

# A SAFE PLATFORM FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

<b>LOCATION</b>	Wau County, Bussere Payam
<b>IMPLEMENTER</b>	Catholic Diocese of Wau (CDOW)
<b>CASE WRITER</b>	Fr. Moses Peter Joseph

The self-help group (SHG) in Bussere Payam has 16 women-members and was formed in 2014. The group meets on a weekly basis to discuss issues related to women and community development. They also carry out savings and loan (VSLA) activities. The chairlady of the Bussere SHG says: "As members we have realized positive social and economic changes in our lives. We encourage women in other villages to start similar groups so that they can lobby and advocate for development in their communities".

## Farmers and pastoralists in conflict

Bussere Payam depends on farming as their source of livelihood. They grow indigenous crops for domestic consumption or sell some produce to earn a small income. Every October, pastoralist communities from neighboring Warrap State bring their cattle to Bussere in search of water and grazing land. They also come to Bussere to escape the risks of conflict

elsewhere. The pastoralists remain in the area for a period of seven months, which coincides with the harvesting season (October to January). The cattle move around randomly and destroy crops on the farms. In revenge for the damage caused, farmers poison crops to kill the cows that eat it. They also kill cows using spears. In turn, the cattle keepers - who are always armed while the farmers are not - kill people, burn villages and loot property.

## Women are most vulnerable to conflicts

Women are mostly affected by this conflict because of the activities they carry out in support of their families. In the absence of livelihood options, they regularly go to the bush to fetch firewood, cut grass, or bring produce from their farm to the market. When they encounter the armed cattle keepers there is the risk of being raped. Because of the conflict, many women have lost their husbands. With no one to support them and their children they become extra vulnerable. Most recent conflicts in Bussere (June 2016) displaced a lot of people, and especially women, to the bush, church compounds or the POC in Wau.

## Self-Help Groups for small business development

Towards the end of 2013, the Catholic Diocese of Wau (CDOW) conducted a PDRA in Bussere Payam. Conflict between farmers and pastoralists was identified as the main hazard. A DRR committee was formed and trained. In 2014, also a women SHG was formed and trained. The members received a start-up capital to start a viable small-scale business. With the profits earned, they began saving money in the group based on the VSLA approach (see previous case story). This serves as investment capital for group members who wish to take out revolving loans to further develop their businesses. In 2015, the SHG also established a joint crop farm and vegetable garden in Bussere in order to further boost their livelihoods. Through regular meetings, the SHGs also create a platform for women to discuss issues concerning peace and economic development in Bussere Payam that affect them and their children. It has increased social cohesion between the members. The SHG meetings also serve to collectively assess the progress of income generating investments on the loans provided to members.

## Improved income for SHG members

The members of the SHG managed to raise their incomes. One of the members, Jacklin George, says: "I buy charcoal and sell it together with groundnut paste and dry okra. I have a daily income average of between 1,300 and 1,600 SSP (between 7 and 9 \$USD), of which 300-400 SPP is profit. With this, I am now able to feed my children." As SHG members improved their economic status they no longer need to take the risk of going to the bush to look for grass and firewood to earn their living.

## Women participating in Peace Conferences

In Western Bahr el Gazal several peace conferences have been held between pastoralists and farmers. During the 2014 conference, the two parties signed a peace agreement. This conference was supported by VNG-International with support



Jacklin George, one of the SHG members, has set up a small business in the PoC camp in Wau and is selling charcoal, groundnuts and okra.



*Shama Sijin sells food items just outside the Cathedral's IDPs camp.*

of CDoW, WDG and HARD. As the 16 SHG members were trained on conflict transformation, they could now participate in peace dialogues and peace conferences. In the past women could only listen without expressing themselves in such events. Their voices are now heard in their communities. One of the Bussere SHG members, Igsam Saleh, has been elected as chairlady for the local women network (see the 'Women Networks Fostering Human Security' case story).

### **Why women are instrumental for peace**

The establishment of women SHG is essential for peacebuilding because women, just like youth, have potential to influence transformation in the community. Women are particularly gifted to mediate conflicts and come to a compromise. Women are much more than care takers of their household. Hence, they need to be encouraged and supported so that they can play a vital role in the community development. That is why there is a need to increase support to the formation of associations in the form of savings and loan initiatives.