

NP SOUTH SUDAN



Photo; Home to Home Awareness raising by Women Protection Team (WPT) in Yei during 16 Days of Activism/Yei, Central Equatoria/November 25th-2020/NPSS

WOMEN PEACE AND SECURITY

PROTECTING COMMUNITIES AGAINST COVID-19 JUBA, CENTRAL EQUATORIA /JULY 2020



A photo of Haneen/Juba PoC, South Sudan/May 2020/NP

Since March 2014, Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) has been working with Women's Protection Teams (WPTs) in Juba PoC with the purpose of increasing women's participation in peacebuilding and building community-based protection mechanisms that can prevent and respond to violence. Since this time, NP has facilitated the establishment of nine WPTs in the Protection of Civilian (PoC) sites, comprised of 120 women, trained in topics under the umbrella of unarmed civilian protection (UCP) including prevention and response to gender-based violence (GBV), child protection, conflict management, leadership and communications skills, and advocacy and coordination. The WPTs now conduct joint activities with NP and independent activities such as patrols, GBV referrals, conflict mediation, protective accompaniment, and child protection advocacy. Given the adaptability of UCP, WPTs are also able to re-orient their activities to meet the dynamic needs and contexts in their communities as well as serve as leaders, utilizing the skills they gained as WPT members. One of the beneficiaries of NP's trainings, workshops, and mentoring is Haneen, a WPT member serving the Internally Displaced Person (IDP) community since 2015. While serving as WPT focal point, Haneen also hold

various positions within the PoC 3 community leadership structures. Currently, she is representing the camp management committee as a human right coordinator for the IDP community in PoC 3 and has recently become a member of the community task force for the prevention of COVID-19. The following is a transcribed interview with Haneen discussing the impacts of COVID-19 on her community as well as her efforts to help her community:

NP: How do you see the reactions from the IDPs in the POCs due to the COVID 19?

Haneen: We are conducting awareness raising to the community everyday by visiting door to door houses, and places where IDPs are gathering such as water points, restaurants, hospitals and distribution sites. Our community haven't taken the preventive measures very seriously and they strongly believe that the COVID will not reach POCs due to the heat in South Sudan.

There are several cultural myths and rumors are spreading within the POCs that the COVID 19 will not target the general IDPs. Therefore, we are increasing our awareness raising sessions and putting more effort to control the rumors which are spreading in the POCs related to the COVID 19. It is VERY important for our community to accept the WHO standards of preventive measures and we as community leaders are trying to convince the IDPs to apply the recommended preventive measures. In addition, we are closely working with the blocks and zonal leaders in order to promote the proper hygiene practices among the IDPs [Internally Displaced Persons].

NP: What are the challenges IDPs are facing due to the COVID-19?

Haneen: IDPs in the PoC, including the Church leaders, are not following the rules and regulations recommended by the community task force. The church leaders are violating the rules and regulations suggested to avoid the spread of COVID-19 while gathering in large numbers of people in the church. The water points are Overcrowded as well and IDPs are still practicing to greet each other with handshakes due to cultural beliefs since greeting without handshake is culturally assumed to be disrespectful.

"We as the community task force members are putting our full efforts to sensitize the community about the important of applying the recommended measures."

Due to the closure of schools to avoid the spread of COVID-19, children started moving around while unaccompanied minors looking for food and charcoal. It is not easy to manage children especially when they are

trying to get something to eat or when they go out of the PoCs for income generating activities. another contributing aspect is that the shelters of the poc are made of plastic sheets and it is very hot in the shelter during the daytime, therefore it is challenging for the adults and children to remain in their shelters and practice social distancing. as a result of this, you will find the youths moving towards the WFZ [weapons free zone] while children are playing by the roadsides and in the natural water pools located in the WFZ.

The government may take some extra actions and lockdown, and this will affect not only the idps in the POC but also the host community. the number of movements from and to the POC will increase, the IDPS will go out collecting firewood and getting charcoal outside of the camp while the host community will try to get assistance in the POCS. eventually, there would be tensions between the IDP and the host community. We do not have any kind of health facilities that are focusing on prevention and treatment of covid-19, and the new arrivals are not tested or isolated for fourteen days upon their arrival as a preventive measure to protect others from getting infected, therefore the risk of the spread and getting infected by covid-19 is high

Due to the closure of most social gathering activities in both POCS, men and boys are more attracted to the local alcohol brewing places inside the POCs consequently, in recent time, concerns are raising about the high incidents of GBV and domestic violence related cases. currently we are closely monitoring the local brewing places inside the POCS for possible demolition of the structures upon our request on CWG [community watch group] and UNPOL for safety and security measures.

however, as community leaders, we are facing challengers on our efforts to close these illegal alcohol brewing places inside the POCS due to the influence from the community watch group members. some of the CWG members have been bribed by these alcohol sellers while some other members also used to consume local alcohol from these places.

