prevention and mitigation, such as advocacy with local authorities to prevent the local spread of COVID-19 (i.e. through the provision of wash stations and soap in key locations and awareness raising activities). Another primary concern expressed by the WPTs was the lack of movement restrictions or quarantine policy for those entering Ganyliel through the port at Taiyar. To respond to this identified concern, the WPTs would engage in advocacy and awareness raising with authorities. Additionally, SGBV was identified as a possible protection concern that could be exacerbated by COVID-19. With concerns that cases of household violence may rise as a result of COVID-19 and its impact on the economy, WPT members discussed how they are prepared to respond to incidences of violence, especially SGBV cases. By providing accompaniment to health facilities, supporting in service referral, and reporting to authorities as requested, the WPT members can act as essential protection actors within their communities.

After the initial meeting, WPT representatives were empowered to share COVID-19 prevention information with other WPT members in their respective blocks. Then, each WPT member would continue to share the message with their families and neighbors, always adhering to COVID-19 prevention guidelines and ensuring widespread information-sharing. Since this

strategy was implemented, WPT members have shown heightened awareness of COVID-19. NP has continued to meet with the WPTs on a weekly basis to provide continual support and information sharing with various WPT members.

NP Ganyliel continues to encourage WPT members to act as examples in their community and leverage their influence as stakeholders to advocate for COVID-19 prevention and mitigation measures. Currently, a number of WPT members are engaging the local authorities to ensure hand washing stations are provided at boreholes and in the market, working to promote handwashing practices throughout the community, and disseminating information to communities on UCP in the context of COVID-19. Most recently, NP supported the WPTs to conduct an awareness raising on violent prevention, peacebuilding, and COVID-19 in Pachienjiok, a community impacted by recent insecurity, with the participation of 31 men and four women.

The grassroots information dissemination method implemented by NP and the WPT has proven especially pertinent in Ganyliel where there is no functional phone network. Through this tactic, NP and the WPT is still able to engage a number of people in GBV and COVID-19 prevention and response without gathering large numbers of people. The position of WPT members within the community uniquely position them well to be alerted of increasing protection concerns exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and to respond quickly in times of need. As the number of COVID-19 cases continue to increase in South Sudan and will likely spread across the country, NP Ganyliel will continue working closely with WPT members to ensure accurate information sharing and implementation of COVID-19 prevention and response measures.

## PROTECTING CIVILIANS FROM REVENGE VIOLENCE IN UNITY STATE

### BENTIU, UNITY STATE | June 2020

Revenge killings are an ongoing source of communal violence in Unity State and throughout South Sudan. Revenge violence pits households, clans, and tribes against one another and can often result in the death of innocent civilians who may only be linked to previous violence through familial ties or another perceived affiliation. The cyclical nature of revenge killings perpetuates ongoing violence at the local level that requires immediate and long-term solutions to end this practice.

In late May 2020, Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) South Sudan was notified by the UN Department of Safety and Security (UNDSS) that a man in Unity State was targeted by a clan in revenge for a recent killing in the PoC. The man had been targeted for approximately two months and, to avoid detection, was moving throughout the PoC and sleeping in different shelters each night. Given NPs mandate to protect civilians and deter violence, the team immediately responded to assist the man to find safer and more durable solutions. NP quickly coordinated with UNDSS and, as the man held US citizenship, NP ensured that the man was able to communicate with the US Embassy. Once NP's Bentiu PoC team consulted with the man and he agreed to be relocated to a safer location, the team provided protective accompaniment from the PoC. Then, NP's Beyond Bentiu Response (BBR) team, based in Bentiu Town, provided the man with direct protection for four days in preparation for his flight

On June 2, the beneficiary was ready to be accompanied to the Rubkona airstrip to board a commercial flight to his destination\*. To protect the safety of the beneficiary on the way to the airstrip, NP had to ensure that he was not recognised on the journey to or at the airstrip. When the plane could be seen passing over the compound, a call was made to determine how much cargo was in the

plane and how long the cargo would take to unload. This was to avoid a long wait at the airstrip in view of a large number Rubkona youth who might recognize him. The beneficiary was provided with a large surgical face mask which covered half his face, a pair of sunglasses and a field issue sun hat. To minimize exposure to national staff, an international team member drove the beneficiary to the airport, allowing twenty minutes' drive time with the aim of arriving at the airstrip at the time of boarding. The team member and beneficiary departed from the compound once a guard verified that no one was outside the compound.

