

South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project 3rd Quarter Summary Report 2014

Brief Summary

Thanks to the efforts of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCOSS) staff, regional liaison Rev. Michael Weller, mission co-worker Leisa Wagstaff, and supporters in the United States, the South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding project has:

- Laid the groundwork for the educational envisioning process and the strategic plan;
- Trained teachers in Juba and Gambella; and
- Trained teachers through the YEI Teacher Training College, which is now a three year in-service training plan.

The PC(USA) South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project, while facing many challenges, is bringing educational resources, accompaniment, and hope into a dire situation. Through this work, teachers are addressing issues of trauma and gaining new skills to provide educational opportunities for students in their current contexts. While working in the present, administrators, teachers and students are also building a foundation for a better future in which formal education opens new doors for the development and healing of a young nation.

Brief Context Update:

South Sudan is deeply wounded and still faces serious challenges. Where major trauma exists, Christ calls us to be there bearing witness to the gospel's love, peace, and hope. Our church's commitment to South Sudan demonstrates our faithfulness to our call, our South Sudanese partners, and the people of South Sudan.

The national peace talks and the battles between government and anti-government forces are ongoing. As a result of the ethnic, political and resource-based conflict which began in December of last year (2013), an estimated 1.8 million people are displaced from their homes; many living in internally displaced or refugee camps. The weapons of war have already claimed tens of thousands of lives, and severe food insecurity threatens an estimated 3.5 million South Sudanese.

The denomination hit hardest by the violent conflict in South Sudan has been the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCOSS). The majority of the PCOSS mission and membership is centered in the Upper Nile, Unity and Jonglei States where the fighting, damage and devastation is greatest. PCOSS headquarters, located in Malakal, was completely looted, with many of its documents and records lost and some of its structures burned down. The negative impact on educational opportunities is astounding. Insecurity and destruction have resulted in the closure of 19 of the 22 PCOSS primary and all of its secondary schools. Nevertheless, the PCOSS remains committed to its education mission and hopeful that more promising days are ahead. Its leaders continue to ask for the help of the PC(USA).

As of August 15, 2014, an estimated 189,327 South Sudanese asylum seekers have arrived in the Gambella Region of Ethiopia. Many of these refugees are members of the PCOSS, and 90 to 95 percent of the new arrivals are women and children; almost 70 percent of these being children. The children are now without schools.

“As I continue to be reconnected with PCOSS church leaders and members, I believe that in spite of what each has gone through individually and as a people; there is hope for the future and a strong abiding faith in God by believers.” – Leisa Wagstaff

Activity Update: *(The following activities are complete as of the end of the 3rd quarter of 2014)*

1. Capacity Building with PCOSS Education Department

- Mission co-worker Leisa Wagstaff began laying the groundwork with the PCOSS Education Director for organizing an envisioning process, developing a strategic plan, and building internal skills for proposal writing. (August 2014)
- The initial set up of procedures for record keeping and supervision of PCOSS schools and the use of software for storage and management of information began in the 2nd Quarter.
- Efforts made to liaise with other non-governmental organizations (NGO)’s and the NGO Education Cluster to learn from members’ expertise, tap into resources and put the concerns of church-supported education in the larger dialogue.

2. Teacher Training Workshops in Juba and Gambella, Ethiopia (September 2014)

- Purpose of the training: “to train PCOSS school personnel in areas of the teaching/learning process, developing school leadership at all levels, empowering educational communities, and helping traumatized children.”
- The training covered a variety of topics including: methodology, lesson planning, classroom and school management, documentation and recordkeeping, roles of the head and class teacher, empowering the Parent-Teacher Council, and trauma healing.
- Participants included head, lead and class teachers currently residing in Juba, Malakal, Bor, Khartoum, Kenya, Gambella and Jabal Thiajak. In Juba, 25 school personnel attended the training. In Gambella, 33 head and class teachers and 4 representatives of the Presbyterian Church in Gambella and the Mekane Yesus Church attended the training. Each training lasted 4 days.
- The time in Gambella also allowed for meetings with different representatives of the PCOSS departments, setting up assessment strategies and individual counselling (trauma healing).
- The workshops were carried out in collaboration with Mission 21.

