

**South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project (SSEPP)  
4th Quarter 2015 Summary Report**

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**I. Brief South Sudan Context Update:**

You may have heard of the great courage and faith of the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan who guarded the gate. His testimony reached the US and reminded us that God still works, even in the midst of a fresh Civil War.

“When the crisis happened,” Moderator Peter Gai Lual recounts, “the two warring parties exchanged the town (of Malakal) more than four times...people fled from their homes, and they came to the church compound in great numbers. Four thousand, seven hundred in one compound and two thousand, three hundred in another compound. At day time, I was always at the gate. I was at the gate because in my compound, those who came in are not in one tribe. People outside (the gate) said ‘you have enemies in the compound.’ But I said, “In this compound there are no enemies. They are good people, and I am their brother. I am responsible for them.” He refused to let anyone enter with a gun, and that is how the Moderator saved lives.

In November, I sat with the Moderator at the PCOSS headquarters which, after being displaced from Malakal, relocated to Juba. I asked him why education is so important to the PCOSS. He responded: “The answer is simple, because there was a good example. During the time of the missionaries, wherever they go, first, they build for themselves where they can sleep. Second, they build the church. Third, they build the school and the hospital. The school and the hospital are for the local community to benefit from there.”



*Akatgol Presbyterian Church- Juba, South Sudan*



*Students entering new school building*

He continued, “the church schools (in South Sudan) are the most successful schools, because they are led by spiritual people who value the life and the well-being of the people.” In his response, I heard an echo of the sentiment: because “I am their brother.”

During my visit to Juba, I also sat with an elder of the Akatgol Presbyterian Church. Her church started a school in

response to the migration of many displaced and orphaned

children into their community. She shared the purpose of the school: “Our vision is to raise (up) anyone who is very poor financially, not only us, even different tribes bring their children here. If there is no money, and they say ‘help me,’ because we are the body of the church, we say ‘no problem.’ We are not just giving a chance to our children alone, we are giving a chance to anybody, any tribe, who has no power to pay.”

In her story, she seemed to be saying, alongside her church: “because I am their sister.”

For many reasons, this quarter has been difficult for the people of South Sudan. Implementation of the peace agreement remains slow. Multiple times the nation waited for the opposition leadership to return to the capital, yet deadlines passed, disappointment and fear followed. The country recently changed from 10 states to 28, which caused increased political tension. The currency was devalued by 85% this quarter, resulting in higher prices in the market. Food and basic necessities became more difficult for most people to attain. As in previous quarters, insecurity captured roads; anger and revenge captured lives.

And... the life of a faithful church remains present. An unwavering voice promises, “I am your brother. I am your sister. I am responsible for your life,” and it cannot be quieted.

## **II. EDUCATION Update:**

### 1. Capacity Building with PCOSS Education Department:

- The PCOSS Education Director, Rev. Nyang, finished his general course work at CORAT and is now focused on his research. In addition to learning from the courses’ curriculum, Rev. Nyang also gleaned from the experiences of other education directors in the region.

### 2. Teacher Training through Yei Teacher Training College (YTTC):

- Eight of the nine students who enrolled in the in-service and pre-service programs completed their school year. One of the in-service students was unable to continue his studies during the

third term due to the serious illness of his spouse who had to be airlifted to Khartoum for treatment. Please pray for her healing.

- One student excelled academically and was listed among the top ten students. Five students have been elected by their YTTC peers as leaders within the Student Guild or community.
- Recruitment of additional teachers for the 2016 YTTC year is in progress. Announcements disseminated via the different church outlets: Executive Meeting, presbytery gatherings, congregations, postings on office notice board, Women Work Department events, emails to key persons, etc. Sixty sets of PCOSS and YTTC applications were distributed at all levels of the church. Current students also advertised. Emphasis was placed on the recruitment of women.
- For the first time since their studies began, the in-service and pre-service students were able to meet together and share experiences, tips for success at the school, how to deal with social and family pressure, ways that the Education Department/SSEPP can assist them in their studies, words of encouragement, and prayers for each other. Students were appreciated for their hard work and thanked for their contributions in helping to guide the future work of the project.
- The four Pochalla-based students flew home on December 23, 2015 after an unexpected delay. *“The 4 students that were delayed getting home by 2 weeks were very gracious to us as we struggled to get them home. Every time I talked with them they told me that “God is in control” and “God knows their needs”. This is not to say that they were not frustrated but rather that they were leaning on their faith during a difficult time.” —Sharon Kandel*



### 3. Mobile Teacher Training:

- Representatives from PCOSS, Across and PC(USA) met in November to discuss the roles of each organization in the collaborative effort to facilitate teacher training in Pochalla and Pibor. The job description was finalized for Education Officers who will mentor the teachers. This training targets individuals who are committed teachers yet do not meet the qualifications of YTTC.
- The position was advertised in Juba and Pochalla and applications for the Pochalla Education Officer have been received, reviewed and ranked. The search for a Pibor Education officer is also in progress.

