

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION COMMITTEES AS PEACE AGENTS

LOCATION	Wau County (Bussere Payam)
IMPLEMENTER	Catholic Diocese of Wau (CDoW)
CASE WRITER	Fr. Moses Peter Joseph

The community of Bussere Payam realized that they have the capacity to settle conflicts and can co-exist with the pastoralists that, each year at the end of the rainy season, come to their community in search for water and pastures. *"We used to fight the cattle keepers to defend ourselves and to protect our women and property but after the Participatory Disaster Risk Assessment (PDRA) process we realized that peace can only be achieved through dialogue"*, said Jacob Marcelo, a Disaster Risk Reduction Committee (DRR) member.

Former conflict resolution is no longer effective

Before civil war broke out in the mid-1980's, cattle keepers who brought their cattle to Bussere and the neighboring areas for grazing used to co-exist with farmers without any major conflicts. Although the cows occasionally damaged crops, there were traditional ways of dealing with compensation and resolving conflict. However, these traditional conflict resolution mechanisms largely broke down because of the long war.

The bitter taste of revenge

Since 2015, tensions rose between the pastoralists and farmers. Because grazing lands have become scarce, herds of cattle increasingly trespass farming lands and destroy crops. As most crops have a long growth cycle it directly affects the farmers' livelihood. Conflict between both groups has sparked a variety of violent behavior. Farmers take revenge by killing the livestock, either through poisoning crops or spearing the cows. Pastoralists respond by looting property or burning houses of farming communities. Women are most affected by this conflict because they have to go to the farms to work, look for firewood or cut grass. This exposes them to the risk of being raped by armed cattle keepers. The conflict escalated to the point where the farming community of Bussere was prepared to entirely block the pastoralists from coming to their community. All this happened because there was no dialogue about how to share the available resources in such a way that it contributes to the livelihoods of all.

Setting up a Disaster Risk Reduction Committee

The Catholic Diocese of Wau (CDoW) conducted a PDRA with 100 Bussere community members. They identified that peacebuilding interventions were needed to solve the conflicts between the pastoralist and farming communities.



Roc Roc Dong peace conference 2014. Fr. Moses Peter Joseph facilitates a focus group discussion between farmers, pastoralists, community groups such as the DRR committees and local authorities from Western Bahr el Gazal and Warrap states.

CDoW then facilitated the formation of a DRR committee with 18 male and 12 female members. The DRR committee was trained on leadership, group dynamics, lobby and advocacy skills, resource mobilization, conflict transformation, networking and livelihood diversification.

To enhance yields and reduce the risks of crop damage, CDoW also trained Bussere's farmers in improved farming methods and distributed fast maturing crops and vegetables such as eggplant, cabbage, tomato, carrot and hot pepper.

Peace at last

The DRR committee has become a strong community institution that takes the lead in facilitating peaceful coexistence. Their members meet twice a month to discuss and plan their activities. The diverse set of trainings offered by CDoW empowered the committee to raise awareness among community members for peaceful coexistence and facilitate dialogue between the warring parties.

Through such dialogue, the Bussere community increasingly appreciates the benefits of peaceful coexistence. They decided to no longer kill cows that destroy their crops but tie them up and report incidents to the DRR committee or local authorities so that the damage can be compensated by the pastoralists. The number of conflicts has also reduced because of the use of fast maturing crops that can be harvested before the arrival of the cattle. Another benefit is that these crops have enhanced family nutrition.

Willingness as driving force

Mediation, conflict transformation and peacebuilding can only succeed if the two warring parties engage in peace dialogue. To achieve such commitment community mobilization is important. Both parties should take ownership of the resolutions agreed upon. Peace initiatives have also become a concern for various other stakeholders. This allowed CDoW to attend a peacebuilding conference organized by the government, where experiences on peacebuilding challenges and approaches were shared. But in spite of willingness, bringing parties to a common understanding is a process that requires patience; especially when peace initiatives are challenged by limited livelihood options.

Way forward

To make sure that Bussere does not relapse into conflict, continuous involvement of relevant key stakeholders in peace mediation and reviewing implementation of the resolutions agreed upon is needed. Also, the cattle keepers should establish their cattle camps along the river, far from farms and settlement. This will further mitigate tensions and allow farmers to focus on food production to improve household nutrition, food security and incomes.