



Cattle in Melut, South Sudan. Photo credit: Kieran Doherty/ Oxfam

PREVENTING CATTLE RAIDING VIOLENCE IN SOUTH SUDAN

Local level peace building focusing on young people

The Community Empowerment and Progress Organization, a partner of the Within and Without the State initiative, has been working with young people in cattle raiding camps and supporting local communities to find their own solutions for peace. In the midst of a renewed outbreak of violence just two days before the country's fifth anniversary, supporting local level peace initiatives remains as vital as ever.

CONTEXT

Decades of violent conflict in Sudan formally ended with the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed in 2005, which in 2011 gave birth to South Sudan, the world's newest country. However, conflict broke out again in December 2013 and more than 50,000 people have lost their lives. 2.3 million people have been forced from their homes and are seeking safety in South Sudan, while the number of South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries has risen to over 715,000. In total, 6.1 million people need urgent humanitarian support now – including 200,000 children suffering severe acute malnutrition – and more than 5.3 million risk not having enough to eat in the months ahead unless international aid is dramatically and urgently increased. In July 2016, fighting broke out again in the capital Juba two days before the fifth Independence Day, killing at least 300 people and displacing thousands. While a ceasefire has been signed, the situation remains volatile.

WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE STATE IN SOUTH SUDAN

Within and Without the State (WWS) is a five-year global initiative (2011–2016) funded by the UK Department for International Development's (DFID) Conflict, Humanitarian and Security programme. It has enabled Oxfam to pilot a variety of approaches to working with civil society to promote more accountable governance in conflict-affected and fragile contexts.

PHASE I

In Phase I, WWS deliberately took time to select partners who were appropriate for the programme, while ensuring others not selected were fully informed as to why they were not chosen – the aim being to enable civil society organizations (CSOs) to cooperate on other issues better in the future. This was also in the context of a country where there is relatively little experience of governance and a lack of effective CSOs. WWS deliberately strengthened the five partners chosen who were working on a range of issues, from media to election monitoring to rehabilitation of disabled people. WWS also ran MP/public dialogues and public accountability meetings, enabling people to question their MPs and try to hold them to account for service delivery. WWS in Phase I also sought to engage with the African Union on civil society space and influence legislation which threatened the ability of NGOs to operate.

PHASE II

In Phase I, WWS was very much grounded in the exciting context of a new state. The key themes were transparency and accountability, demonstrated in the slow but thorough selection of partners. This led to identifying space in civil society to engage with the new government structures through direct interactions such as MP dialogues. For Phase II, the whole context changed following the split in the government and the fighting which began in December 2013. While WWS still focused on transparency and accountability, direct interaction with MPs and the government became more challenging. As a result, WWS tried new and creative approaches such as screening community mobilization films, which allow communities to have a space to voice their issues in a non-confrontational way.

The programme currently works with three national NGOs which focus on giving support to local governance and community structures. They raise community awareness through theatre and radio, and work on women's empowerment with small scale cooperatives and support women to raise their voices. WWS has also worked on local level peace mediation, developing an early warning system for cattle raiding.



WWS works in Lakes State and Central Equatoria State, South Sudan (areas highlighted in orange). Source: Oxfam.

CATTLE RAIDING

It is not possible to overstate the importance of cattle in South Sudanese culture. They are seen as the key indicator of a person's wealth and status and are usually given as a bride price to a woman's family in gifts ranging from fewer than ten to several hundred. They are used as the family bank account, particularly relevant now when the South Sudanese pound is devaluing so rapidly. They are also paid out as compensation to settle various community disputes. After years of conflict, small arms are widespread and this has led to many using guns in traditional disputes over cattle.

THE WORK OF CEPO

One of WWS' long-standing partners is the Community Empowerment for Progress Organization (CEPO). CEPO works across South Sudan in a range of initiatives focused around peace and conflict mitigation, human rights, the rule of law, livelihoods, governance and democratic transformation. In Western Lakes State (now one of three areas formerly known as Lakes State), CEPO has been active in bringing peace in Rumbek, the biggest town in the region, and surrounding areas.

Peace and stability dialogues

In 2014, CEPO ran two peace and stability dialogues in Lakes state. This brought around 90 participants drawn from different communities' cattle camps to Rumbek town for face-to-face dialogue. The two sides had not met together for talks for some five years until the CEPO initiative. There was a lot of community consultation before the opposing sides met. CEPO carried out a baseline workshop with participants from all five *payams* (local territorial grouping) of Rumbek county. This involved *payam* administrators, young people and women's leaders so they heard what the community wanted. The participants came up with solutions and focused on the youth from the cattle camps, including implementing an early warning system to alert the authorities.