The team arrived safely at the airstrip, and as the plane was still being unloaded, they parked away from the large group of youth coming and going from the area on boda bodas (taxi-motorbikes). A contact recognized NP's vehicle and agreed to signal as soon as the beneficiary could board the plane.

After another ten minutes, the team was signalled to approach the runway where the plane was ready to be boarded. NP escorted the beneficiary to the plane and waited alongside the aircraft until he could board. NP then waited at the airstrip until the plane took off before returning to the compound.

The safe extraction of a person vulnerable to violence was a success. However, revenge cycles continue throughout South Sudan and require ongoing interventions to increase the safety and security of civilians. NP continues to support a range of interventions to deter violence including short-term interventions (such as direct protection through patrols and protective accompaniment), medium-term interventions (through dialogue, mediation, and community protection meetings), and long-term interventions (such as establishing and strengthening community based protection mechanisms and unarmed civilian protection trainings). By combining these range of interventions, NP is able to provide support to communities and individuals when needed while also increasing the capacity of communities to engage in the protection of their most vulnerable. When cycles of violence are interrupted and communities are supported in violence prevention and response activities, positive and lifesaving changes can be made at the grassroots level.

## UTILIZING UCP STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS HARASSMENT AND CRIME IN MUNDRI EAST COUNTY

MUNDRI, WESTERN EQUATORIA STATE | April 2020

In October 2019, increasing criminality in Mundri East County, in particular high instances of violent road robberies in Baugyi and Doro bomas (along Mundri - Juba road), led to a tension between armed forces and civilians in the area. While community members believed armed actors are responsible for the crimes, the armed actors blamed the local youth. In pursuit of the criminals, armed soldiers conducted household searches, harassed civilians and physically abused and tortured some of the young men. Eager to resolve the issue non-violently but afraid to engage with the armed forces directly, the chief of Baugyi and Doro asked Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) team in Mundri, as a nonpartisan, protection actor for support.

NP's response was manifold. Firstly, NP attended Community Security Meeting in Baugyi and Doro and facilitated an open dialogue between civilians and armed forces, ensuring a safe space for civilians, particularly youth and women, to raise their concerns regarding the actions of the armed forces. For example, civilians felt confident in NP's presence to speak about feeling unsafe due to soldier's physical abuse, stealing their possessions and looting their properties.

The community members said they were afraid to report the incident and identify the criminals, as by doing so, they would compromise their own safety as it happened in the past. Women also expressed feeling confused as the armed forces and the local leaders have been giving contradicting

directions to civilians, e.g. While the local leaders encouraged community members to attend community security meetings and raise their concerns, armed groups had been preventing the civilians from participating.

In response, the Commanding Officer initially reaffirmed his commitment to use force against civilians if they will not cooperate in identifying the criminals. However, a Paramount Chief, who NP has mentored and trained in UCP, convinced him to allow the community leaders to resolve this issue non-violently and ensure civilians are protected at all times.

Secondly, following the meeting in Baugyi and Doro, NP has conducted deterrent patrols in the hotspot areas like Baugyi, Doro, Lanyi, Lozoh and Lui where criminality had reportedly increased since October last year. While on patrols, NP engaged with chiefs and soldiers, urging them to cooperate to maintain peace and order and stop violence against civilians. Lastly, NP identified number of protection concerns in the areas and advocated humanitarian partners and local authorities to address them.

When NP returned to Doro in January and February 2020, the community confirmed that security situation was relatively stable and that NP's engagement helped to improve their relationship with soldiers with no incidents of harassment having occurred since November 2019. NP also observed that internally displaced people have now been gradually returning to a Doro center from the bush which was a reassuring sign of stability. The frequency of the road robberies has reduced too, and when the criminal incidents do occur, community feel empowered to promptly engage in a dialogue with all parties involved finding a common ground to address it collectively and non-violently.

## IMPROVING UNARMED COMMUNITY PROTECTION IN KHERNYANG

LANKIEN, JONGLEI STATE | May 2020



Photo: NP protection officer discussing EWER strategies implemented by Khernyang with community leader/ Khernyang/ January 22, 2020/NP

The signing of the Revitalized Agreement on the Resolution of Conflict in South Sudan (R-ARCSS) in September 2018 and the subsequent formation of the Revitalized Transitional Government of National Unity (R-TGoNU) in February 2020 reduced tensions between the signatory parties and brought increased confidence in the durability of peace. However, many communities continue to suffer from high levels of communal violence, including revenge killings, abductions, and cattle raids. Communal violence has resulted in cyclical and multigenerational trauma for many South Sudanese and has been unaddressed by the cessations of hostilities at the national level.

