

# NP SOUTH SUDAN



*PHOTO: WOMEN'S PROTECTION TEAM TRAINING ON SEXUAL GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (SGBV) /BENTIU/ JUNE /2021/ NPSS*

## WOMEN PEACE & SECURITY

### FROM FEAR OF HARASSMENT TO COURAGE AND SUCCESS: A CASE-STUDY OF WOMEN'S ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN CIVILIAN PROTECTION IN LUI

MUNDRI EAST COUNTY, WESTERN EQUATORIA STATE | MAY | 2021



*Lui WPT having a group-discussion during NP's leadership and advocacy training.*

Since the occupation of Lui town by armed actors in 2016, local communities were pestered by violent acts of the army inflicted on the civilian population. In the area, armed actors have been accused of arbitrary arrests of youths, false accusations, beating civilians who were suspected to work with non-state actors, and robberies within Lui town and along the Lui-Jabo roads. As part of Nonviolent Peaceforce's work in the region, NP focused on the establishment and further strengthening of the capacity of the Women's Protection Team (WPT). With the objective of improving the general security and protection situation around Lui town, the WPT also concentrates on advocacy efforts. For example, raising concerns of the local community, and specifically women's issues, to humanitarian partners, to armed forces and local authorities. In addition, WPT members monitor activities of armed actors that violate the ceasefire agreement and report breaches to NP for further suitable action. After continued interactions with the WPTs, its members are currently confident in their roles and have made some significant contributions to the safety and security in Lui town and surroundings.

*Building the Women's Protection Teams.*

When the Lui WPT was first formed in 2017, its members faced challenges in conducting activities and advocacy. The women feared for accusations of spying and repercussions thereof, when reporting on unlawful military operations and misbehaviors. Other challenges were related to confidence building regarding the role women may have within communities when it comes to protection and safety. NP continued to work with the WPTs, connecting them to other women's groups such as Mothers Union – an organized church-based group of women who were already performing peacebuilding activities in their church. Trainings were provided on Unarmed Civilian Protection which includes topics such as: peacebuilding, conflict management, gender relations, gender-based violence, early warning early response (EWER), social cohesion, protection, the ceasefire agreement and civilian ceasefire monitoring and reporting mechanisms. The trainings have not only empowered the members of the WPT to protect others, but have also provided them with the skills to use nonviolent communication to protect themselves, families and their properties and feel more confident in conversations with military forces:

*"The trainings we received from NP have enabled us to be confident enough to speak to [the armed group] when we are faced with difficult situation. One-time, a group of [soldiers] came to my home demanding for a chicken, but because of the nonviolent approaches I had learnt from NP, I tried to negotiate with them in a non-violent way until we reached a common understanding, and I willingly served them with ready cooked food instead of my chicken." (Lui, March 2021)*

*Successful engagements by the WPTs in Lui.*

Having been empowered by the various trainings, the WPTs in and around Lui started to get more confident in their role as community-based protection mechanism (CBPM), and showed the intent to continue the WPT's work beyond the project's funding period. The WPT already engaged in multiple successful activities, which help to reduce the impact of violent conflict on the community.

For example, during the second week of March 2021, the WPT in Lui-Mundri East County, successfully advocated for the release of two young civilians detained by an armed group. The two youngsters had been arrested, beaten and detained at a military barrack in Lui, due to allegations of being non-state actors by the armed group. Both young males were released a few days after the group negotiated with the armed group. Members of the WPT have further committed themselves to proactively engage between members of their community and other communities when disputes emerge. One WPT member noted:

*“I solved a conflict between two women at a borehole in Lui. One of the women in dispute was from our own community and the other woman was a caretaker to a patient at the Lui hospital. The woman from our community refused for the caretaker to fetch water because she was a stranger. I educated the two to understand that regardless of whether they come from different communities, both of them are human beings with equal dignity that should be equally respected and they equally need water to live. I then talked to the woman from my area to allow the caretaker to fetch water first because she might want to serve the life of the patient with water/food and attend to other needs of the patient. The woman from my community thanked me for my advice and allowed the caretaker to fetch water first. From that time on, she has always been friendly to strangers who go to fetch water from the same borehole.” (Lui, 24 April 2021)*