CEPO chose not to involve senior politicians as they felt they could have tried to make political capital out of the process, but only those directly involved. They also brought in the UN Mission to South Sudan who contributed t-shirts, helped with transport and gave a small grant to each *payam* involved. They also did a mapping of key elders and administrators who would actually contribute to their aims. They took the risk of involving all those involved in actual violence despite the fear that violence could even break out at the meeting. The key was to focus on the negative impacts of violence, so that people's negative attitudes, practices, perceptions and beliefs began to change before they actually got down to dialogue. Another outcome was that after the process the community no longer protected those accused of violence. Once that happened, people even gave themselves up to the police because they knew that without their community's protection they would be in more

danger.

Box 1: Building trust

'When we travelled to the communities we didn't just go for a few hours. We spent nights in the villages – many nights discussing with the communities. We slaughtered goats and sheep, and talked and celebrated, and even cried. We spent nights in the cattle camps, as many as were necessary until we were all exhausted, and then we planned more visits in the same manner, to show that we are committed and get the correct facts, the history, feelings and the truth. We listened and they listened, and in this we built trust and started to understand where we were each coming from. We talked about the collateral damage to the communities, unintentional killings of youth in hands of their own section members, and how it affected people.'

– Peace committee youth leader

Youth peace ambassadors

With the moral authority to decry conflict and the social networks to mobilize support and public action to spread a message of peace and co-existence among the three communities in an effective and sustainable way, youth peace ambassadors engaged in intra- and inter-tribal peacemaking initiatives, campaigns and sensitization among the Rup, Kuei and Pakam communities of Lakes State.

The youth peace ambassadors are groups of youths selected by CEPO from the fighting tribes to champion the peace process at grassroots level; bridge inter-ethnic divides, cattle raids and killings; establish a discourse of understanding (even in the face of bitterness among the tribes); and provide hope and a desire for peace. These are influential young people accepted by their communities and others. They are very familiar with the situation on the ground and know the causes of the conflict, the actors, spoilers and the families most affected by the conflict.

They advised on engagement with family members who had lost relatives in the fighting, sensitization on peace and co-existence in the different cattle camps of Kuei, Rup and Pakam communities. They also facilitated face-to-face dialogue among the leaders of the cattle camps from the different tribes. It was during these three days of dialogue that the youths of Rup community confessed in front of everyone that they were responsible for the killings, cattle raids and ambushes in Rumbek town. They vowed to stop attacks against all of the communities, and expressed gratefulness and appreciation for the concerted peace initiative championed by their own sons and daughters. The Rup communities were also allowed to go back to their previous land/areas from which they had been displaced by the conflict.

Box 2: A fresh start

Matur, 28, is a leader of Mayom *payam* youth who attended the peace and stability dialogues. He said:

'We agreed there was no benefit from the violence and agreed to end it and allow people to move freely between the two areas. We agreed to let the government resolve the issues, pursue those who are guilty and arrange compensation, rather than carrying out violence ourselves. We agreed to pursue forgiveness and to start a new page.

Other peace conferences bring together many people, but this was the first one that actually brought together the young people from the cattle camps who are carrying out the violence on the front line. The hatred from the past is still very high, but these dialogues brought us together.'



Matur, Mayom *payam* youth leader. Photo credit: Richard Chilvers/Oxfam

PEACE DIALOGUE IN RUMBEEK MAY 2015

CEPO, in collaboration with the state advisor for peace and reconciliation, facilitated a dialogue between the warring communities of Rup against the alliance of Kue and Pakam of Rumbek North. The dialogue was strongly supported and attended by the state minister of local government, the acting commissioner of Rumbek North and MPs at state level for both Rumbek Central and North. 71 participants from both parties were in attendance, with 17 of the participants being women and 54 men.

During the dialogue, the government officials were encouraged to take responsibility for not having put into action some of the resolutions passed in the previous peace dialogues among the warring parties. The officials promised to do what they can to avert future problematic situations. The presence of both Kue and their allies the Pakam from Rumbek North sent a strong message of peace to the Rup clan. Hence, discussions during the meeting were open and honest, as testified by one of the Rup community representatives in one of the meeting sessions. Some of the resolutions made during this dialogue were:

- Peace dialogues have been moved to the lowest administrative units of the local government structure, i.e. *payam* and *boma* (local village grouping) levels, to ensure impact at scale.
- Confidence building initiatives were established by selecting respected chiefs from all the fighting clans to participate in a state tour – a trust and confidence building visit to all the conflict-prone areas in Lakes State as well as county headquarters.
- Work was initiated with law enforcement agents on issues such as stopping civilians from carrying arms in public places.
- Mapping all the aggrieved families – those who lost relatives in the revenge killings – to engage with them on healing, reconciliation and forgiveness initiatives.

EXPANDING THE EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

CEPO selected a pilot site for the peace dialogues in Rumbek Centre. They have now been asked by the government to devise an Early Warning System to alert police so they can intervene. They built trust with the young people living in the cattle camps, and devised a system where early signs of trouble could be identified. For example, if young men are collecting water bottles and hanging them around their waists it means they are planning to go on a raid to a distant camp. The youth of the camps now have the knowledge of how they can map potential threats from other youths and then report them to the police. The police then alert the leaders of the *payams* and *bomas* and local peace and justice committees made up of youth, women and elders. The WWS pilot has led to a Saferworld-funded project for many cattle camps.