Nyirrol County, where Lankien is located, is a hot spot for communal violence, especially during the dry season when cattle keepers from rival tribes and sub-tribes have increased mobility. In April 2020 alone, the NP Lankien team received reports of five cattle raid incidents, the killing of individuals on the road and the abduction of children. Since establishing a static field location in Lankien in 2017, Nonviolent Peaceforce has recognized the vital importance of peacebuilding, conflict resolution and dialogue facilitation at the grassroots level to enable peace and reduce cyclical violence at the local level. To respond to these needs, NP launched activities rooted in its Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP) methodology including Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) awareness, which promote discussions on the impacts and dangers of SALW, as well as Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) workshops. EWER workshops are designed to improve community response to conflict, violence, and disaster, taking into consideration the needs of the most vulnerable.

These EWER workshops are developed in consultation with communities to ensure that all plans are community driven, tailored to the specific needs of the population, and guided by a Do-No-Harm approach. Additionally, NP has established and strengthened two Women's Protection

Teams (WPTs) and one Community Protection Team (CPT) that are helping disseminate pertinent protection information to reduce the risk of violence against women and children.

One of the villages where NP has engaged the community in EWER strategies is Khernyang, located approximately 3 KM from Lankien town and comprised of approximately 300 households. NP provided a series of EWER trainings to community members in Khernyang, including to 40 members of the local WPT. Prior to NP's intervention, the community conducted patrols but only utilized armed youth and on an irregular basis. Since November 2019, after NP's EWER trainings, a more defined strategy was developed incorporating elements of UCP. Khernyang community members began conducting unarmed patrols in key hot spot areas identified during the EWER training (i.e. Khernyang to Bow swamp and Khernyang to Poegbour) on a regular basis from 8 AM to 6 PM, women were accompanied by youth and older men when collecting firewood, and children were restricted from travelling or playing along risky roads. According to a woman living in Khernyang, Tibitha Nyauor, "When the youth start the patrolling, we the women follow them, some women watch for attackers up from a tree and the ground while most of us collect firewood."

## PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

# A STREET BOY GETS A SECOND CHANCE AT A FAMILY LIFE

**BENTIU, UNITY STATE | April 2020**



Photo: Children in Bentiu/December 2019/NP

The streets of Rubkona, particularly Rubkona market, has served as a destination for dozens of children fleeing poverty, abuse, conflict, and violence. Many of these children were exposed to the violence of war and communal conflict their entire lives and suffered from the breakdown in community and household structures, economic development and the provision of basic services that accompanies long-term conflict. The lack of safe spaces for children to develop positive coping mechanisms, seek recreation, and learn has resulted in a generation of people utilizing maladaptive behaviors and negative coping mechanisms. The children at Rubkona market are among the most obvious symptoms of the need for child protection actors in areas affected by conflict and violence as well as the need for strong coordination between humanitarian and UN partners in order to address the unique

needs of children and mitigate the impact of conflict on the next generation of adults.

In January 2019, Nonviolent Peaceforce's (NP) Beyond Bentiu Response (BBR) team embarked on an assessment of the situation and needs of street children in Rubkona market, resulting in a 30-page report detailing the backgrounds of street children, reasons the children were on the street, drug use, challenges and other issues faced by the street children. NP subsequently presented the findings of the assessment to the Child Protection Working Group and advocated to partners to respond to the concerns faced by over 40 children in the market.

Based on the findings of NPs assessment, two partner organisations came together to create an Interim Care Center for the street children in Bentiu town. A space was provided by the local government authorities and a partner organization completed a renovation to create a safe space for the children to stay while they awaited reunification with their families. By November 2019, the care center was ready, social workers were hired and trained to care for the children, and cooks and guards were in place.

Throughout this period, NPs BBR team remained in contact with the street children and, in early November, began a concerted effort to build relationships with the street children to ascertain if any would be willing to leave the streets and enter into a Family Tracing and Reunification (FTR) programme. To do this, the BBR team organized informal breakfast club meetings with the street children. These meetings were held under a tree on the periphery of the market in an area where the street children would congregate. At first, the children were suspicious and fearful to sit with the NP team. However, once they saw the team sitting on the ground simply offering a cup of tea and a piece of bread, they came to sit with the team.