### III. PEACEBUILDING Update

#### 4. RECONCILE Peace Institute:

- Eight months ago RECONCILE was asked to join 4 other local institutions (including Yei Teacher Training College) to help launch Yei Centenary University. RECONCILE would provide the University's expertise in peacebuilding and development. In December, RECONCILE staff took part in a strategic planning process, and the goal is to open the University in 2019.
- Recruitment of applicants for the 2016 RECONCILE Peace Institute took place through the efforts of RECONCILE staff, RPI alumni and Partners.
- A selection committee formed and chose the participants. Approximately 30 scholarships have been secured for this year's class.
- RPI 2016 is scheduled to begin the first week of February and run to the 30<sup>th</sup> of April.

#### 5. Women's Dormitory and Security Fence:

- Continuing work to finish the rooms included: plastering walls, fixing windows and door frames, wiring, plumbing, and painting.
- The bars on the security fence are in place and being fixed.
- *"We are creating a space for the children of the women participants to play near the block while their mothers are in class."*—  
*Dele Seme*

### IV. Testimonies of Impact

- YTTC Teachers: "Being here in school, we are learning different things, teaching methodology, how to handle children, how to bring children love. I want to be a teacher to serve my community. Our community needs citizens, young people like us to go to school and then we will go to help transform. To transform, the community needs teachers like us now," said Alimo Olango Cham. He continued, "It is a priority of the Presbyterian Church of South Sudan to take school to our community, so that our community will change. It will change through education; peace will come to the community through education."
- Matters of peace were also on Omot Ochalla's mind as he prepared to return home after completing his first year at YTTC. He contemplated, "What shall we do to keep those young men and women back home busy and forget about what had happened between them?" He then explained the internal fighting which took place in Pochalla while the teachers were in Yei. "The clashes tore apart our relationship in the county."



Implementing some of his training at YTTC, he decided to take soccer and volleyballs back to Pochalla to start healing and reconciliation through play. He lamented the fact that there have not been positive activities for children in Pochalla, yet early and forced marriages of young girls and drinking alcohol and idleness of young men is widespread. He hopes that by offering sports, *“little by little, during that one month of my vacation in Pochalla, it will have some slight changes among themselves as young ones. Then it may continue to expand to the elderly people.”*

Please pray that the four student teachers who returned to Pochalla for their school break will help their community heal from the trauma of violent conflict.



*Elder Mary Gai leads in Akatgol Pres. Church and joined the school*

- Akatgol Presbyterian School: While meeting with the church Elders to discuss their school, one grandmother, Mary Gai, shared that she joined the school herself. She began at Primary level 2 and is now in P6. She doesn't want to rely on others to read, write and translate for her anymore. She also desires to read the Bible in English so that she can share it with other tribes, not just those who speak her mother tongue. *“I thought that I must study, even though my age is very old, I have to study for myself,”* she

said. She went on to say: *“we have to give a chance for our children to study and to grow in knowledge, so that they will help our society.”* I think Elder Mary would be proud of the responses the children gave when asked what they want to be when they finish school: *“I want to be a pilot so I can help my parents,” “I want to be a doctor to cure people,” “School is very important to help people.”* At very young ages, the students grasp the importance of their education for their families and community.

- The church members, children, and community are deeply encouraged by the addition of the two cement classrooms. *“People look at the new building, and they are amazed,”* said the head teacher, *“But I tell them, with God, nothing is impossible.”*
- RECONCILE's Women's Dormitory: *“We are receiving a lot of encouraging comments from our visitors in the center regarding the Women's Village as the first of its kind,”* Dele Seme, Training Center Manager.

## V. Challenges

- Due to the PCOSS' historical work and main ministerial focus in the Upper Nile, Unity and Jonglei States, it has few contacts and low leverage in accessing other NGO, government and FBO resources located in the Central Equatoria region. This makes it necessary to depend upon the

good will of other organizations as well as much effort, finance, and time to carry out seemingly simple activities such as getting flight bookings to isolated areas of the country, accessing materials and supplies, etc.

- The PCOSS Church leadership, including the Education Director, does not fully understand the intricacies of the project. It was only after Rev. Peter Gai Lual’s visit to the USA and participation in the Sudan Mission Network that he was able to make the statement, “I finally understand the project.” This comes after several visits to South Sudan by the PC(USA) Louisville staff and companions, meetings whereby discussions centered on the SSEPP, etc. This has delayed the implementation of several aspects of the project such as strategic planning for the development of schools, networking with the MoEST, FBOs and NGOs, etc.
- Due to a medical leave, Leisa was not present to encourage the work of the PCOSS Education Department during the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter. However, efforts were made to assist the Education Director with tasks he was focusing on such as the implementation of a workshop sponsored by Mission 21 and the writing of proposals to be submitted to Mission 21 and the Church of Scotland.
- The 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter was a frustrating one when the danger of driving on the Juba/Yei road became too great, and we had to find a way to fly the Teacher Training students from Yei to Juba. Because of problems with the banking system, getting money for the flights brought to a halt everything we were doing. It is amazing how something like this in the States could be taken care of with a phone call and a few emails. Here, it was days of phone calls, emails, and trips to the Mission Aviation Fellowship office in Juba. In the end, we got it done and were able to get the students on a flight to Juba, so all was good!
- *“The current economic situation in the country and insecurity on the roads affected the schedule of the work on the Women’s Dormitory due to lack of construction materials and increase in prices in the markets” – Dele Seme, Training Center Manager*



