

**South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding Project (SSEPP)
1st Quarter 2015 Summary Report**

Brief South Sudan Context Update:

The deadline set for March 5th passed without a peace agreement between opposing political leaders. The Executive Director of RECONCILE International returned from the South Sudan peace talks held in Addis Ababa and gave a summary to students of the reasons the two sides could not agree. The RECONCILE Peace Institute (RPI) students listened to his report, then they left the room to attend their courses on Community-Based Trauma Healing, Conflict Transformation and Peace Studies.

While the disappointment was great and real, RPI students remain focused on what they can do to bring peace. The students feel they can start the work of reconciliation with their families first, then their communities. “That gives them hope that peace can spread,” said one RPI instructor, who was amazed and inspired by the spirit of her students.

On March 18th, the President of South Sudan addressed heavy-hearted citizens in a large amphitheater in Juba. He gave his perspective on the failed peace process. On that same day, RPI students observed court proceedings and spoke with an experienced judge in Yei. The students are studying issues of justice and exploring healthy ways to restore convicted individuals back to their communities. After visiting local courts on three levels, they returned to class eager to debrief.

Even though there seem to be many reasons to give up on hope, there are South Sudanese who will not give up on peace. Rev. Zacharia Wani, a national leader for the South Sudan Presbyterian Evangelical Church, is one example of an individual willing to put himself at risk to create change. He admits that he was nervous when he arrived at the RECONCILE Peace Institute because of the various ethnic groups present. “The first week, everyone kept to themselves a bit,” he explained, “but by the second week people began to chat a bit. Now we are getting along well, with good chemistry.” He went on to say,

(Below) Reconcile Peace Institute Participants praying together after sharing personal stories of trauma, February 2015



“people do not think certain tribes can be together, but they are here at RPI, living in the dormitory together, eating meals together. As long as this Peace Institute exists, there is hope for peace in this country.”

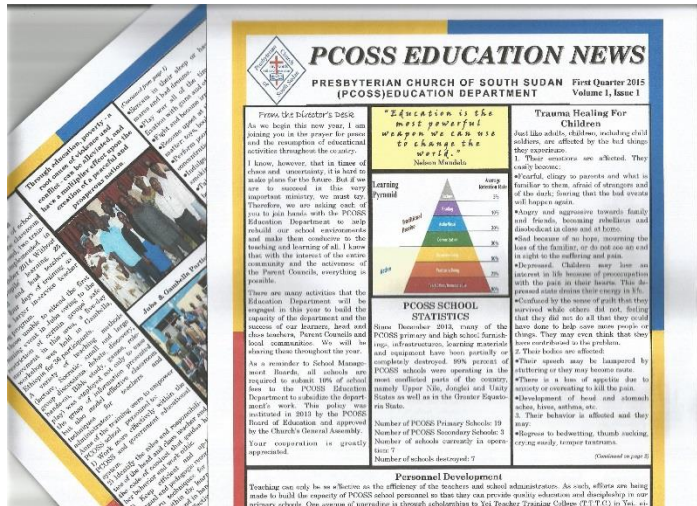
May God continue to bring down walls of mistrust and build up strong relationships among the diverse groups in South Sudan and in the US.

Activity Update: (The following activities are complete as of the end of the 1st quarter of 2015)

1. Capacity Building with Presbyterian Church of South Sudan (PCOSS) Education Department:

- Education Department personnel and 2015 Yei Teacher Training College (YTTC) scholarship recipients participated in the South Sudan Youth Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) Conference. The conference equipped participants with skills to access educational resources online. “There is a wealth of information available,” explains mission co-worker Leisa Wagstaff, “we need to put the technology in the hands of our schools.”
- Four 2015 (YTTC) scholarship recipients participated in the PLAN International/UNICEF Play for Peace five-day training. Playing helps children express themselves and heal from the trauma of war and abuse. Participants were equipped to help children move beyond experiencing low-self-esteem and stereotyping to being able to accomplish a common goal, and to do so while laughing.
- The PCOSS Education Director attended a two-day trauma healing training course facilitated by Presbyterian Relief and Disaster Assistance (PRDA) and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA), and the Director and Education Facilitator received training in encouraging literacy through “Big Books,” a ministry of Trinity Presbytery in South Carolina.

- The first edition of the “PCOSS Education News” was published and distributed to constituent schools. The newsletter is a quarterly endeavor to challenge, inspire, inform, connect and educate school administrators, teachers, parent councils and other stakeholders. Featured prominently on the front of the first newsletter is a quote from Nelson Mandela: “Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world.”



The first edition of the PCOSS Education News.

2. Teacher Training through Yei Teacher Training College:

- The inaugural batch of three in-service scholarship recipients continued their studies at YTTC and successfully completed two accelerated sessions at the beginning of the year. They will begin their second year of studies during the next primary school holiday.
- After advertising the teacher training opportunity in each PCOSS presbytery and school, six applicants began the two-year pre-service training at YTTC. The congregations who endorsed these individuals have committed to hold them continually in prayer. One PCOSS student teacher, Michael Christopher Gilo, attending the training explained, “My family supports my

decision to study. Yes, it is a sacrifice, but I'm building a future for myself, my family and my community." Please join the churches in South Sudan who are praying for these teachers.

