

Mahad IDP Camp is a highly congested and densely populated area hosting over 12,000 IDPs, according to the camp's chairperson. Located near Konyo-Konyo, Juba's biggest street market, the movement and population density in the camp is an alarming factor that can negatively contribute to the COVID-19 prevention efforts. According to the discussions held with the community leaders, women and girls have become more vulnerable to gender-based violence (GBV) since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating already existing structural inequalities in the community. According to community members, there has been an increase in child, early and forced marriage (CEFM) and child pregnancy in the area.

When NP first came to Mahad, it was observed that women met within their own ethnic groups, mainly Anyuak, Dinka and Murle, the majority ethnic groups in the camps' composition. Those women would meet when social matters would come into place, among them, funerals, marriages or for settling disagreements involving those part of their own ethnic group. Previous attempts were made to form a General Women's Union with women representing the different ethnic groups from the camp, however, after misunderstanding due to tribal differences and a lack of structure and leadership coordination among the women, the group stopped to gathered together.

Due to regular community engagements in Mahad, women from the camp took the initiative and approached NP seeking support to create a platform among women where

protection issues could be discussed, and to help foster peace among the various tribes. Working with the already existing different women's groups from Anyuak, Dink and Murle communities, NP suggested that women would choose representatives from each of those communities, to be represented in an umbrella women's group, where they would sit together to discuss protection issues and efforts to strengthen the community relationship among different ethnic lines. Those women would also be critical community representatives to share information and conduct outreach activities to the rest of the camp's population.

From the first engagement with the newly formed umbrella women group, NP had emphasized the timeframe of the project and the importance of the independent continuity of the group's operation in addressing protection concerns independently. Hence, NP focused its efforts and engagement with the group in a series of capacity building activities and awareness raising on existing protection concerns related to women's and child protection, and conducted trainings on Protection Mainstreaming and on Social Cohesion, to strengthen the community's relationship across the women's group.

*"Up to now I felt a lot of changes in my life, the way I interact with people is now different compared to those days before I attended all the trainings. I can feel the love and peace of mind now from the women and the community, I have now forgotten those pains.", said a member of the umbrella women's group.*

Following capacity building efforts with the umbrella women's group, NP supported the women to start conducting independent activities, among them, patrols, awareness raising and protection mainstreaming activities related to multi-sectoral humanitarian service deliveries. Mentoring meetings were organized prior to any of those activities, in efforts to increase coordination and attend to any questions the groups could anticipate. For example, when conducting patrols, the group was advised to always meet with the leadership and explain their purposes, being transparent and increasing its accountability towards its own population. Such efforts strengthen relationships in the community and helped the women group to be recognized by community leadership and open dialogue on some of their concerns, such as the lack of inclusion of minority ethnic groups in registration sessions for humanitarian service delivery. NP was also present during those initial activities in order to continue to coach the women's group and address any protection gaps and support in responding to technical questions raised in those first activities. After those sessions, the women would gather together and debrief on outcomes of the activities, helping to raise challenges and successes among them.

According to a member of the umbrella women's group, the mentoring NP provided helped her and the other member of the umbrella women's group, to respond to protection concerns of other women in their community.

*"Now I even advice some women who are facing domestic violence in their houses. I really thanked NP and other organizations who also trained us, because trainings can change lives of the communities"*

NP plans to continue to engage with the umbrella women's group, who is now developing an action plan to continue to advance their independent activities and initiative against GBV and other protection concerns affecting women in Mahad, and link them to local community leadership and humanitarian agencies.

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