At the beginning, the breakfast club meetings were very challenging. Even early in the morning, the children were often high

on benzene or other substances they could attain. While some were happy to sit and talk with the team, others would disturb the group and begin fights or insult NP staff.

However, because the NP team were consistent with their presence and the breakfast club meetings, many of the children began to warm to the team and even engage openly and in a friendly manner. NP introduced a rule that attending breakfast club was dependent on the children putting down their benzene bottles and not inhaling the solvent while talking with the team. Many of the children tried to adhere to this rule but simply could not control their impulses to constantly inhale from the bottles. Even so, there were some notable changes in how the children related to the team. One day, one of the children retrieved five of NP's metal teacups which others had tried to steal. This demonstrated to NP that the children were at a turning point and beginning to trust and respect the team.

After many weeks of regular breakfast club meetings, the team identified some children who were willing to come to the center and ultimately return to their families or clans. NP briefed the organization running the interim care center to prepare to receive the children.

The following day, NP brought three children to the centre. They were malnourished and covered in sores and infected wounds from years of living on the streets. A doctor from ICRC visited the center to provide basic medical care and the children were given clean clothes and soap. At first, the children were excited by their new surroundings and enjoyed a meal prepared by the cook. It was on this day, however, that two IDPs were killed in the POC and the UN declared a grey status, meaning UN agencies could not operate and most NGOs were placed on temporary lock down.

The following day, the center's social workers called NP to inform that the children were struggling with withdrawal from alcohol, drugs, and nicotine. The children were trying to escape from the center and insisting they wanted to return to Rubkona market. With no other agencies able to respond due to the grey status, NP staff spent the weekend going to and from the center counselling the children and supporting them to stay in the center. The social workers that had been

hired to work at the center by the partner agency could not cope with the extent of the children's needs and lacked knowledge of substance abuse.

The withdrawal from drugs exposed a more vulnerable side the children had never shown before. On the streets they were tough and rarely showed emotions other than anger or, occasionally, humor. Now they were in a safe environment but suffering through psychological withdrawal from daily drug intake. Some of the children were sitting and crying, asking to go home to their mothers. NP ensured that they were present to support the children and offered comfort during this challenging time.

Eventually, NP was successful in its advocacy for child protection partners to support the FTR process. With FTR in process, NP brought more children to the centre, including a young boy named Mathew, who was eight years old and had been living on the streets for two years.

Realizing the limited capacity of the care workers to cope with the complex issues the children had, NP began daily visits to the center to spend time playing and educating the children utilizing materials donated by partner organizations such as paper and colored pencils. Some days, NP would play football or other running games with the children while on other days, the children practiced drawing and writing or watched an animated film on a laptop.

Initial attempts by partners to reunify the children with their families were unsuccessful, with children returned to family members close to the market. The day following their "homecoming," the children were seen back in the market, high on solvents or drunk on local alcohol. At this stage, NP sought additional assistance from ICRC to help with the reunification of the remaining children.

ICRC staff came to the centre and conducted lengthy interviews with each of the three remaining children. By now, the children had spent two months at the centre, with NP visiting daily. The children had recovered from their substance abuse, their wounds and sores had healed and thanks to an improved diet, were clean and healthy.

One of the children interviewed by ICRC was Mathew, a very quiet child. ICRC reported

that they found Mathew's family in Unity State, in a county far from Bentiu. Mathew was informed that his family had been found and that soon he would return to them. At this time, one of the NP staff who had been working with the children each day was about to leave for R&R. When the staff member came to say goodbye to the children, Mathew became quieter than usual and stood in the corner crying. While Mathew had been more reserved and seemed less attached, he was upset that he was leaving and would not see the NP staff member again.

The following week, after two months at the center, Mathew was brought back to his village on an ICRC-organized transport. Upon his return, the whole village came to welcome him home. They were singing traditional songs and held a party to celebrate the return of their lost son. Feeling the warmth and love of his community, Mathew smiled again.

## **OLD ENOUGH TO BE A BRIDE: FIGHTING CHILD MARRIAGES IN LANKIEN**

**LANKIEN, JONGLEI STATE | April 2020**

Chol was 16 when she was forced to marry a man 24 years her senior. "I have never wanted to marry the man", Chol's said to NP. But Chol's opinion would not be counted. She was old enough to be a bride, her father thought, and a dowry or a bride price paid by a husband-to-be would help Chol's family lift the burden of poverty. Eight months into a marriage, Chol pleaded with her father to allow her to get a divorce, but the father refused to listen.

