



*transforming the world's
response to conflict*

Field Notes

Women and Peace Issue
Second Quarter
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In the World's Youngest Nation, Women Take a Stand Against Violence

By Kristine (Tin) Valerio, Team Leader in Northern Bahar El Ghazal for Nonviolent Peaceforce in South Sudan

It was my first month at our field site in Northern Bahr el Ghazal State in South Sudan. With a team of peacekeepers, I responded to a reported rape of a 13-year-old girl. When we met her, she was terrified. Although she spoke in Arabic, a language I don't know, I instinctively understood what she was telling us. Her voice cracked and tears streamed from her eyes as she related her story. I hugged her tightly, hoping I could help her feel the security she desperately needed. With this girl's case and other rape cases, Nonviolent Peaceforce refers survivors to health and psychosocial services. We accompany them to the legal proceedings. We help them start the process of healing.

As we celebrated International Women's Day in March, I was reminded both of how far we've come and the long road ahead. The reality is, women are still targets for physical, psychological, economic, and sexual violence. As a response to rape and oth-

er gender-based violence, Nonviolent Peaceforce is building Women's Peacekeeping Teams – teams made of local women, empowered to promote peace and stand up to violence. The goals are to educate, empower, and encourage women's participation in

eliminating gender-based violence; as well as engage women in the peace-building process.

As a trainer and peacekeeper, I've heard amazing stories of resilience and survival at Women's Peacekeeping Team meetings. During our Community Security Meeting in Malualbai, a woman shared with us that

her husband is an alcoholic who beats her almost every day. The local police chief, who was also at the meeting, announced that the police force would act on that case and all other cases of alcohol abuse in their community. Previously, the women had not reported these issues to the police, not trusting that they would be taken seriously. Bringing the women and the



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police together in a safe space to build trust will contribute to sustainable change. I shared with the women the need to voice their concerns and suggested steps they could take to alleviate violence at home and in their communities. All members of the community, she pointed out, must work hand-in-hand to end gender-based violence.

At another recent meeting, women shared stories of their experiences with gender-based violence, the response they've initiated as Women's Peacekeeping Teams, and their struggle to build homes, as well as a nation, free from violence. The women were eager participants, listening intently as we talked about complex concepts, many of which were new to them: gender and gender preference, emergency contraceptive pills, HIV/AIDS transmission and

prevention, trauma, legal sanctions, and more. I learned as much from them as they learned from me.

The Women's Peacekeeping Team in Akuem told us how they were able to respond immediately when a girl was shouting for help while a boy was in the act of raping her. The team in

Gok Machar shared with us how they organized themselves to stand against any forms of abuse in their community. Women and girls in South Sudan are standing up to violence and we must help them carry on their work.

These stories motivate me, as a lifelong woman activist, to keep fighting for a safe and secure society for women, girls, and the whole community. But more than the pain that women and girls experience, what makes me keep fighting for women's rights is

the stories of hope --the initiatives like the Women's Peacekeeping Teams at our field site.

A year ago, I was in South Korea joining a protest on the street, crying for justice and for the comfort of women. A year before that, I was in Palestine learning to understand the issues of Muslim Arab women. Before coming to South Sudan, while providing for the sexual and reproductive health needs of women in the aftermath of Typhoon Haiyan in my country, the

Philippines, I saw how resilient the Filipinas were.

Each country has its own unique culture and struggles. All over the world, however, the oppression of women is a common affliction.

In the fight for women's rights, there is an urgent need for women around the world to come together in solidarity. In South Sudan, the Women's Peacekeeping Teams are doing just that. International Women's Day gives us the opportunity to reflect on the progress we've made and plan for the future.

Long live International Women's Day!



Women and girls in South Sudan are standing up to violence and we must help them carry on their work.

Empowering Indigenous Women to Resolve Conflict in Mindanao, the Philippines

By Paul Fraleigh, Country Director, The Philippines, and Ryan Sullivan, Program Consultant

Recently in Mindanao, the Philippines, tensions have escalated due to a boundary conflict between the provinces of North Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat and Maguindanao. Three barangays, or villages, in North Cotabato Province have been the most affected.

