

"THIS IS BIG-BUSINESS"

LOCATION	Jur River County, Marial Bai, Udici and Kangi Payams
IMPLEMENTER	Hope Agency for Relief and Development (HARD)
CASE WRITER	Santo Garang Yama

"I have three beautiful children but since I am a single parent I am struggling to take care of them," says 27-year-old Angelina Akur Urayo. Angelina lives in Udici Boma and is a farmer. Her farming activities are however mainly subsistence based, offering little income to respond to her family's needs.

Agro-pastoralism affected by drought and conflict

Communities in Udici Boma in Jur River County are mainly composed of Luos and Dinkas and most of them are agro-pastoralists. There are also pastoralists from neighboring Warrap State and Northern Bar el Gazal State who brought their cattle in search of water and pasture. These pastoralists migrate with their cattle during the dry season. They occasionally lose control of their cattle and the cows end up destroying the land and crops of the farming communities. Conflicts between farmers and pastoralists hence frequently occur. As drought also negatively affects the growth of crops, the consequences for the farming communities are often severe. Their harvest fails and, as a result, families have little to eat and no income from the surplus they would normally sell.

Supporting alternative livelihoods through Self-Help Groups

In 2014, Hope Agency for Relief and Development (HARD) conducted a PDRA. This confirmed that drought and conflict are among the most pressing hazards in Udici. It also showed that especially women that engage in farming activities are highly vulnerable to the effects of drought and conflict because a poor harvest leads to a loss of their livelihoods. Other socio-economic and livelihood options of farmers in Jur River County (Udici, Gette and Tharkueng,) are limited.

HARD supported local women to establish self-help groups (SHG), each with 20 members, and built their skills in small business development and management. Each group selects among its members a number of leaders, who have the roles of chair, secretary, treasurer and their deputies. Chairing of the group meeting is done on rotational basis to give every SHG member a chance to chair a meeting. The SHG follows a savings and loan approach in line with the VSLA principle (see previous two case stories).

Brewing up a tea restaurant

Angelina also joined a SHG. "The members of our group decided to each save small amounts of money on a weekly basis (10 SSP, 0.05 USD). I managed to make my contributions from the modest revenues of some of the harvest I sold", she says. In 2015, Angelina borrowed 5,000 SSP from her group and used it to set up a small tea restaurant. When she cleared the loan, she



SHG weekly group meeting.

borrowed another 20,000 SSP to expand her business. "I used the second loan to transform my business from a tea restaurant into a better restaurant where I now sell tea, food and other drinks". While smiling she said: "This is big business".

Because of the earnings from her restaurant Angelina now sends her children to school and she can afford medical care. She also plans to use part of her savings to buy groundnut seeds for the next cropping season. Angelina has become a role model in Udici Boma.



Monitoring visit of Cordaid to a self-help group.

Social cohesion in the self-help groups

The SHGs prove to be quite stable in composition. Angelina's group has been together for three consecutive years now. This makes that members know each other very well and the women mutually support one another where needed. "When one of us is bereaved, everyone contributes 500 SSP and we participate in cooking, collecting firewood and water, and we clean and serve guests", Angelina says. She appreciates the support from HARD, in particular for the training on business management, adding "I thank God for giving me the opportunity to join this SHG".

The benefits of a bottom-up approach

The SHG approach adopted a bottom-up approach that enhances empowerment and capacity building through popular participation. The Udici community members have realized the important roles they can play themselves in determining local strategies that can help solve their problems.

Way forward

Inflation in South Sudan has been high the past years. This also affected the SHG members. Some were discouraged to borrow money from the group and make investments. They fear that community members cannot afford to buy their products or services because commodity prices keep rising on a daily basis. In spite of this challenge, the SHG approach has empowered vulnerable women to develop alternative livelihoods, strengthening their economic position and social integration. Whilst the focus of the project was on women, there is also a need to promote SHGs for men.