“The back area of the church in which the training took place was transformed into a conducive environment for teaching and learning with charts, pictures, three-dimensional teaching aids, conversational seating arrangements, the participants’ work on the walls, etc. Participants, observers and visitors expressed their awe at the way in which the training had been set-up.”

Leisa Wagstaff, Gambella, Ethiopia

3. Teacher Training through Yei Teacher Training College (YTTC) in-service training:

- The Education Project is currently supporting 3 students and Hudson Memorial PC is supporting 2 students for the August/September 4-week session (the in-service training consists of 9 months of training carried out during school holidays over a 3 year period).
- The plan to support ten candidates at YTTC was not possible at this time, as the uncertainty of the political situation caused the other 7 qualified candidates to decline the opportunity, so that they could stay with their families.

- Plans also shifted from supporting the 2 year YTTC program to the 3 year in-service training. The change allows teachers to provide their families with the much-needed income earned from teaching while attaining supplemental training during the holidays. The current situation in South Sudan weakened economic support systems, and the adjustment in the training schedule seeks to address that concern, while recognizing the change acquires an additional cost. The new schedule also benefits female teachers who face greater challenges in leaving home for longer periods of time.

Results of Activities:

- As a result of the YTTC training, the PCOSS Education Department will have well-trained teachers to serve its schools when they are reopened upon the return of the population in the areas affected.
- The training in Gambella reached teachers who have no other avenue for training due to their status as refugees. Consequently, the PCOSS educational system now has a group of trained teachers and leaders to impact the quality of education of the 14,000 students seeking refuge in Ethiopia while increasing educational opportunities for girls when peace returns in South Sudan.
- Due to the teacher training workshops in both Juba and Gambella, school personnel are encouraged and prepared to carry out education in spite of their difficult setting. They know of the need to incorporate alternative educational systems (AES), and they are equipped to implement education in emergency educational programs as well as attend to the special needs of traumatized children.
- During the trainings, head teachers, teachers, administrators and the larger community were provided with safe space to share about their experiences and concerns in the present socio-economic and political setting. They learned more about the importance of the grieving process and also the ways to move towards healing. This opportunity helped participants with their own personal healing, and as a result, better prepares them to create a healing environment for students.
- Teachers began to rebuild their resources as the training handouts were placed in a binder for each participant to use as a reference.

“Participants expressed their appreciation for the opportunity to be trained and the financial and moral support from partner churches.”

Leisa Wagstaff

Challenges:

- Currently, the assessments needed to be more successful in the implementation of the South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project have not been completed for several reasons: the insecurity of travel to certain areas, the displacement of communities, and the difficulty of collecting records and contact information.
- The shortage of trained teachers in South Sudan continues to increase due to the current unrest and diseases resulting from poor living conditions for internally displaced persons. Some teachers have already sought refugee status in other countries and do not plan to return to South Sudan.
- The implementation of the peacebuilding component of the project has been limited due to a lack of personnel on the ground. Mission co-workers working with RECONCILE International are scheduled to be back in South Sudan in the first week of November.

Financial Update:

Gifts: \$357,420*

**This figure does not include the mission co-worker support for this project. It relates only to the project portion*

Funds Disbursed:

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- Scholarship grant to Yei Teacher Training College \$6,075

***This figure does not include support provided by Louisville-based Presbyterian Mission Agency staff.*

Personnel Update

- Michael Weller and Leisa Wagstaff, with the support of PCOSS partners, have done an amazing job of navigating the many challenges and changes taking place in South Sudan at this time. Leisa is working to build the capacity of the PCOSS Education Department, and she served as the main facilitator of the teacher training workshops in Juba and Gambella.
- Lynn and Sharon Kandel as well as the Reverends Shelvis and Nancy Smith-Mather plan to return to South Sudan in the fourth quarter of the year (2014) to join in with the logistical and peacebuilding components of the South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project.