Hostilities existing since the 1970's persist because of land disputes between the Moro (native Muslim ethnic groups), the B'laan (an indigenous group native to the area) and Christian settler claimants. The minority B'laan consider parts of the conflict area their ancestral domain. The root causes of the conflict remain fundamentally unresolved and violence could recur at any time.

To address this conflict Nonviolent Peaceforce in the Philippines launched a project covering two of the villages in North Cotabato. Under the same project, one village in Sarangani was also covered. The project was slated to run from October 2014 to February 2015 and dubbed "Empowering Indigenous Communities with Emphasis on Women's Participation to Prevent and Respond to Violence and Positively Engage Authorities in Mindanao, Philippines." It was made possible through partnerships with the Tulunan Community Development Center (TCDC) and the Maasim Tribal Council.

Women's participation in the project was an important element, as women have always played a definitive role in times of war in peace. In 2000, a United Nations fact sheet reported that "more than 75

per cent of displaced people are women and children, and in some refugee populations they constitute 90 per cent." Importantly, it also observed "a growing understanding of the role of women in conflict resolution and the specific skills and abilities they bring to the decision-making process."

This observation made over a decade ago reflects the reality in Southern Philippines. Women and children of Mindanao bear the



Women participating in a community orientation in barangay Daliao in January. Of the 152 participants, 84 were women.

brunt of the conflict. The Lumad, the indigenous people of Mindanao, have been historically marginalized, lacking equal participation in governance, suffering high rates of human rights abuses and from violent conflict.

To limit violence and protect civilians, Nonviolent Peaceforce maintains relationships with all the communities, relationships established in earlier training for Early Warning and Early Response (EWER), a system that allows people to identify and address threats to safety and human rights abuses. Earlier

this year, the dynamics of the conflict made it clear that further training in the application of appropriate nonviolent responses was needed.

In January 2015, many people from the B'laan community were displaced as a result of fighting between armed settler groups and Moro farmers. The hostile environment meant that an EWER orientation and three-day training scheduled for March had to be cancelled. Due to pervasive armed conflict and recurrent community displacement, the establishment of a fully functioning EWER structure in one the villages (New Bunuwawan) became nearly impossible.

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Pervasive armed conflict delayed the start of additional training, but Nonviolent Peaceforce staff persisted and the training finally took place from March 16-18th. It was attended by the internally-displaced persons (IDPs) from New Bunawan. As a result, approximately 60% of the participants are EWER monitors in their communities. It is feared that the B'laan of Sitio Tuburan will continue to remain victims of violence until proper initiatives to solve the conflict are present. NP's team has pledged to continue engaging both communities even after the project period.

“Before, I had no experience engaging with government officials because I had no courage. I am thankful to Nonviolent Peaceforce because you gave me the courage through additional knowledge and skills to engage them.”

The empowerment of indigenous women was at the core of the project's success. A total of 10 EWER orientations were held, and out of 744 participants, 427 were women. A total of 75 women also participated in 5 focus group discussions and out of 105 training participants, 66 were women.

A female indigenous person, who is now an EWER Monitor from Sarangani province, said, “Before, I had no experience engaging with government officials because I had no courage. I am thankful to Nonviolent Peaceforce because you gave me the courage through additional knowledge and skills to engage them. We can now each contribute as partners to achieve peace.”

Specifically, the project linked protection and participation, while proactively improving women's participation at the grassroots. Now partici-

pants are skilled, informed and empowered within their communities. They are now better positioned to influence other stakeholders for their own protection concerns.

Increased confidence for positive engagement of government and security actors can serve as a platform to foster mutual respect. With the empowerment of women, dynamics and relationships within communities themselves have significantly improved. Through NP's work, the

EWER structure continues to contribute proactively in times of relative calm and reactively in times of violence, which has been the model of NP's protection-related work in Mindanao since 2007.

