

# RESTORING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH COMMUNAL DIALOGUE IN NGOJA



## YEI, CENTRAL EQUATORIA STATE



*Photo: Peace Dialogue between Two Sub-clans in Ngoja village, yei county 19<sup>th</sup> Feb 2022*

Yei County in Central Equatoria has become a flashpoint of conflict, largely due to the sustained presence of armed actors and fighting between multiple armed factions since the escalation of the 2016 South Sudan crisis. The conflict has led to significant internal displacement within Yei County, as well as across international borders, primarily to Uganda. Additionally, contestations over land and resources due to migration into the area have created tensions between the host community and those settling in the county.

Land and other resource contestations are cited as integral in the sequence of violence of several multi-generational conflicts in the area—particularly in the case of the intra-clan conflict between the Yongule and Kede sub-clans of the Morisa clan in Ngoja, Yei County. The current conflict started as a family dispute, which can be traced back more than three decades after an unfair distribution of resources between two half-brothers named. Each belonging to different sub-clans Yongule and Kede.

The first-born son of the Morisa, traditionally held rights over land as a landlord, leadership as the head of the clan, and other family inheritance, including taking dowry of his sisters and paying dowries for his followers.

But when asked to fulfil the rite of marriage of his half-brother, the first born declined the request. His action angered their father, who was alleged to have cursed his half-brother, and withdrew his birth rites as a first-born son and gave them to his younger half-brother, —hence he became leader of a separate sub-clan with all the rights to leadership, land, and other rites of a firstborn bestowed upon him.

The people of the Yongule sub-clan felt cheated and to this day attribute all the calamities befalling their communities to the curses of their forefather, while the Kede sub clan continue to exercise superiority in land ownership and resources. This has led to poor community relationships and inter-clan fighting during community gatherings and resource sharing, targeted killings, and fighting over clan leadership.

One of the clan elders of the Yongule sub-clan said the following while narrating the history of the intra-clan conflict:

*“Some people will say ‘these things happened more than 80 years ago, why are we still fighting over it?’ but we are telling this history to our youth. We don’t want them to forget what rightfully belongs to them. Our forefathers also told us to fight for what is ours: the leadership and the land rights belong to us, the first sons of Morisa, the Yongule sub-clan.”*

Aiming to address the poor relationships between the two sub-clans, outstanding issues of land grabbing, and disputes over other resources and leadership, NP worked with a local group, **Community Local Dialogue Initiative for Peace and Reconciliation in Morisa**.

NP had previously trained and coached the group in identifying conflict drivers and on how to mitigate violence, conduct dialogues, and facilitate trust building. The Local Dialogue Initiative then reached out to NP to support in facilitating the intra-clan conflict of the Morisa Clan, which prompted NP to support the initiative in order to identify the issues facing the community and to provide joint, locally-led solutions and recommendations.

After several mediations by the community-based structures of Local Dialogue Initiative and the Youth Protection Team supported by NP, the NP provided further support after it was requested by the Initiative and the team organized a community dialogue for the two sub-clans in February 2022 in Ngoja boma. Among the stakeholders present in the dialogue were chiefs, the Youth Protection Team, the church leaders, and intellectuals of Ngoja boma, the Women Protection Team and the chairperson for the Local Dialogue Initiative, and landlords to give background to the conflicts and guide the community to a path of peace and reconciliation. One of the Community elders from the Kede sub-clan appreciated the initiative to dialogue and stated:

*“I am really thankful that we are looking into this issue today, these things happened a long time ago—I was not even born, but am now old and people are still fighting over who should lead and who should be the landlord. **We want our youth to be one and talk about development, let our youth go to school and not fight for us—let them fight for their futures.**”*

At the dialogue, NP provided protective presence and safe space for the conflicting parties to resolve their differences and identify solutions to deter future occurrences of violence. The community reached several solutions at the dialogue where the Kede sub-clan accepted to give the birth rite and the traditional leadership back to Yongule sub-clan. Although the Kede sub-clan claimed these rightfully belongs to them, a clan elder from the Kede sub-clan said, *“for the sake of peace, we are willing to give back the birth rite to the Yongule sub-clan and we shall respect their leadership of the clan because we are brothers.”*

An elder from the Yongule sub-clan also appreciated NP for listening and guiding the community towards peace:

*“I thank NP for being with the people always and making sure everybody is listened to, you see sometimes people say that ‘it is something very old we need to get over it,’ but how when we have not talked about and people are still fighting over it? **For me, I thank NP because when people feel listened to they also listen to you.** So, we shall not fight again. We will sit down as a family to solve our future conflicts.”*

The two sub-clans resolved to forgive each other and resolve future misunderstandings peacefully as brothers. The religious leaders present at the dialogue then prayed to “avert all the calamities and the generational curses placed the on sub-clan of Yongule.” The community formed a committee to oversee the implementation of the dialogue resolutions specifically to oversee the transfer of the traditional leadership from the Kede sub-clan to the Yongule sub-clan.

After the dialogue, the sub-clans were excited and happy and made promises to implement what has been agreed. The dialogue also gave an opportunity for the community members to interact. For example, one of the community elders said that *“we have not been eating together, but from now on, we are going to be eating and drinking together and sharing everything just like the brothers that we are.”*

NP will follow up and support the committee formed to support the resolutions, as well as monitor the impact of the reconciliation between the two sub-clans to enhance peaceful coexistence in the community.