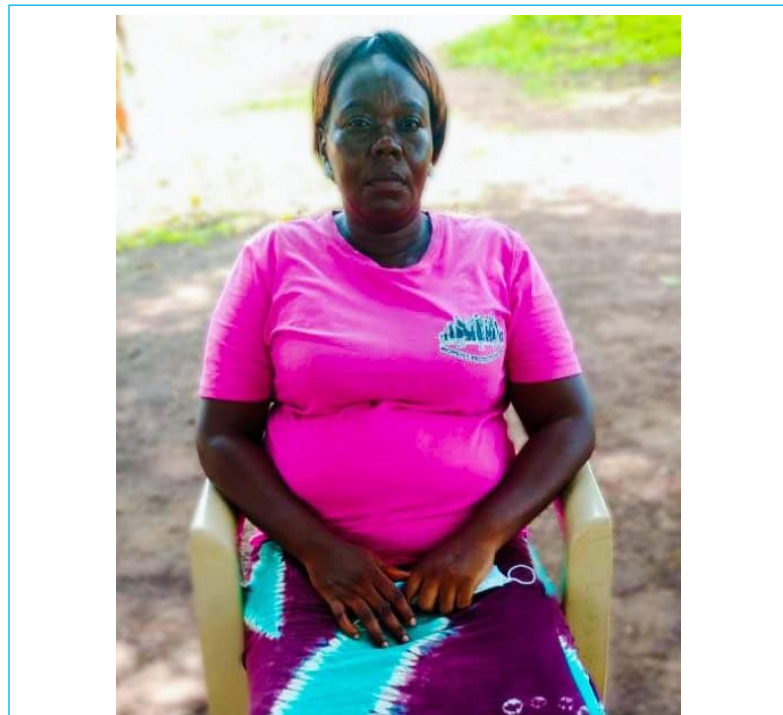
#### *Continuing the work of the WPTs*

The WPT in Lui will continue to provide accompaniment for GBV survivors, raise awareness on GBV prevention, and negotiate for the release of local youths who are arbitrarily detained by the SSPDF. The WPTs further monitor and report ceasefire breaches perpetrated by the signatory parties and identify indicators of violent conflict before escalation, reporting these to NP and other suitable partners. Last, members of the WPT reported that their work has resulted in reduced rates of violence in the region, compared to 2017-2018. With this in mind, the WPT is committed to continue ensuring peaceful coexistence between the army and civilians, communities and individuals.

NP hopes to engage with other remote communities to further promote safety and security through NP's Unarmed Civilian Protection (UCP) approach

## **WOMEN RISING TO LEADERSHIP: THE FIRST FEMALE HEAD CHIEF OF HAI-KUZEE**

YAMBIO, WESTERN EQUATORIA STATE|JUNE|2021



*Photo: Victoria Luka, the first Female Head Chief of Hai-Kuzee during an interview with Nonviolent Peaceforce, May 2021*

All over South Sudan, traditional gender roles have kept women from pursuing leadership positions. Members of the women's protection team (WPT) in Yambio explained that women are still considered to be of lesser value than men, especially when it comes to decision-making. The WPT further emphasized that the representation of women in positions of influence at both the national and local level remains low. Women who do take on leadership roles often face negative social attitudes, relegating women as only suitable for housework and questioning the capacity of women to intervene in protection issues.

Despite these challenges, a growing number of strong women are breaking through these barriers and rising to positions of power within their communities. Victoria Luka, one of Yambio WPT's active members, was elected as the first female Head Chief of Hai-Kuzee in Yambio in August 2020.

