

Advocating for Community Safety - Nzara Women's Protection Team taking action



Photo: WPT advocacy meeting / Nzara, Western Equatoria State, South Sudan / August 29, 2020/NP

Nzara is a town 25km outside Yambio, Western Equatoria, and has seen the brunt of violent conflict from 2013. This area has been a witness of a number of armed confrontations between different armed groups, thus the communities have faced constant high levels of violence throughout the years. Its proximity to the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has also observed cross-border transnational dynamics such as nomadic cattle keepers, influx of displaced persons from neighboring countries, armed groups carrying out raids and the different challenges that come with competition for resources.

One of the WPTs that NP has trained and coached has taken the lead in working towards the increased safety and security of their villages. In the past they have been key in challenging chiefs to resuscitate the traditional structure where the chief's homestead is a place of refuge for survivors; they also greatly contributed to map hotspot areas and assist survivors through referral processes in place. As part of the process to participate to positive influence local decisions, the WPTs have advocated to

improve security in the region, as well as to increase livelihood opportunities for women.

While there had been some hesitancy to appeal to political leaders in the past, NP trained members of this WPT on advocacy and communication skills to engage with leadership, since most changes occur where there is political will. Consequently, sharing their concerns directly to the leadership could be more effective and promising for the outcome. On 29 August 2020, the women requested for a meeting with the governor, to voice out their grievances and requests.

During the meeting, the women indicated that the continued fighting between the soldiers and the Ambororo was compromising their safety. The Ambororo is a nomadic community that travels around among the Western Equatoria, South Sudan, DRC, Niger and Central African Republic; they are often involved in resource disputes with the community in Nzara regarding access to water and grazing land. It had become high risk for the local women to attend to their fields, to go to the river fishing or collect firewood in the bushes as they feared revenge attacks or being caught in the crossfire when violence breaks out. They were appealing to the governor that the fighting should stop.

An appeal was also made to the governor for the improvement of the safety and security of women in Nzara. They have been living in constant fear for themselves and their daughters as there is a systematic targeting of single women and female headed households, being harassed in the community.

The women further advocated for more access to land and ownership of livelihood opportunities such as retail spaces in the markets. They indicated that a significant portion of them were young widows who have lost their husbands due to the conflict and had young children to take care of. Their

vision is to be independent and able to care for themselves and their families without having to get married and dependent on another man for livelihood. While opportunities existed, there were still some complications around land ownership, traditionally only given to men.

The governor was receptive of their concerns and promised to act on it. Regarding to the harassment of women he said that he will seek further information to propose possible responses. Regarding the land ownership issue, he mentioned that he will engage with the chiefs once the final state government has been formed to ensure that women will be eligible to own land.

The engagement from the WPTs have shown fruitful results, as there have not been violent clashes around Nzara since the meeting and the Ambororo have relocated about 80km away from Nzara. The women are taking ownership of the situation in their community and taking leadership in confronting the issue, redefining local norms.

**Nonviolent Peaceforce's work with the Women's Protection Team in Nzara, Western Equatoria, South Sudan is possible thanks to the support of the European Union.*