



SUCCESS STORY

War-Affected Lou Nuer Youth Vow to Turn Over New Leaf



Lou Nuer youth gather in Waat for discussions on how to overcome intertribal violence.

As part of USAID/OTI's conflict reduction program, thousands of young Lou Nuer pastoralists came together to discuss peaceful collaboration ahead of the dry season migration in Jonglei State.

December 2009 – In the southern Sudanese state of Jonglei, news that thousands of young people are congregating typically spells trouble. But that was not the case last month when an estimated 3,000 young Lou Nuer pastoralists gathered in the town of Waat. Instead of coming to perpetuate a cycle of violence that has plagued Jonglei in 2009, the youth were in Waat to talk about peace.

With support from USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI), the Nuer Peace Council (NPC) organized a week-long conference to forge a plan for achieving peaceful collaboration among young people in this increasingly volatile region. Following a program of facilitated discussions, drama, and song, participants agreed to a five-point resolution for contributing to development

rather than acting as peace spoilers.

Most of the attendees traveled on foot from distant settlements and cattle camps to reach Waat, although OTI provided senior Lou Nuer leaders and NPC representatives with air transport to the event. Government of Southern Sudan officials appealed to the young people to respect local peace agreements and refrain from cattle raiding and violent confrontation over resources during the coming dry season migration. In turn, participants called on the government to deliver services equitably and address the challenges of rural communities.

Nearly five years after the signing of Sudan's Comprehensive Peace Agreement, the promise of peace and development remains largely unfulfilled for Nuer, Dinka, and Murle pastoralist communities in Jonglei. Disillusioned youth, many of whom live in remote cattle camps far from the reach of traditional and county authorities, are well armed and often involved in violent attacks and counterattacks on neighboring communities. A spike in interethnic violence in 2009 has had devastating consequences for the region's citizens and is jeopardizing preparations for national elections and a referendum on self-determination, planned for 2010 and 2011, respectively.

While attending the conference in Waat, three youth associations from Akobo, Uror, and Nyirol counties discovered a shared vision for peaceful change. The groups agreed to form a coalition to improve employment and recreational opportunities for youth in their communities and have submitted a request for assistance to facilitate vocational training and income-generation activities. In the crucial months ahead, OTI will strive to reduce conflict in Jonglei by supporting opportunities for at-risk youth to engage in constructive social and economic activities.