Mission co-worker Leisa Wagstaff, back in Juba after ankle surgery

## VI. Financial Update

In 2015, \$353,928 was disbursed to global partners and \$107,658 was raised for Mission Co-Worker sending and support, praise the Lord! In 2016, we hope to raise more funds to support our partners as they implement the project; they have demonstrated the capacity to do even more to meet the pressing needs if additional support is provided.

We are pleased to report that funding for the South Sudan Education & Peacebuilding Project has grown from 2014, its first year, to 2015.

	2014	2015
Total number of donors	18	40
presbyteries	1	2
congregations	10	15
individuals	7	23

Thank you to all donors, and please help us grow more in the coming year, both through your own gifts, and through your advocacy with your neighbors! For information on how to give, please contact Nicole Gerkins at [nicole.gerkins@pcusa.org](mailto:nicole.gerkins@pcusa.org) or by phone at 800-728-7228, x 5611.



*Women in an internally displaced camp in Juba cooking the potatoes Leisa peeled for Christmas*

## **VII. Mission Co-Workers' Updates** (*Mission Co-Workers were asked to share prayer request with you...*)

**Leisa Wagstaff:** "I returned to South Sudan in early December, after five months of recovery from a bi-malleolar ankle fracture. Many tears were shed as I said goodbye to one family and hello to another – my South Sudanese colleagues and neighbors. Sincere thanks to all of the PC(USA) family for their support during my time in the USA and the many ways that you are continuing to support me in my journey towards healing and our shared ministry here. It has not been easy and continues to be a challenge as I navigate the uneven and rocky dirt paths. The farther I venture out, however, the stronger my ankle becomes and the higher my confidence level in walking grows."

### Leisa's Praises:

- Thankfulness for the opportunity to share Christmas and New Year's Day worship and celebrations with the residents of the Internally Displaced Camp congregation in Kolokonyo. I am humbled in that these IDP community members have really opened their hearts to me and are willing to share their lives with me.
- Safety and good health for the PCUSA mission personnel in South Sudan and leaders of the PCOSS.



*Peeling potatoes for the Christmas celebration*

- The transforming change in knowledge, humbleness and dedication to serving the community and sound spiritual growth of the inaugural batch of the SSEPP’s scholarship recipients to Yei Teacher Training College (YTTC).”

Leisa’s Prayer Requests:

- A true ceasefire in all parts of the country, especially in Malakal where people once again saw fighting on Christmas Eve.
- School children will be able to complete a full year of study wherever they currently find themselves.
- Success of the SSEPP’s first four-week mobile teacher training program which will be held in a remote area of the country. May God grant me the wisdom, stamina, patience and language to train these teachers, most of whom have never had opportunities to finish secondary school.
- Communities will move beyond their trauma to the rebuilding of families, schools and churches.



*At work in Juba apartment*

**Lynn and Sharon Kandel:** We continue to work with the people of Pochalla in hopes of starting construction in February. This is a challenging place as it is so remote but is a quiet village along the river and a nice place to visit.

Lessons learned this quarter:

- Plan ahead by a month at least.
- Get money out of the bank as often as you can.
- Pray.
- Maintain a sense of humor.

Lynn and Sharon Prayer Requests:

- Pray for wisdom to know how to Handle the changing currency exchange rates.
- Praise for getting to know the YTTC students better and for their attitude during difficult times.



*Enjoying “Grandma time”*





Nancy with Akatgol Pres students

**Shelvis and Nancy Smith-Mather:** We were so grateful for another Christmas in Yei. The churches in our town are filled with joy and praise when celebrating Christ's birth; it inspires and challenges us. We also give thanks for a good trip to Juba this quarter, which felt like a logistical nightmare with small children, but God provided and gave much grace along the way, including finding a playground and receiving an unexpected invitation to a birthday party!

The past few months have felt more isolating and overwhelming than usual for our family, with even more limited power, internet and fuel. We continue to develop new strategies to try

and thrive in our calling here. Most recently, this included putting up a tire swing next to our house for some much-needed entertainment.

Please pray for creative ways for us to engage with our neighbors, to develop healthy friendships for our children, and to live out our belief that, with God, all things are possible.



*Thank you for your interest in this ministry which uplifts and equips people in South Sudan, for the glory of God! Please keep this project in your prayers and also share it with others! Thank you!*