(Photo below): Six new applicants begin pre-service training at YTTC.



3. School Assessments, Community Mobilization and School Construction:

- An assessment of all PCOSS schools completed this quarter found most schools closed due to the displacement of people. A few schools near the border with Sudan, four schools in Central Equatoria State and one in Jonglei State are currently operating.
- A Parent/Student handbook was designed by PCOSS and includes topics such as the school's mission, student health and safety, dress codes, school fees and the key role of parents in the teaching and learning process. The handbook stresses that violence and discrimination are not tolerated at school.
- A template of by-laws was created which can be adapted for use in each school's unique setting. The by-laws cover a variety of subjects, including the mission and vision of the school, functions of the school board, election of board members, and the processing of grievances.
- The local church continues to mobilize the community in Pochalla for greater educational development. Working hand in hand with their local government educational authorities, six meetings were held this quarter. A twelve-member School Management Board was elected, including seven men and five women. The members received initial training and reviewed both the by-laws and Parent/Student Handbook. After a few adjustments, the by-laws were adopted.

- The site for the new school in Pochalla was cleared to prepare for classroom construction.
- Mission co-worker Lynn Kandel is working on a basic construction plan for a school building that can easily be modified for local needs.



Above: Clearing the site for the new school in Pochalla.

4. Peacebuilding Activities

- The RECONCILE Peace Institute trains faith and community leaders from across South Sudan providing certification in either *Community-Based Trauma Healing* or *Conflict Transformation and Peace Studies*. Due to limited housing options on RPI's campus, both male and female leaders have been accommodated in the same dormitory, a situation which is culturally inappropriate. By God's grace, construction of 12 self-contained rooms for women began in February this year!



Above: Preparing the foundation of the women's dorm at RPI.

- Back in 2014, RPI classes were canceled after the outbreak of civil war displaced many of the students from their homes, just weeks before the institute's scheduled start. RPI re-opened in January 2015 with more funding, scholarships and participants than any previous year. In addition, this year's class is the first to include participants from all 10 states as well as

the Nuba Mountains. (Further details on the recipients receiving scholarships through project funding will be included in next quarter's report).



Rooms at RECONCILE at the end of the 1st Quarter.

Results of Activities:

- In addition to gaining knowledge about information technology, the teachers who attended the Information and Communication Technology for Development (ICT4D) Conference felt more confident to begin their two-year course of study at YTTC.

"This training has been great. It is much-needed preparation for our studies at YTTC. I now know that ICT is broader than just using a computer or cell phone." Omot Mam Ochalla

"I feel that I have already begun my studies at YTTC. Thank you, Mama Leisa, for finding this opportunity for us. I was a bit afraid of leaving my small village but now I am feeling more confident and ready to be in an academic setting." Daniel Omot Nyigwo

- At the Play for Peace conference, one teacher began healing from personal trauma. He will now be a healthier individual and a better teacher. Praise the Lord!

"I came from Pochalla a little traumatized because of the experiences that I have gone through during the years of war and most recently, as a member of a marginalized people. These four days have helped me to deal with my trauma. I am playing, laughing and learning... I am thankful to the Church for all that it is doing for me and I will share what I know upon my return to Pochalla." Alimo Ollango Othow and George Ochalla Okach

- Students are experiencing an improved quality of instruction in the classrooms of the three teachers who completed their first year of in-service training at YTTC. The teachers returned to their home schools to continue teaching until the next training during the school holiday.
- Community cohesiveness was strengthened as the PCOSS Education Department encouraged the presbyteries and congregations who sent teachers to YTTC to spiritually, emotionally, and financially support the teachers and their families during their training.
- With the publication of the first issue of the *PCOSS Education News*, PCOSS schools communities have a new channel through which to share and learn from other local schools and from the PCOSS Department of Education.
- Due to the mobilization in Pochalla, people who left school are now returning! *"People are seeing the power of education...During the mobilization in Pochalla for a primary school, six ladies turned out to register for a primary eight class, and three for grade nine,"* said PCOSS Evangelist Othow Okoti. Previously, Primary 8 was not offered in Pochalla, so students moved away to find an alternate school. Consequently, very few girls attended Primary 7 or 8.

- As progress is made on the 12 new rooms at RECONCILE, the staff, the training participants and the Smith-Mather family (who live at RECONCILE) are constantly reminded that God continues to give signs of hope even during difficult seasons. Spirits were uplifted at the building's ground breaking ceremony, when Bishop Hilary Adeba struck the ground saying, "in the name of the Father." He then broke the soil again, adding "and the Son." Finally, he raised the hoe a final time and proclaimed, "And the Holy Spirit Amen."
- RECONCILE Peace Institute students were halfway through their course of study at the end of the first quarter, but they were already sharing stories of impact:

"RECONCILE accepted the call and God is using RECONCILE to create change. I did not know that there was something that I was lacking. But this module has been like a mirror in my life to help me know myself...and I don't think that I will forget what I have received from here."

