



IS PEACE BUILDING in KURON HAVING AN IMPACT?

For decades, Norwegian Church Aid and PAX have supported the Holy Trinity Peace Village in Kuron holding meetings with village chiefs and elders of all the local ethnic groups. The idea was to reduce the violence and killings associated with cattle rustling and child abductions. As the

staff of the Peace Department live in the Toposa area, they were able to easily access and address arising problems. The team was often called to this village or that village for consultations over a conflict between ethnic groups or inter clan disagreements.

Chief Comments: *“This is the first time we have had so many follow-up meetings and communications. We see the impact of all these communication and engagements. We can now move more freely and our children are safer.”*

Over the years, the people began to trust and rely upon the Peace Department Team members more and more. After only a short 20 years of interventions they began to see small but distinguishable results. There were fewer cattle rustling events. Fewer children were abducted. Fewer youth were killed.



Toposa men at Peace and Cultural Event

This area remained relatively calm compared to other areas of South Sudan. Countless meetings, village gatherings, and workshops were held in many places with the idea of keeping the mindset of the people on prevention of cattle rustling.

In 2004 a Peace Academy was built just across the Kuron River to: *“...serve as a resource training centre so as to mobilize regularly these ethnic groups involved in tribal conflicts for peace, reconciliation and conflict resolutions, and to start education program for these families and to train the youth both boys and girls in [peace cord] to stop livestock raids and assist in resolving other conflicts in their communities....”* Easter Blessing Letter, 11.April.2004, Bishop Taban Paride, Emeritus Diocese of Torit.

In November of 2020, for the first time in this area, a large Peace and Cultural event was held. Over 25 local chiefs and elders along with the Governor of Eastern Equatoria were in attendance. There were a lot of speeches, words exchanged, and promises made. People discussed the cattle rustling and child abductions which frequently occur between the various tribes. At the conclusion of the 5 day event, there was resolve to replicate it again next time in Murle territory.



From that time until September.2021, there was a rather marked decrease in cattle theft and violent death related to such. From April to August there were only a few reported stealing's of cows and only one abduction of a

child. All of the cows stolen during this period were returned.

In August of 2021 another large gathering of Toposa, Jie, Kachipo, and Murle was held through the facilitation of the Peace Building office in Kuron Village. At this large gathering with two Commissioners and 25 chiefs in attendance, a resolution was passed specifically addressing punishments for any cattle rustling. This was a significant event as for the first time the elders and chiefs agreed to a Resolution which stipulated fines and punishments for cattle stealing. Everyone agreed to this and signed this Resolution.

They held a two days workshop on how to develop the Resolution. The elders developed these points one by one as this is the culture. Then the elders and youth came together as one group to discuss. However, the youth refused the elders to talk. The youth admitted it was they themselves who made all these problems. The four representatives of the Youth Ethnic Groups took the lead on these discussions and in the end everyone was in agreement on these resolutions.

The following are the resolutions agreed upon by leaders/representatives of the 4 communities of the Jie, Murle, Kachipo and Toposa through the Holy Trinity Peace Village Kuron that will guide and accompany the Peace agreement between such ethnic groups.

CATTLE RAIDS

Any raided cows will be pursued and returned to the rightful owners by the stakeholders in a timely fashion.

The cattle raided will be doubled as charges placed on the raiders.

The raiders will be imprisoned for 15 years.

The Chief from the raiders area will be imprisoned for 5 years if he or she refuses to disclose the raiders to the authorities.

CHILD ABDUCTIONS

Any abducted child/children will be searched for and returned to their parents.

The abductors will be imprisoned for 20 years.

The buyers of the child/children will be imprisoned for 15 years and their cows confiscated by the government.

10 cows will be paid as compensation of the abducted child/children.

ROAD AMBUSHES/KILLINGS

The murders/killers will be pursued and arrested and face severe punishments according to the laws of South Sudan.

Now with a punishment of having to pay cows as a fine is acting as a deterrent to future thefts.

All seemed content with this new and original model. This was a big step forward for all the ethnic groups who have traditions of stealing each other's cows. But would the Resolution hold? Would the elders uphold its mandates? How would the next incident be handled? One did not have to wait long to find out.



On Sept.02.2021, a seemingly common theft occurred of 8 cows stolen from Murle by Toposa and those cows were brought to a certain kraal (village) in the Kuron area. However, the Peace Department reminded the chiefs of their Resolution made just a couple months previous. Within the week people knew who the thieves were and where the cows were being kept. The community elders and chiefs were immediately mobilized and confronted the thieves. After lengthy discussions these two thieves not only returned the 8 cows but also had to pay a fine of 4 Toposa Peace meeting outside Peace Village

cows each as punishment.

All of this action was helped quite a bit by the recent acquisition of cell phones. In fact, at one point, when the people heard the Governor's voice on the cell phone of the HTPVK Peace Manager, they immediately took action against the thieves.

Change is occurring within the Toposa community. Traditional ways of doing things are slowly but undoubtedly changing. More traditional pastoralists are cultivating crops. More men are getting involved in agriculture and other ways of growing food. More children are being allowed to attend schools. More parents are refusing early childhood marriages. Of course, there are still problems and tensions between the ethnic groups. Hundreds of years of animosity does not disappear in a short 20 years. However, there are indications which give hope and inspiration to the next generation. Let us hope that all people learn to live in peace and harmony.

Lessons Learned:

You must be on the ground living and working with the people you serve. Trust takes a long time to build up and by living with the people you gain much more respect and understanding.

Peace building and Unity take a lot of work and time. Attitudes don't change quickly.

It is essential to mobilize as soon as something happens. To wait is to let things go. To act quickly is to show resolve and firmness.

Listening for years before acting is essential. One does not truly understand the issues and the culture until one takes time to learn.

These communities are willing to keep peace but they need a neutral outside body to motivate and follow up on these unification attempts.

(edited: sources: Interviews with Toposa and Mr. Eliah Lokii, 23.Sept.2021 gabe hurrish)



Stolen cattle being returned to Murle in Boma