

STRENGTHENING LOCAL PEACE AND PROTECTION MECHANISMS IN GREATER ULANG



Photo: Women Protection Team/Rirnyang Payam, Ulang County/January 2020/Nonviolent Peaceforce

Rirnyang, a *payam** of Ulang County, is home to the Cie-Puoch sub-clan. The community is prone to attacks from the Lou Nuer and Murle during the dry season, which occurs from January to April of every year and periodically results in violent conflict, abduction of women and children, displacement of the civilian population, and the potential for serious protection concerns to arise. The *bomas*** at the edge of the forest, such as Pachuey *boma*, are the most vulnerable to these attacks.

Based on these concerns, NP identified a need to strengthen community-based protection mechanisms to ensure an ongoing protection presence in Rirnyang, particularly when the rainy season hinders access to the *payam*, as well as to increase the participation of women in the peacebuilding and leadership mechanisms of the community. As a result, in December 2018, NP established a Women's Protection Team (WPT) in Rirnyang with the membership of forty women who were strategically selected in close coordination with local leaders based on each women's demonstrated leadership in the community and commitment to participation in protection activities. Once formed, the WPT was then trained on Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP), including prevention and response to gender-based violence (GBV) and child protection in order to provide them with the necessary skills to take action in their communities and respond to incidents of violence and protection concerns. Recently, the WPT has been particularly active in preventing and resolving inter-clan conflict that has disturbed the peace and security of the community.

In May 2019, an attack in Pachuey, a community in Rirnyang, by the Lou Nuer resulted in the displacement of the civilian population to Yieng. Following the displacement from the Pachuey to Yieng, incidents of criminality that occurred in Yieng led to tensions between the two communities. During a court process for the theft of a cow and donkey in 2019, the two communities fought one another leading to the death of two people and the return of the Pachuey community from Yieng to Rirnyang, along with the perpetrators of the killings. As there was no compensation or mediation process, tensions between the two communities escalated and youth in Rirnyang increasingly moved with weapons in fear that the two sides would clash again.

In September 2019, while visiting relatives in Rirnyang, a male youth recognized the man who killed his relative in Yieng. Tensions rose and the two sides began firing at one another. The WPTs quickly put on their visibility and inter-positioned themselves between the conflicting sides. The fighting stopped because the members of the WPT were mothers, aunts, and sisters of the fighters who feared that the bullets would kill them.

The WPTs role in de-escalating tensions between the two communities along with their work in resolving household-level domestic violence cases, providing protective accompaniment to those in need, and advocating for the protection needs of their community has been recognized by local and governmental authorities.

*A *payam* is a sub-division of a county and is the second lowest administrative unit in South Sudan.

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The county commissioner of Ulang recognized the important role played by WPTs in mitigating conflict and promoting peace in the community. The work of the individual WPTs has been further magnified by the integration of members of the WPTs into NPs peace committees that are also comprised of local leadership and youth. NP plans to continue encouraging the inclusion of women into local peace processes as well as providing further trainings to increase the protective capacity of the WPTs along with skills in leadership and advocacy.

NP is also continually working to build the capacity of the peace committees to monitor and respond to inter-clan conflict throughout greater Ulang such as through a recent training on participatory conflict analysis, an upcoming training on mediation and dialogue, and supporting local peace initiatives by providing and facilitating safe spaces for dialogue within and between communities.



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