



Peace Committees and Promoters in South Sudan

CONTRIBUTION TO PEACE IN BOR SOUTH COUNTY

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This publication is based on qualitative research conducted in March 2025 on the role of Peace Committees and Peace Promoters. The research involved interviews and group discussions with Peace Committees and Peace Promoters, community members, local leaders and government authorities. Full report available on request.



Background

Bor South County in Jonglei State, South Sudan, is characterised by a history of violent conflicts and displacement due to violence and floodings. Since the start of the civil war in 2013 many people have left their villages and have found refuge near Bor town, where security has been more stable. The population has become diverse with people from different payams, clans and ethnic backgrounds inhabiting Bor town and its surroundings. Families and especially the youth are adapting to a new life in town away from their villages as they cannot go back because of the continuing fear of new attacks by neighbouring Murle. This complex situation is a breeding ground for family and community conflicts and coupled with the widespread presence of small arms these often escalate into violence.

ZOA Dorcas is an international humanitarian organisation working in Bor South County since 2012. ZOA Dorcas has been implementing a 5-year project (2020 – 2025) in Bor South County funded by the Pharus foundation. This project aims to contribute to peace and stability through food security & livelihoods, wash and peacebuilding. One of the approaches is the support to Peace Committees and Peace Promoters.

Peace Committees and Peace Promoters

Peace Committees are active in 3 payams (Anyidi, Makuach, Kolnyang) while Peace Promoters work in the different bomas in these payams. Peace Committee members and Peace Promoters are proposed by the local leaders and come from different categories (chiefs, church leaders, women and youth leaders, elders, and people with a disability, representing the different bomas and clans). They should be respected members of the community, be living in the community, be neutral and not engage in violent conflict.

The Peace Committees have 17 – 20 members depending on the number of bomas in the payam. The total number of Peace Promoters in the 3 payams is 200. The Peace Committees are active in conflict resolution, conflict prevention and peacebuilding at payam level where Peace Promoters do similar work at boma level for minor cases. They existed already before the project started and all work on a voluntary basis. ZOA Dorcas has revitalised them and provided training and coaching.



Conflict mediation

The Peace Committees (PC) and Peace Promoters (PP) have been addressing several types of conflicts.

Family conflicts: conflicts between the spouses and between family members.

Conflicts around boreholes: disputes between children and women related to scarcity of water, when boreholes are broken down and the number of water users increases with the influx of IDPs.

Land conflicts: disputes about grazing land and farmland, demarcation issues and contested ownership.

Conflicts about fishing grounds: disputes about access to the fishing grounds.

Elopement related conflicts: family retaliation and dowry issues following an illegal marriage without the consent of the parents and without dowry payment.

Youth related violence: conflicts at dancing grounds, when playing games, sometimes associated with alcohol and drug abuse.

Peace Committees and Peace Promoters cannot rely on a government mandate or armed forces to mediate conflict. But they use their existing skills in conflict mediation that were strengthened through the different training sessions. The presence of local chiefs in the Peace Committees increases their authority. Communities believe that their decisions should be followed or respected.

Impact of Peace Committees and Promoters

The Peace Committees and Peace Promoters are not the only actors in conflict resolution; the local chiefs, and the government justice law and order institutions (police, courts) all play an important role. So, what is the added value of the Peace Committees and the Peace Promoters?

Quick action preventing the escalation into widespread violence:

The Peace Committees and Peace Promoters, who are present in the community, act quickly to prevent conflicts from escalating. They intervene when they hear about a conflict while the local chiefs wait till the conflict is reported to them. The chiefs testify that this reduces the time that they have to spend on solving conflicts.

"Before if the chief was absent and conflicts arose this was a problem. But now we can deal with the small conflicts before they can escalate." Peace Committee member in Anyidi



Community trust and legitimacy: They are trusted by both the chiefs and the community; they are seen as neutral and capable. Chiefs are not always seen as neutral as they represent their specific clan while the members of the Peace Committee and Peace Promoters are coming from different bomas and therefore from different clans.

Positive alternative to police and chiefs: The Peace Committees and Peace Promoters

can handle minor conflicts which do not require involving the local (formal or informal) authorities. This saves people time and money as they will not have to pay fines imposed by the chiefs or formal justice providers, or court fees.

Reconciliation: The focus of the Peace Committees and Peace Promoters is on restorative justice which promotes dialogues, forgiveness and restoring the relationships. They discuss with the families after the chiefs, or the police have imposed fines or after court has pronounced the verdict. These measures may lead to bitterness among the involved persons and families. So, dialogue and reconciliation are needed for the families to be able to continue living peacefully together.

"Those who are found guilty had to pay cows which is painful, the elders will come in to curse the wrong doers, and people will be in jail. So, you need reconciliation to be able to continue." Local chiefs in Makuach



Counselling: The Peace Committees counsel conflict parties and their families not to take revenge, but to sit down and talk, and to refrain from violence. Especially Peace Promoters who have a wide presence in the bomas counsel families when there are (potential) conflicts between spouses, parents and children, or family members with in-laws.