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Hannen's contributions to her community demonstrate the importance of empowering women to take leadership roles in their communities as well as the significant impact that individuals can make at the grassroots level. when women are given the opportunities to serve and protect their communities, they can make positive and substantive changes, including in protecting their communities against the spread of covid-19. Hannen's testimony also underscores the significant impacts that covid-19 is already having on the IDP and host community in juba. however, thanks to recent funding provided by USAID's office of foreign disaster assistance (OFDA), NP is currently working hand-in-hand with community members like Hannen to prevent and respond to protection concerns exacerbated by covid-19 across South Sudan

ADDRESSING PROTECTION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS WITH NP'S OUTREACH-WORKERS

JUBA, SOUTH SUDAN | October 2020



Photo; Rose, one of NP's outreach worker during patrols in New Site, South Sudan/2020

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated already existing structural inequalities, especially those impacting women and girls across every sphere from health to the economy, security to social protection. In times of crisis, fragility and conflict, when resources are strained and institutional capacity is limited, women and girls face disproportionate impacts with far-reaching consequences. In South Sudan, and more specifically in densely populated areas like Juba, pre-existing gender inequalities, discriminatory social norms, intercommunal violence, cattle raiding, and poverty, among others, are likely to be exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic and further limit women and girls' access to health and other essential services. According to the discussions held with the community leaders at the beginning of project implementation, the vulnerabilities of young girls and women increased as they have been more affected by sexual exploitation and abuse as a result of economic strain created due to the pandemic.

To strengthen women's protection and security, Nonviolent Peaceforce selected community outreach workers, all of whom are members of those new communities that NP started to engage. Prior to its engagement, NP assessed that the local community at New Site, a highly populated neighborhoods in Juba with deficient provision of basic services and presence of humanitarian actors, lacks knowledge on protection issues, particularly around Gender Based Violence (GBV). Among them, domestic violence and early and forced child marriage were highly present in the community.

According to Rose, one of NP's community outreach worker in New Site, positive change was observed when relating to the incidences of GBV after months of awareness raising, community engagement and empowerment on related topics. In one of Rose's outreach diary entries, she mentioned: "Women and girls were able to understand about women's rights and how important these are for their day-to-day life. People within the community particularly the women were dominated by the culture and religion to be under their husbands'

power - even though women are strong enough to stand by themselves. After the awareness raising sessions conducted by NP, not only women but also the men accepted to respect for the rights of their women and girls. Several women have come with an idea of starting self-employments to avoid asking for money from their husbands which is one of the root causes of GBV cases at the domestic level."

Rose's engagement in the community has been constant. By conducting several patrols and engagement sessions with community members she was able to notice a behavioral change not only in the increase of self-confidence and empowerment of women, but also in questioning masculinities and the role of men in their community. "I have observed and also a few women reported to me that their husbands have changed their daily routing and now more attentive to the children and their wives while some of them have abandoned their drinking habits. This has reduced the number of domestic violence incidents in the community."

Seeking to promote behavioral messaging targeted at key groups and individuals to promote social change and reduce the impact of violence on civilians, specific messaging was developed to discuss early and forced child marriage among parents and girls. Through her interactions with members of her own community in new site, Rose believes that: "NP's awareness raising sessions on early marriage to the community has also enlightened the attitudes of their parents. Parents were able to understand the importance of sending their girls to the schools rather than giving their daughters to men for the bride price as an income-generating activity. The girls did not know the side effects of child marriage and now their eyes have opened and they understood the importance of child education for them and as well as to the society. Parents have learnt the rights of the children and are now taking care of their children and discouraging child marriage.

Rose feels very happy about her new role in her own community. People now trust and resort to her guidance when something happens. But according to her, her work and determination are long from being gone, she plans next to engage directly with youth groups, often associated with cases of sexual abuse of girls, to change their attitudes towards the protection of their own community. Inspiring many resilient women in South Sudan, Rose concludes by saying that for the future,

"I hope to become a chief in my community and they will listen to me. I know that I can do it".

ADVOCATING FOR PROTECTION FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY - NZARA WOMEN'S PROTECTION TEAM TAKING ACTION

NZARA, YAMBIO/SOUTH SUDAN/November-2020

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.

MAHAD'S UMBRELLA WOMEN GROUP TAKING INITIATIVE AGAINST GBV

MAHAD IDP CAMP, JUBA/SOUTH SUDAN /December-2020

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. *"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.