When a member of NP's Women Protection Team (WPT) in Lankien informed NP about Chol's situation in November 2019, NP, pursuing the best interest of a child and mindful of Do No Harm principle, acted immediately. NP's first step was to verify the information. After NP's female National

Protection Officer contacted Chol and confirmed that the information was accurate, NP offered help. Despite child marriages being illegal in South Sudan, the laws protecting women and girls are not enforced and continue being overshadowed by customary norms. Cognizant of that, NP sought a way to address the customary rule. The team asked the Director of Gender, Children, and Social Affairs who was not only trained by NP in GBV prevention and response, but also publicly committed to stop child marriages in Lankien, to be a part of a solution. The Director agreed to help and immediately met with Chol's parents and relatives. During the meeting, he talked about the negative consequences of child marriage and the benefits of education and eventually convinced Chol's father to cancel the marriage. Shortly after the meeting, Chol's family returned the dowry and authorized a divorce.

Chol's marriage lasted eight months, and while recovery will take time, Chol is happy to be free and determined to continue her education in a local primary school.

Since NP established its presence in Lankien in 2017, it has worked tirelessly to safeguard the rights of women and girls like Chol. NP has been transforming communities' behaviors and beliefs around child marriages and violence against women and girls by engaging various demographic groups and community structures in behavioral change activities, workshops, and mentoring sessions. In particular, NP trained WPT members in child protection and GBV prevention and response, empowering women not only to identify and respond to child protection concerns and instances of GBV in their communities but also to pass the knowledge and learnings to broader communities. Further, NP has worked with partners to establish, update, and strengthen referral pathways and raise awareness among communities on what services are available to GBV survivors in and around Lankien town. Additionally, NP had established a strong relationship with teachers, Parent Teacher Associations, Education Directors, and community leaders to encourage community members to send their children to school.

It is worth noting that although the progress towards ending child marriage in Lankien has slowly been made, behavioral change

without economic and political stability will not eradicate this harmful practice completely. Child marriage will likely to persist until communities in Lankien are lifted from poverty since dowry's are an important but harmful source of livelihoods. Mindful of this, NP along with its GBV prevention activities, continues relentlessly advocating on improved and equal access to education, employment and livelihoods opportunities to ensure no girl is deprived of her childhood.

## **IMPROVING EQUITABLE ACCESS TO FOOD ASSISTANCE FOR UNACCOMPANIED AND SEPARATED CHILDREN THROUGH PROTECTION MAINSTREAMING IN GANYLIEL**

GANYLIEL, UNITY STATE | April 2020



Photo: General food distribution in Nyal/ March 2020/NP

NP's Ganyliel team has been conducting protection mainstreaming, proactive presence and protective accompaniment during general food distributions (GFD) since January 2019 in both Ganyliel and Nyal in

collaboration with German Argo Action (GAA), World Food Program (WFP), and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) – the distribution partners coordinating and providing food assistance to these communities. NP supports at distributions by identifying and prioritizing vulnerable individuals, assisting with crowd control, mitigating the risk of conflict and violence, and providing accompaniment to the elderly, lactating and pregnant women, and unaccompanied and separated children.

Although food distribution partners were initially providing food assistance to unaccompanied and separated children (UASC), they suspended the provision of food assistance in the absence of the household representatives. Under these procedures, food could only be only collected by the household representative and, in his or her absence, another adult member of the family could collect the rations. This was, in part, due to the practice of adult community members sending young children to collect the food rations on behalf of their families. However, by prohibiting the distribution of food to these young children, due to a lack of verification, grave child protection concerns arose for UASCs. Hence, there was a need to verify the status of the children queuing for food.

According to IOM representatives at the biometric verification desk, distribution partners were not interviewing the children to determine other means of identification and instead, would simply turn the children away. When this issue was reported to NP, NP called for a partner meeting and advocated for alternative methods of identifying household members in instances where thumbprints were not recognized or in the absence of household representative. As a result of these meetings, alternative methods were devised and implemented including identification of the composition of the household and naming at least two people on registration cards. This allowed beneficiaries more flexibility receiving food assistance in the absence of household representatives.

In November 2019, NP consulted the distribution partners and local authorities, raising the issue that the immediate denial of humanitarian assistance to minors without verification and investigation was a violation

of their rights and contributed to significant child protection concerns.

