

PREVENTING AND RESPONDING TO VIOLENCE IN JUBA POC



Photo: COVID-19 Awareness Raising/Juba POC, South Sudan/2020/NP

Since the establishment of Juba PoC 3, the residents have faced challenges such as high levels of gang violence, overcrowded living conditions, and a lack of access to livelihoods. However, in May and early June 2020, residents faced additional and compounding challenges including the spread of COVID-19, heavy rains that damaged homes, and a declining confidence in the durability of peace. In this context, on the evening of June 4, 2020, tensions between youth from two Nuer clans, the Fangak and the Guik, erupted into violence in two zones of Juba PoC 3 over a lost memory card.

The youth fought using sticks and spears until, on June 5, camp leadership unsuccessfully attempted

to intervene. Instead of a peaceful resolution to the conflict, the situation escalated further and resulted in the expulsion of approximately 2000 Guik, Nasir, and Fangak youth from the PoC. By the end of the day, 373 people were injured, 34 were admitted to the clinic of a health partner, and 12 were referred to Juba Teaching Hospital for further care.

At the early stages of the clashes, NP team focused on triangulating information and verifying rumors that served to spread fear throughout the population. By verifying and analyzing rumors using information from trusted sources and engaging the Greater Leaders to verify rumors and disseminate correct information to their

communities, NP was able to prevent the spread of incorrect information and reduce the number of people participating in the fighting, thus contributing to a temporary de-escalation. The team also provided protective accompaniment to 23 injured IDPs (16 men, 3 women, and 4 boys) on June 4 and June 5 so they could safely reach the health clinic.

On the evening of June 5, the fighting ceased and many of the expelled community members were able to re-enter the camp. Despite this, tensions remained high and most of the youth were still carrying their weapons. The tensions led to renewed fighting on June 6 and resulted in the Nasir, Fangak and Akobo clans being ousted from the PoC 3 by the Guit community. Rumors spread throughout the PoC that clans remaining in the PoC would join with the Guit, fueling the potential for intensifying violence. Consequentially, the trucks that usually provided water to tens of thousands of IDPs was denied access to the camp, the market was shut, and even some members of the Community Management Committee (CMC) took sides in the conflict.

As the fighting continued, members of the Women Protection Team (WPT) stepped in to provide protective accompaniment to injured IDPs who risked being attacked by rival groups on their way to access medical treatment. In addition, the WPT members actively attempted to de-escalate the situation by communicating to the community through public announcements in their respective sectors and blocks, asking IDPs to stay calm and to not participate in the violence. WPTs also maintained open communication lines with community leadership. For example, in response to youth mobilization, the WPT updated the Community Watch Group (CWG) and other relevant actors in the PoC.

In response to the displacement of IDP youth from the PoC, NP engaged with leaders from both sides of the conflict and facilitated a meeting with the elders. After the meeting, elders representing the IDPs were able to convince those who had fled to re-enter. NP was present throughout the process to provide protective presence as necessary.

Though a meeting occurred on June 6 in an attempt to find resolution to the conflict, no agreement was reached. Fighting resumed the same evening, extending to PoC 1 and the checkpoint and resulting in increased use of force by the UN and government forces.

Given its well-established position inside the IDP community, NP team was able to contact the various conflicting parties and support mediation processes by communicating with relevant parties and urging for prompt mediation. NP's priorities for its talks with the conflict parties were for the parties to renounce violence and begin the disarmament process as well as for expelled groups to return to the PoC 3.

On June 7, NP engaged in shuttle diplomacy and negotiation efforts between the two sites, attempting to re-build broken relationships between the opposing parties and facilitate the resumption of non-violent communication. This would enable the groups to come together to hold a dialogue face-to-face. The team also engaged with the Greater Leaders, a tactic that proved fruitful as these leaders agreed to meet with other community leaders across both PoCs and publicly renounce the violence. The team also conducted advocacy and coordinated with other protection partners to ensure the protection of the most vulnerable, including persons with special needs, such as ensuring injured persons could access health. This required NP to negotiate with PoC community leaders when bringing injured IDPs

from outside the PoC to access pertinent medical treatment.

On June 8, the ground was ready for a conflict resolution meeting, involving all the conflicting parties, the community leadership, an IO delegation. To support positive outcomes of this meeting and at the request of camp leadership, NP facilitated a dry run with the mediators to develop an agenda and provided technical mediation support and logistical assistance. NP also provided protective presence at the meeting and accompanied the delegation who came from outside the PoCs to participate in the meeting. The meeting resulted in the main parties agreeing to permanent peace inside PoC 3 and for unity among the clans in the PoC.

Thanks to continuous engagement with key stakeholders, the close collaboration with the WPT and a constant analysis of the context to ensure a safe and effective response, NP managed throughout the four days of intense fighting to bring divergent groups together and find alternative solutions to violence. Through relationships built with the community since NP first began programming in the PoC in 2013, NP was able to intervene at the grassroots level to mitigate violence, protect civilians, and create an enabling environment for mediation between conflicting parties. Going forward, NP will meet with the camp leadership and review the proposed objectives of the reconciliation process such as disseminating information about outcomes to local communities. NP will also continue monitoring the outcomes of the meeting and tensions amongst IDPs to deter the potential for another outbreak of violence.