*“In my community, if you make the right decisions and lead well, you hear people saying: ‘She is leading like a man’ I want people to know that women are good decision makers and leaders too” - Head Chief Victoria Luka*

NP first established and supported a Women’s Protection Team in Yambio in 2019. Since then, NP has supported the WPTs strengthen their knowledge on general protection, gender-based violence (GBV) prevention and response, civilian ceasefire monitoring, nonviolent communication, leadership skills and conflict mediation. For Victoria, NP’s support was most valuable in facilitating nonviolent problem-solving, forming relations with other NGOs and local government, and building her confidence as a powerful woman with a voice that deserves to be heard.

*“I feel courageous compared to the past where I could not speak in public or address issues but being one of the WPT has led to my success as head woman.”*

Since becoming a member of the WPT, Victoria has become an active voice for peace within her community. In June

2020, for example, she acted as a family mediator between

men, women and youth when they engaged in conflict. After multiple sessions with NP on GBV prevention and response, Victoria also started offering civilian protection to women who endured physical assaults, accompanying women to the police station or hospital for assistance, and providing a place to stay overnight in her own home.

*“I am filled with joy as I am expressing to NP how I have been nominated and elected as Head Chief because of the several trainings given by NP that have empowered and given me the courage to be an active volunteer in the community,” said Victoria Luka.*

Victoria became known in her community as a person who stood up for the protection of civilians, especially women and youth, and someone who was able to effectively mediate conflicts. It was on this basis that the community asked her to run for Head Chief, seeing her as a better fit than the other male candidates.

Reflecting on her first months as Head Chief, Victoria notes that rising to a leadership position is hard for women, but holding on to this position and her influence may even be harder. As a female Head Chief, Victoria still faces challenges in being recognized as a leader. However, with the leadership skills she developed in collaboration with NP and her continued involvement with the WPT

Victoria explains that she feels supported and has a platform to work towards the harmony she wants to push for in her community.

*“I attribute my good start in serving the community to the support by my colleagues in the women’s protection team and the trainings given to the group by NP. It is empowering me to take up my role with few challenges”*

When NP and Victoria discussed what she would like to focus on in her position as Head Chief, Victoria noted that she will pay attention to community issues, including general protection. She further aims to address the concerns of women and girls specifically and is determined to find ways for young men and women to find psychological support to manage inter-generational trauma. Victoria also hopes to change her community’s perception of female leaders, a perception that may already be changing evidenced by her election as Head Chief.

NP will continue to support the WPTs in Yambio to strengthen

the capacity of women, their knowledge of ceasefire monitoring, and their participation in peacebuilding and decision-making within their communities.

## PROTECTION IN EMERGENCIES

### IMPROVING THE SAFETY AND SECURITY OF CHILDREN THROUGH HUMANITARIAN COORDINATION AND RESPONSE

RAJA COUNTY, WESTERN BAR EL GHAZEL STATE|MAY|2021



*Photo: members of the Women Protection Team and Youth Protection Team attending sensitization on mental health by ALIMA in Raja*

Located in the north-western corner of South Sudan in Western Bahr el-Ghazal State, Raja county shares a long international border with the Central African Republic to the West, and Sudan to the north. The County has been impacted by both cross-border and local level violence, and these in turn triggered displacement from the northern parts of the county to Raja Town on various occasions. The situation is made worse by the economic hardship of the area.

In such environment, children have increased vulnerability to child protection concern. For instance, children who interacted with NP's Raja Team often had bruises over their bodies an indication of child abuse and many complained of being beaten by their parents or guardians, with some even suffering from burning and starvations as a form of punishment

Many children also came from nearby villages to Raja Town, pushed away from home by the lack of food and harsh treatment and drawn to the town by the employment opportunities there. Many ended up working or begging in the markets.

Since mid-2020, NP has been conducting Child Safe Space (CSS) sessions with children from four locations in Raja County: Raja Town, Khorshamam, Boro Medina and Diem Zubeir. Children were given a chance to play games like cards, volleyball and learn important life lessons such as how to maintain their personal hygiene. A visible effect of these sessions is that children became more confident: they are given a space where they are free to be themselves, play with each other and make friends.