To resolve the issue, NP was assigned to take note of the UASCs who were unable to access the food assistance provided. The referrals were then shared with GAA and IOM in order to organize a complimentary distribution for these children. Through the use of child friendly interviewing skills, NP was able to identify, interview, and complete a written referral for UASCs which would support these children through appropriate channels identified by distribution partners and local authorities. In addition, the team was involved in writing referrals to the IOM team to consider other individuals whose thumbprints was not recognized by the biometric identification system, thereby ensuring equitable access to food assistance for all members of the community.

Between January and March 2020, there were four food distributions in Nyal and Ganyiel. During these distributions, NP interviewed and referred 15 UASC's who were then able to successfully receive rations. By identifying and referring these UASC's, NP reduced the risk of these children engaging in harmful child labor or experiencing increased neglect and exploitation in order to

access food, as well as ensured equitable access of food assistance for these children, thereby reducing their risk of malnutrition and related illnesses. Further, NP ensured that the rights and needs of UASCs were respected and considered in the distribution of material aid. NP will continue participating in food distributions, ensuring that these children, and other vulnerable members of the population, are identified, interviewed and are referred through the proper channels.

Further, through this process, NP identified gaps in the way complaints were handled during food distributions that, in effect, hindered access to food assistance for other members of the community. To address this, NP will continue promoting protection principles in material aid distributions through direct protection to vulnerable members of the community at distributions as well as targeted trainings to humanitarian partners, key community stakeholders, and community leaders on topics including protection mainstreaming, child protection, and prevention and response to GBV. These trainings will support humanitarian partners and community leaders to develop protection centered best practices for the provision of humanitarian assistance.

## WOMEN PEACE & SECURITY

### THE WORK OF THE WOMEN'S PROTECTION TEAMS IN FACILITATING DIALOGUE AND PROMOTING CONFLICT RESOLUTION AMONG THE COMMUNITY IN YEI

YEI, CENTRAL EQUATORIA STATE | April 2020



Photo: Forming of WPT in Yei/March 2020 / NP

During the widespread displacement that occurred during the 2016 crisis in South Sudan, the residents of Mukaya, a village located 17 miles from Yei, fled to Yei town to escape mass killings and violence. When the residents of Mukaya reached Yei, they were welcomed by the community of Atende, a village in the outskirts of Yei town.

The peaceful coexistence and strong relationships that subsequently developed between the two communities in Atende created an enabling environment for

Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) to establish Yei's first Women's Protection Team (WPT) in November 2019, comprised equally of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and members of the host community. Since its formation, the 36 members of the Atende WPT have been trained in unarmed civilian protection (UCP), including prevention and response to gender-based violence (GBV) and child protection. After these foundational trainings, the Atende WPT was officially launched, commemorated by a presentation to local authorities and the wider community. Since then, members of the WPT have provided psychological first aid to individuals and families in distress and intervened in cases of domestic violence, communal and tribal disputes, and other conflicts affecting the community. In March 2020, the team came together once again, but this time to support a struggling WPT member.

Tabita is a member of the host community of Atende and has been part of the WPT since its formation. She is married, has three children and takes care of her niece and nephew who are orphans. In March, her team members noticed she was having troubles at home as she became violent to her husband and started to abuse alcohol, distressing her family and neighbors. In addition, she stopped attending WPT meetings or participating in the group's activities. The leaders of the WPT tried to talk to her on several occasions, but with no result.

After thoroughly addressing the issue in one of its monthly meetings, the WPT came to the conclusion that they needed to fully support Tabita. The WPT also determined that they would continue to visit her even if she could no longer serve as a member of the group. Therefore, on March 19, the chairperson of the WPT, Grace Mumari, along with two WPT members and the sub-chief of Atende, visited Tabita's home to talk to her. They explained that she was an important part of team and they would be by her side. They emphasized that now she had a role to play in protecting the community, and for that, she needed to start addressing household issues in a peaceful way.

After several meetings, Tabita was able to talk to her husband and the WPT’s about the anger and sadness she felt. Once she was able to express her needs and fears, the team facilitated a dialogue between Tabita and her husband where they reached an agreement that would allow Tabita and her husband to live together peacefully. Through this process, Tabita realized how important the team was for her and how life-changing their intervention was. She mentioned to NP, “If my team had not come, my anger would have continued to grow. Their presence made me calm down and their continuous support gave me hope.”

