



SUCCESS STORY

Dialogue Helps Avert Conflict

Peace and reconciliation meetings avert conflict and build relationships



Community members participate in a traditional Murle dance in celebration of a successful peace meeting in Gurumuk.

The success of the Yuai meeting elicited such strong demand for follow-up that key delegates immediately held subsequent meetings with Dinka and Murle leaders. The series has spawned a plethora of smaller border peace initiatives by local chiefs, authorities, and armed youth.

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During Sudan's North-South civil war, Upper Nile state was deeply affected by internal divisions and an overwhelming number of weapons in civilian hands. Youth, who traditionally herd and protect cattle, were loosely organized under the leadership of chiefs or cattle camp leaders, effectively creating an irregular civil defense force that came to be known as *Jiec* in Boor — literally, the White Army.

One ethnic group, the Lou Nuer, has been profoundly divided by conflicts with its neighbors — the Gawaar Nuer, Dinka Duk, Murle, Anyuak, and Jikany Nuer. Since the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in 2005, USAID has been working with them to address potential and existing conflict.

The first Lou community meeting in June 2005 reinforced the need to reintegrate armed groups. A meeting in November targeted youth leaders of Lou Gawaar and Duk. Though fraught by complex politicized divisions, it paved a way for initial agreements on arms control and seasonal grazing access.

In January 2006, the situation took a turn for the worse when a disarmament initiative led by the Sudan People's Liberation Army resulted in a tense standoff between their troops and armed civilians in Lou Nuer territory. Despite efforts to persuade the leaders to engage in dialogue, clashes ensued. Observers watched with dismay as the work toward stability seemed to unravel. They feared that old feuds would reignite and weapon supply lines would be reestablished.

USAID responded by sponsoring initiatives with the Nuer Peace Council that brought together politicians, armed groups, and Lou leaders. This culminated in a peace meeting in Yuai, where more than 700 participants gathered, including Government of South Sudan President Riak Machar. The meeting resulted in agreements among Lou leaders on integration, disarmament, and peaceful engagement with their neighbors. Despite the fragile peace, participants from all sides said that the dialogue has profoundly influenced the course of events and averted conflicts that may have resulted in the collapse of delicate new relationships.

Photo: PACT