The CSS also proved to be a good opportunity for NP to observe the child protection concerns in Raja county. For instance, NP learned about the extent and severity of the physical punishment at home after children started to open up about what they faced at home. As a protection organisation, NP took these reports seriously and met with local chiefs to gain greater insight into the contributing factors of child abuse in the community. During the meetings, the chiefs confirmed that child abuse is rampant, something that they attributed to lack of knowledge of what constitutes child abuse, negative coping mechanisms to economic hardship, and alcoholism.

Recognizing that reducing the prevalence of child abuse requires mental health interventions, NP approached its consortium partner, ALIMA, who has a mental health clinic in Raja Town. It was eventually decided that NP and ALIMA would raise awareness to increase the community's knowledge of available mental health services such as counselling and stress management. NP also conducted awareness raising to community members and community protection teams that it established (Women Protection Teams and Youth Protection Teams especially); the sessions focused on child protection and child rights with the expectation the participants would sensitize their own communities.

Thanks to these sensitisation efforts, communities became more aware of child protection and children's rights. While child abuse still occurs, community members have become more active in monitoring and reporting such cases to the local chiefs and authorities. According to community reports, parents became more accountable in their behaviours as they know the community is watching their actions and would report them in case there are maltreatments.

In one particular incident, community members reported a case where a child was burnt by his mother herself suffering from mental health issues as a punishment. Upon hearing this, the local chief referred the woman to ALIMA's mental health service. The chief also used the opportunity to sensitise the community of the importance of using ALIMA's services and to continue monitoring child abuse cases in the neighbourhood.

Going forward, NP will continue working with ALIMA and the community protection teams to disseminate information regarding the availability of mental health services as well as child protection and child rights. This has enabled the community protection teams to take a leading role in ending child abuse in Raja County.

## INCREASING COORDINATION FOR IMPROVED HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IN TONJ SOUTH

WARRAP STATE|JUNE|2021

Protection mainstreaming is critical for ensuring that humanitarian programming is conducted through a protection and conflict sensitive lens as well as that it incorporates the needs of the most vulnerable members of the community. When non-protection partners are trained on protection mainstreaming, their programming is enhanced and can better respond to the needs of all community members. As a leading protection partner in South Sudan, Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) has been training partners from all sectors in protection mainstreaming throughout the country.

In March 2021, NP's Mobile Protection Response Team (MPRT), funded by South Sudan Humanitarian Fund (SSHF), travelled to Tonj South to conduct a protection assessment and provide immediate response to identified protection concerns. After NP observed that there were no static protection partners in the area, NP decided to conduct a protection mainstreaming for non-protection partners operating from Tonj Town to ensure centrality of protection in their activities.

On March 30th, 2021, NP held a protection mainstreaming training for 12 participants (nine male and three female) from four partner organizations, including World Vision, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), Comitato Collaborazione Medica (CCM) and The Organization for Children's Harmony (TOCH).

During the training, NP identified two partners providing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Case Management however, there was no coordination between the partners and there was no unified referral pathway. Each partner had its own internal referral pathway that would guide their organization in responding to GBV cases. This situation sometimes caused delays in providing effective GBV response to survivors.

It could be due to lack of transport to send a survivor to Wau or not knowing that a survivor could receive services in Tonj South

As a result of these findings, NP decided it was imperative to adapt its programming to respond to the lack of coordination between these GBV partners. As such, the rest of the training provided a forum for all partners to introduce their services so that partners knew what services existed in the area and duplication and gaps could be reduced. For example, during this session, it was mentioned that the health partner in Tonj Town, Tonj South had the capacity to treat GBV survivors, thereby reducing or eliminating the need for other partners to refer survivors to Wau.

This situation indicates the importance of protection partners to ensure the protection of civilians even in the programming of non-protection partners.

Often times, even with the best intentions of all parties, the protection of civilians can be enhanced and coordination can be improved, thereby leading to improved access to services by the community.

Though NP's MPRT was only in Tonj South for a short period, it is likely that the protection programming it implemented in the area will have positive long-term and multi-sectoral impacts. NP hopes to return to Tonj South in the future and follow up on the development and dissemination of the GBV referral pathway as well as support the establishment and strengthening of referral pathways in other areas of its operation.