Through their collective action, and aided by their trainings, the WPT members have been able to have a positive impact on the peace and protection of their communities and realize real change at the community and household levels. Grace Mumari expressed that members of the community call on the WPT for assistance with a variety of issues including household and community conflict, assistance to vulnerable members of the community, referrals to governmental and non-governmental agencies, and psychological first aid. Grace is certain that the trust and respect of the WPT’s interventions by community members and local leaders indicate that they are a pivotal aspect of supporting their community and restoring peace in South Sudan.

National peace begins with building peace at the most local levels, including in each family home. Addressing the legacy of conflict as it is manifested in each individual, including facilitating healing from multi-generational trauma, is where the seed of change grows. “We were in the dark but now we are empowered, and we understood we are not alone. We have transformed our homes and our community through the trainings and teamwork.”

Though the Yei WPT has already made immense progress since their founding, there is still a significant amount of work ahead. In March 2020, the women participated in the National Women’s Conference in Juba, where they had the opportunity to meet other WPT members from different parts of South Sudan, as well as women leaders from across the country. They developed an action plan that includes providing the UCP trainings and awareness raising activities they received from NP to the

nearby villages, in coordination with the leaders of these communities. They also want to encourage teamwork among the female IDP and host community members when collecting firewood and fetching water, two activities where women are often attacked. Moreover, they will continue advocating for the provision of integral services and emergency post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) for survivors of SGBV and for a law to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in South Sudan in compliance with international standards. As Grace said, “We women are moving forward, and to accomplish that, we need to claim for our rights.”

## BREAKING THE CYCLE OF REVENGE VIOLENCE IN GREATER ULANG

ULANG, UPPER NILE STATE | April 2020



Photo: Nyalieth Kolong, WPT member in Ulang County, Upper Nile State, speaking in front of community members during a community meeting about the role of women in peacebuilding/ February 2020/NP

Since April 2015, Nonviolent Peaceforce's (NP) Ulang team has been establishing and strengthening Women Protection Teams (WPTs) in communities throughout Greater Ulang, in Ulang, Nyangore, Rirnyang, Yieng, Doma, Yomding, Kuich and Nyarkueth, with the aim of empowering women to serve as leaders for peace and protection in their communities. WPT members have received a variety of trainings under NPs Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP) methodology including conflict management, early warning and early response, and prevention and response to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), enabling them to constructively identify, mitigate, and prevent protection concerns and the escalation of conflict into violence. In greater Ulang, one of the primary sources of violence is revenge killing. For the Nuer, the primary tribe in greater Ulang, women, especially mothers, hold a critical role in conflict mitigation and conflict transformation considering the influence they have on their children. This, along with the skills WPT members gained through NPs UCP trainings, has uniquely positioned WPT members to effectively prevent violence arising from communal conflict, including revenge killing, in greater Ulang.

Nyalieth, a mother from Wuntit boma, Yieng payam, Ulang County has been a member of the Ulang WPT since March 2018. This is her narrative:

In 1997, Nyalieth's brother-in-law was killed by a member of a sub-clan in Barmach, a payam under Ulang County. Though the traditional compensation process was completed, this was not a guarantee for peace and the families were considered enemies.

In August 2019, the brother of the perpetrator became lost on his way to Ulang, instead arriving in Wuntit, the village where Nyalieth's family lives. While asking community members for directions to Ulang, he was identified by some female relatives of the victim killed in 1997. They thought of informing the men in the community which

would have likely resulted in a revenge killing however, Nyalieth stopped them and insisted that they keep him inside the tukul for safety.

The same evening, Nyalieth informed the man that she would guide him to Ulang and accompany him until she was sure he could not be followed by armed men from Wuntit. The man was hesitant and didn't immediately trust Nyalieth, thinking she might hand him over to her relatives. After Nyalieth promised him safety, they left and the man reached Ulang unharmed. Two days later, Nyalieth met the man in Ulang. The man thanked her and then asked, "Why did you do that? Why did you help me?" Nyalieth explained that she received trainings conducted by NP and said, "NP taught us about preaching peace rather than violence. I also have learned about protective accompaniment and that's what I did."

Nyalieth's act has demonstrated the power women have to intervene in situations of conflict to prevent escalation into violence. Through trainings and mentoring in UCP and participation in a group, like the WPT, dedicated to community peace and protection, these women are empowered to utilize their UCP skills to positively influence negative cultural practices such as revenge killing and slowly make positive changes at the community level.