Women involvement in conflict resolution

When the Peace Committees and Peace Promoters were reestablished at the start of the project, ZOA Dorcas asked for more women representatives. 17% of the Peace Committee members and 24% of the Peace Promoters are women, so they are still a minority.

The female Peace Promoters and Peace Committee members are now more involved in conflict resolution, in conflicts among women and among children specifically, but also in other conflicts. Women feel more confident to speak in public or to talk to men who are engaged in a conflict. Some women representatives have been women

leaders since many years but their involvement in the Peace Committees helped to increase their voice.

“When there is a conflict involving men I cannot separate them physically, but the men will have respect for me when I intervene.” Female member of the Peace Committee in Kolnyang

“Women are now more involved in conflict resolution which is good. Women had enough of all the conflicts and want them to stop.” Female

Peace Promoter in Kolnyang



“We tell the women and girls: don’t use violence as the conflict will escalate to the whole community. Peace starts within yourself.” Two female Peace Promoters in Anyidi



CASE STUDY ANYIDI PAYAM

Agricultural land conflict

In 2023, a conflict arose between a Nuer man from the Protection of Civilians (PoC) site behind the UNMISS compound and a Dinka man from Anyidi Payam over farmland belonging to Anyidi Payam. This individual dispute escalated into a group conflict between the Nuer community in the PoC site and the Dinka Bor community.

The police were called to intervene, and the chiefs were asked to settle the case. They

invited a Peace Committee member to mediate.

He stated: *“Nuer brothers are our brothers. They are now in our land, but one day we might end up in their land. So we should not create problems over farmland.”* His mediation successfully prevented both groups from becoming violent. The chief divided the land equally between the two parties, and to this day, there have been no further conflicts over this land.

CASE STUDY MAKUACH PAYAM

Youth conflict involving firearms

On 23 March 2024, a conflict erupted among youths in Makuach Payam, Konbeek Boma. Two young men, who were drunk, began fighting, which escalated into a group fighting involving firearms. Four individuals were seriously injured.

Upon hearing the gunfire, members of the Peace Committee, along with the chiefs, quickly coordinated and rushed to the scene of the violence. They alerted the police, who arrived and fired at the youths. However, the youths retaliated, and the police withdraw with the remark: “If you want to kill each other, go ahead.” The youths initially fled but returned when summoned by the Peace Committee,

because they said: *“the Peace Committee are our own people”*.

The Peace Committee persuaded them to lay down their arms, and the police subsequently disarmed them. The injured were transported to the hospital, and the police arrested the ringleaders among the youths. The Peace Committee provided the police with detailed information about the conflict.

At the time of writing this case study narrative, the case has not yet been brought to court, as the injured individuals are still receiving treatment in the hospital.



Peacebuilding training manual

ZOA Dorcas has developed together with the Peace Committees and the Ministry of Peacebuilding a peacebuilding training manual. This manual contains sessions on general conflict mediation skills, and sessions on the specific conflicts that are frequent in Bor South County. The manual is used to train Peace Committees and Peace Promoters.

“ZOA Dorcas trained us about living in peace with your family and neighbours, to live freely without fear, potential locations for conflict like borehole, trees where youth play games, and youth dancing ground.

ZOA Dorcas trained us not to distance ourselves but be close to the people when they have a conflict. We are now tasked by the local authorities to do conflict mediation; we are known in the community also through the training we received from ZOA

Dorcas.” Peace Promoters in Makuach



The **Peacebuilding training manual** is available upon request with ZOA Dorcas

Contribution to peace

The work of the Peace Committees and the Peace Promoters have contributed to more peace in the county. Conflicts have reduced especially around boreholes and elopements. People now inform quickly the parents of the girl and the chief when a girl is brought in the family without proper marriage arrangements. This has prevented the outbreak of violence between the families.

Conflict reduction has also been observed between people from different clans and payams, and between people from different ethnicities in Bor town. **Conflict escalation has been**

prevented by the early intervention of the Peace Committees together with the chiefs and the police. The chiefs indicate a reduction in the number of cases that are reported to them. Many smaller cases are solved by the Peace Committee and the Peace Promoters.

However, the Peace Committees and Peace Promoters are not able to address the inter-ethnic conflicts involving Dinka and Murle. These often very violent conflicts are beyond their mandate and capacity and require the involvement of other actors. But the Peace Committees could **link with Murle Peace Committees** and connect with them.

Key take aways

The three Peace Committees and the 200 Peace Promoters have contributed to the **prevention of the violent escalation** of conflicts at family and community level. Although they are not able to address inter community conflicts, between Dinka and Murle, they do positively mediate on local intra community conflicts among Dinka in collaboration with the local chiefs and the police.

>> Their **added value** is their proximity and **quick conflict intervention** to deescalate conflicts. They are strong in **mediation and reconciliation**, and they provide a fast and free alternative to conflict handling by the chiefs and the police. They are trusted in the community as they are seen as **neutral and capable**. They are active in conflict prevention and counselling of families.

>> The Peace Committees and Peace Promoters are **committed** to continue working for their community. To guarantee their effectiveness and sustainability, close collaboration with both **customary and local government authorities** is key.



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