-Rev. Edna Tumalu, Pastor, Chapter President of Methodist Women, RPI Participant 2015

"I came with the aim of taking the information and transforming my community, but I came and I was transformed. This course brought to light what it means to be at peace with yourself and to extend it to your family members and community. We also learned that challenge will never be absent in our lives and we have been given teachings as to how to deal with the challenges. Challenge is not a stumbling block for peace, whatever happens there is a hope for peace." - Kleda Benjamin, Nuba Mountains Community Leader, RPI Participant 2015



Breaking into smiles at the ground-breaking ceremony.

Challenges:

- For multiple reasons, including revisions of partner budgets and implementation of new financial documentation policies, project funds did not make it to partners this quarter. Consequently, many planned activities were not implemented. Unfortunately, the rainy season started at the end of the quarter, so several activities will need to wait until the end of the year when the dry season makes roads passable and dries the airstrips. "It forces us to be creative," said Leisa Wagstaff, when asked about the delay in funds this quarter. By God's provision, in the midst of many challenges, great things happened this quarter, and the foundation was laid for even greater things.
- Insecurity in the country created challenges for both YTTC and RPI. Some successful applicants did not join the training due to the fear of traveling to and/or living in Yei. The trauma is deep for many who fled the country in fear of their lives, and believe if they return their lives will be

lost. Please pray for healing of horrific memories and that God would cultivate the right spirit for reconciliation.

- For students traveling to training from refugee or internally displaced camps, securing approval to exit the camps requires a long process.
- Completing the YTTC applications was difficult for those who did not have the resources or knowledge of how to attain the necessary documents (school certificates, birth certificates, etc.) which were lost during the political crisis.
- Many factors make it difficult for women to attend YTTC and RPI: fear of leaving families for the required length of time, socio-cultural constraints on married women to make choices regarding their education and future, and the small percentage of women who have attained the basic entry qualifications.
- Poor national infrastructure, outdated equipment, limited cell phone networks, no national postal system, and unpredictable internet access, hinder communication and project implementation in various ways.
- The rapid devaluing of South Sudanese currency and an increase in the price of basic items in the market, make budgeting for activities difficult for partners.



Above: RPI students' drama of the Good Samaritan Story in morning devotions

Financial Update:

There were 22 new gifts to the South Sudan Education and Peacebuilding project this quarter: 11 from individuals, 4 from congregations, and 7 from presbyteries. Those gifts totaled \$40,673.

The main expense this quarter was mission co-worker salaries, and \$2,041.57 reimbursed a few programmatic activities. Much time was spent by partners, mission co-workers and colleagues, revising budgets and laying a solid foundation among partners and within the PCUSA departments. The hard work put in this quarter will strengthen the project this quarter and also in the years ahead. In the second quarter \$223,424.5 is scheduled to reach partners (\$99,984.50 to RECONCILE International, \$64,763 to Across, \$37,677 to PCOSS and \$21,000 to YTTC).

Mission co-worker updates:



Leisa Wagstaff: In addition to her work as Education Facilitator with the PCOSS Education Department, Leisa was certified as a facilitator in children’s trauma healing by the Trauma Healing Institute. With these skills, she assisted in the implementation of trauma healing for 70 children from different communities and Internally Displaced Persons camps in Juba during a five-day program. She also facilitated a recent PCOSS Women’s Work Department leadership development training. In addition to the training, she gave spa treatments to women using readily available vegetables and fruits and encouraged them to refrain from using damaging skin lotions and fade creams to lighten skin color, which have flooded African markets by foreign companies.



Lynn and Sharon Kandel: They have shared the following update on their language learning: “We have found it a challenge since Juba Arabic is a mix of Classical Arabic, low Arabic and many other bits and pieces of other languages thrown in. We thought we were getting a handle on the language until we tried to get a taxi to take us to the church offices which are near the airport. When we said we wanted to go near the airport all we got was a blank look! We found out that many people do not call it "airport", they don't even know that Arabic word! Instead they just call it the place of the airplanes! We can at least buy our groceries and get where we want to go so progress has been made!”



Shelvis and Nancy Smith-Mather: “The presence of the RPI students on our campus this quarter has been a blessing. Throughout the week we are privileged to hear stories of personal transformation as well as radical commitment to peace. Some evenings we hear students of various ethnic groups laughing together late at night, which brings a smile to our faces. Now the many mango trees on the compound provide an after class activity and entertainment as all kinds of efforts are made to reach the delicious, high-hanging fruits. Please continue to pray for our health as Shelvis took his turn with illness this quarter. Please pray for the health of all the students, the mission co-workers

and our partners.”

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!