NP Ulang will continue to provide tailored trainings to each of its eight WPTs to facilitate improved community response to prevalent protection concerns. For example, NP is planning to conduct more in-depth GBV prevention and response trainings to its WPTs in order to address under-reporting and stigmatization of GBV. Additionally, NP plans to train the WPTs on communication, advocacy and coordination to better enable the WPT member's participation as leaders and decision makers in their communities. Finally, in March 2020, focal points from the WPTs had the opportunity to participate in a national WPT conference in Juba in which women from every WPT throughout South Sudan shared their experiences, activities, and challenges. After the conference,

motivated by the activities of WPTs in other locations, the WPTs in greater Ulang decided to engage in more independent activities, including patrols, awareness raising on key protection issues, and protective accompaniments, with support provided by NP when requested.

## SOCIAL COHESION

### TAMBURA: ENHANCING ETHNIC UNITY THROUGH THE DE-ESCALATION OF TRIBAL TENSIONS

TAMBURA, WESTERN EQUATORIA STATE | May 2020



Photo: Peacebuilding event in Tambura/ South Sudan/November 2019/NP

Tambura, a county in Western Equatoria State located on the border with the Central African Republic, is primarily populated by the Azande and Balanda tribes. According to a paramount chief, the Balanda migrated to

Tambura from Western Bahr el Ghazal in the 18th century and, compared to the Azanda, are a minority in the area. The two tribes co-existed peacefully until their relationship started to deteriorate in 2019 fueled by Balanda sentiments of a lack of representation in the Azande-dominated government. The power struggle between the two groups soon escalated into a violent confrontation with armed youth from both tribes carrying out violent attacks against each another.

In September 2019, NP conducted an 8-day mission to Tambura to gain further insight into the conflict and its impact on the community as well as to offer support to the community in nonviolent dispute resolution. Upon arrival to Tambura, NP observed that the security situation appeared to be stable. However, meetings with local authorities, traditional and religious leaders, the Peace Working Group, and representatives of the Balanda and Azande communities revealed that tensions between the Balanda and Azande remained high. Community leaders expressed concern that, if tensions were not de-escalated swiftly, violence could spread throughout the state.

Recognizing that the youth were the primary demographic involved in violent incidents between the two tribes, NP decided to engage with the youth directly. On 13 September 2019, NP facilitated a workshop on nonviolent communication and

nonviolent conflict resolution for 55 young men and 40 young women representing various tribes across Tambura.

The youth actively participated in the workshop and suggested organizing a cultural event where young people would learn about each other's culture and customs. Aiming to bridge the ethnic and cultural divide and promote peaceful co-existence, NP welcomed the youth's initiative and commitment to supporting the event.

Two months later, NP returned to Tambura for a follow-up visit and organized a community protection meeting to learn how the relationship between the tribes evolved since September. The chiefs of the Azande and Balanda informed NP that they are no longer being targeted and are now able to move throughout the community safely. The youth also acknowledged that tensions between the tribes has declined but remarked that politicians continue to fuel tribal divisions. Violence reduction could be attributed to series of peacebuilding workshops that NP conducted throughout Tambura, improving youth's capacity to prevent, mitigate and non-violently respond to conflict. Additionally, the youth have also initiated a discussion on establishment of peace forums across the state.

In November 2019, NP joined the youth in facilitating a cultural event initially envisioned during the September workshop on nonviolent communication and conflict resolution. The cultural event disseminated messages of nonviolence, peace, and unity to approximately 1,000 women and men from tribes across Tambura through a variety of mediums. Balanda and Azande youth performed traditional dances, sang songs, and recited poetry, while girls from a number of tribes participated in a football tournament. The event was appreciated by the community and received positive feedback. Further, realizing the cultural event's positive impact on the cohesion of the community, youth leaders decided to hold this event annually, ensuring the

participation of all tribes "no matter how small they are."

In South Sudan, a home for over 60 different tribes, ethnic conflict is a major impediment to peace. Localized tribal tensions can transform into violent conflict and rapidly disperse to a greater geographical area. Although conflict between the Balanda and Azande was successfully diffused this time, there is a high likelihood of a resumption of conflict. The formation of the Transitional Government of National Unity will hopefully result in a more inclusive local government in Tambura that addresses longstanding grievances between the Balanda and Azande. However, in the meantime, NP will continue to engage youth in Tambura with trainings and mentoring activities that foster a culture of nonviolence and promote peaceful co-existence.