SUPPORTING PEACE

Radio Talk shows

CEPO conducted a radio talk show on peaceful co-existence among the youths of different clans in the local dialect, Dinka. It was impressive as a number of people called to raise questions and others even made suggestions on how to live peacefully.

Box 3: Promoting peace on the radio

‘All the young men came from town and spoke to the community many times. Because they are from our area, because they are our sons, the community listened, and knew that they had to take it seriously. We were left as leaders to contemplate the future of our communities, of our daughters and sons, and agreed that peace is the only way forward. We had to work on how to accept this, and make it work.’

Dut Maker, Executive chief – Palier Duth (Rup clan)

Traditional reconciliation ceremonies

Once peace has been agreed, the communities involved approach traditional spiritual leaders and usually kill a white bull to signal reconciliation. It is then cut in half and the two reconciled communities walk between the pieces as a symbol of agreement and reconciliation, before sharing a meal together. This is an essential part of the peacebuilding process in the local cultures, as it is through sharing food together that they make a symbolic commitment in front of their communities to come together in friendship.

SIX LESSONS LEARNED

1 PREPARE THE GROUND

It is vital to work with the communities separately before they come together to decide what they need to see to stop the violence and escalation of conflict. During peace dialogues, CEPO found and met with six communities from October to December 2015, speaking to all six groups at once. This was so that one community could not take advantage of another community's willingness to call a halt to the violence. They held pre-sensitization meetings at the actual cattle camps where the young men were based. Peace awareness meetings were held, which helped identify the causes of conflict and what might need to be done to bring peace.

CEPO also found it important to identify the 'spoilers' of the process as well as the influencers at grassroots level. This can be difficult as they can be scattered across very wide areas and have very different agendas.

2 ENGAGE WITH GRASSROOTS LEVEL ACTORS

When working with communities in conflict, it is important to ensure those who are actually involved in the conflict are the most engaged. In this context, it was crucial young people were involved. CEPO found that people themselves came up with the solutions to their situations, and that they just needed to provide a safe space for people to talk to each other. The affected communities around Rumbek had become disillusioned with externally imposed solutions and with politicians who manipulated the situation for their own ends. CEPO found the only lasting solution was to make the community itself responsible for finding and keeping peace.

3 ENGAGE WITH PEOPLE ON AN INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

CEPO found that rather than meeting with groups of people, it was important to work with individuals. Even though this took longer, they found it worked better, as individuals were given the chance to express their views as well as suggest possible ways forward.

Box 4: The importance of flexibility and context

‘We need to keep adjusting our programmes as the context changes, and that is what WWS allowed us to do. If you come and try to implement a project with a fixed mind, a fixed agenda, a fixed programme and a fixed budget, you will not succeed. There will be no impact. We can have all the money and resources, and use them – there is always something to spend money on – but what impact will you have at the end of that project if you do not adjust it to meet the dynamic needs and context? Peace is something that needs flexibility and fluid tactics. Our responsibility is to contribute to the stability of the country. We need to do what we can with what we have, but make sure we are doing it with the right intentions, and in the right way. If what we are doing is not working, then we change it to try and make it work. It is the only way.’



Isaac Majjer Majok Adut, CEPO. Photo credit: Stella Madete/Oxfam

4 PEACE FIRST

As CEPO looked for ways to bring the communities together, they discovered people were prepared to put down their weapons before all the relevant issues were resolved. They found there was sufficient appetite for peace that they could ask parties to stop the violence before lasting solutions had been found.

5 INVOLVE WOMEN

Women are not traditionally involved at grassroots level peace

negotiations in South Sudan, but CEPO found they are crucial players in changing the outlook of society. They can either have a positive or negative influence. For example, it is often the women who compose songs inciting the young men to take revenge or take cattle, but if they are motivated to achieve peace, they can agree as women from different sides of the conflict only to sing songs that call for peace. CEPO promoted this idea by inviting women to the dialogues. They stipulated that women should come, as they found that if they did not call for this, they would not be included. They found that when women personalized the suffering they experienced, it had an emotional impact on the male participants. When they spoke out about gender based violence (GBV) or the loss of husbands or brothers or sons, it broke through the desire for more violence. More generally, women's participation in and support for efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts at local and national levels is increasingly recognized as a key element in ensuring that peace discussions and agreements reflect the concerns of the majority and enjoy broader public legitimacy and support.

6 TIMELY INVOLVEMENT OF POLITICIANS

CEPO found that it is for crucial politicians to be involved, but not in the earlier phases, otherwise they may try to make political capital or side with their own vested interests. It is wise to only get them involved once the communities themselves have come to an understanding. It is important the government supports the brokered agreement, so that CEPO can hand it over to them to supervise. CEPO was also able to work with the commissioner, who even broadcast on the radio to encourage the peace process.

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