In “Children of the Killing Fields,” Cambodia's Chanthou Boua wrote: “Post-conflict societies inherently mean that people, especially women, are exhausted, particularly after a long protracted conflict. They have overwhelming tasks to fulfill in response to the situations mentioned above, usu-

ally with limited resources. Women have the added responsibility of nurturing the family livelihood. In post-conflict situations, with so many pressing issues to contend with, the social issues facing women are often low on the agenda.”

Chantou Boua's description is still appropriate, but the prospects for women may have changed already. The work of NP in Mindanao is proof that the social issues facing women are at the forefront of peace building efforts. NP develops and expands EWER structures that are focused on the inclusion of women and indigenous people. It also provides links between the structures, authorities and other stakeholders. By doing this NP provides communities with mechanisms that promote their safety, security and participation.



NP's South central Mindanao team and indigenous peoples women participants after two-day seminar on conflict prevention and preparedness in Kiamba in February.

Women's Peacekeeping Teams Make a Difference!

By Amy Hansen, Communications and Development Associate



Jane Wambui Wanjiru

In 2012 the Women's Peacekeeping Teams program began in Western Equatoria, South Sudan. Jane Wambui Wanjiru, a former field staff member in Sri Lanka, played a huge role in facilitating their development. Jane listened when women approached her wanting to do more to contribute to peace in their communities. They felt with training they could help Nonviolent Peaceforce have a greater impact towards peace.

Now Women's Peacekeeping Teams receive a series of trainings on how to respond to cases concerning gender based violence, human rights, child protection, as well as other safety and security issues. Each Women's Peacekeeping Team is unique and responds to different issues based on their local context. This includes issues ranging from domestic violence to early marriage to sexual assault.

Since the creation of the teams, Jane has been the Womens Participation and Protection Officer Advisor for Nonviolent Peaceforce in South Sudan. She is responsible for supporting over 13 Women's Peacekeeping Teams in South Sudan and building their capacity to respond to peace and security issues.

In February 2015, to show our appreciation for these women, Nonviolent Peaceforce began our campaign to "Thank a Woman Peacekeeper in South Sudan." Over 550 people responded with their messages of support for the women.

During a recent interview Jane told us how she felt about the women receiving the messages from the campaign. Jane responded "For me receiving those messages and seeing the appreciation the women receive was really amazing. I felt the connection. Seeing someone respond from Germany, from Zimba-

bwee, being able to connect to these women's work and being able to send genuine messages of appreciation means we are all fighting for one cause. I felt like part of a bigger family."

In April and May field staff delivered responses to the Women's Peacekeeping Teams in South Sudan including teams in Rumbek, Yida, Minkaman, Aweil East and Aweil North. Some of the responses received are printed below. To read more, please visit: nonviolentpeaceforce.org/womensday2015. As Jane later explained in her interview, this initiative is really important to the Women's Peacekeeping for whom respect and admiration does not always come easily. However, as Jane says, the teams have come a long way since 2012. Now, instead of not being allowed to attend meetings with power-holders and men, women have cases referred to them from village chiefs. All of us at Nonviolent Peaceforce think that is an amazing accomplishment.

I really want to congratulate all the women who are working tirelessly to save life and maintain peace in South Sudan.

-Luis Francis, Tanzania

Your sisters and brothers in the Sudanese community in Roanoke, Virginia hold you in their prayers.

-The Rev. Christine Payden-Travers

When I was in the Marine Corps, I carried dead Marines home to their families. You are working to end the need for the body escorts.

-Jim Lovestar (USMC, 1968-71)

Dear wonderful women,

The example you are giving to your children is immeasurable. There is hope that now that in the future life will be different in your world. I admire you so much and my heart goes out to you. You are an inspiration to all women.

In gratitude and admiration

-Natalia from New Zealand

I admire all your efforts. Keep working towards your goals and think positive.

-Love from Kathleen in Canada

DID YOU KNOW?

In spite of limited educational opportunity in the countries we work in, approximately 40% of Nonviolent Peaceforce's national staff are women.

Approximately 45% of Nonviolent Peaceforce's international staff are women as well.

Almost 40% of the Board of Directors are women.



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Women's Peacekeeping Teams in South Sudan



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