

Lessons Learned #3

Adaptive Peacebuilding in Greater Jonglei

May 2021

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peacebuilding in
Greater Jonglei**

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Overview

This ‘Lessons Learned’ Paper combines a narrative section with the peacebuilding principles that the team has identified through the process. The narrative element below deliberately also takes the updates as they were written at the time, rather than re-editing after the fact. Whilst this makes for a less flowing narrative, it allows another angle of engagement for the reader; seeing what the team was emphasising as the process iterated. The hope is that, collectively, this document provides a practice-based stimulus for discussion, reflection and critique among others working in the peacebuilding space, both in Greater Jonglei and more widely in South Sudan.

The **outcome challenges** this Greater Jonglei engagement targeted were:

- Armed youth actors reducing participation in violent conflict, cattle raiding, child abduction, and identifying alternative activities in Jonglei and greater Pibor Administrative Area.
- Armed youth leaders promoting peace and alternative livelihoods.
- Organised and ad hoc armed groups refraining from interference in the delivery of humanitarian assistance.
- Communities moving more freely within Jonglei and an increase in livelihoods collaboration, especially in community border areas.

About the Peacebuilding Opportunities Fund (POF)

FCDO’s South Sudan Peacebuilding Opportunities Fund (POF) is a scalable, adaptable, and contextually-driven mechanism to pursue peacebuilding objectives in South Sudan.

The POF seeks to deliver outcomes which ensure that targeted communities are more harmonious and resilient to conflict, and that political, socio-economic, and cultural institutions key for handling conflict and establishing the conditions for sustained peace are strengthened and more inclusive.

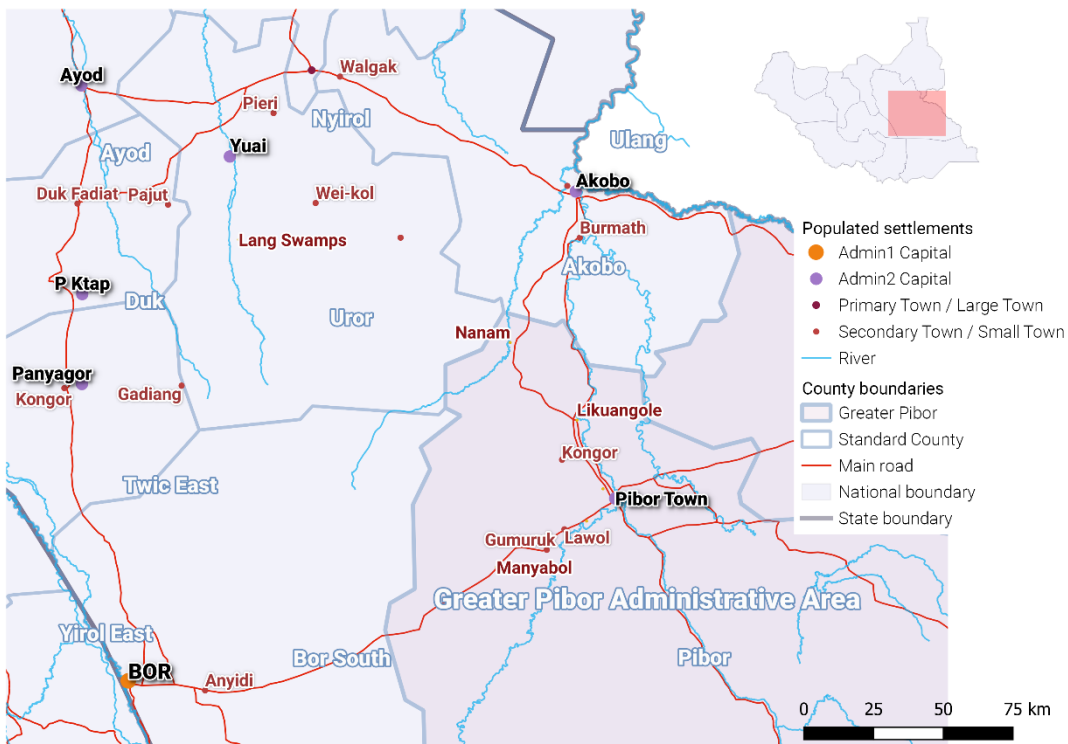
Engagement Narrative

The video link to the right captures highlights of the case story, ways of working, and the signs of hope that the process had brought at the time the video was made (Feb 2021). It is narrated by the three POF Area Advisers, respectively from the Murle, Lou Nuer and Dinka Bor communities.

The written updates below were produced as the process unfolded.



Figure 1- Map of Greater Jonglei with key centres



Key events

Nov – Dec 2020

Narrative

Engaging Jonglei traditional and spiritual leaders

[07 Dec Update] Following consultations with relevant community and political leaders, the Jonglei team visited Pibor (including Lekuangole and Gumuruk), Pieri and Bor (including Anyagor and Duk), to meet with traditional and spiritual leaders. Discussion focussed on agreeing next steps in the peace dialogue process across the three main communities. While there is deep mistrust between groups, and scepticism from previous failed peace attempts, there is also strong appetite for peace.

The POF team is working to facilitate a meeting between the Lou Nuer and the Murle in Pieri that would establish a peace ‘gesture’. This will be followed up direct engagement with the armed youth, who want a locally agreed settlement without the involvement of Juba politicians. Distrust between the Murle and Dinka Bor runs deep. The team is working to establish communication channels to allow both sides to share views and their commitments to a peaceful settlement.



Left: Briefing with the armed youth, chiefs and women in Lekuangole, 4 December

10 Dec 2020

Spear Ceremony in Pieri, presided by Dak Kueth and committed to by Dak Kueth, Gumuruk Paramount Chief Gulech, Murle armed youth leader Turyal Peluk, Minister of Peacebuilding Hon Stephen Par Kuol, POF representative Michael Comerford.

Peace signals from Pieri meeting

[21 Dec Update] Following concurrent engagements with communities in the greater Pibor, Akobo and Bor areas of Jonglei, a meeting was held in Pieri that brought together key traditional and armed youth leadership of the Lou Nuer and the Murle: from the Lou Nuer, Spiritual Leader Dak Kueth, Liliy and other armed youth leaders, as well as Paramount Chiefs; from the Murle, the Paramount of Chiefs of Lekuangole and Gumuruk, and one of the key Armed Youth Leaders. The meeting established a commitment to peace, underlined the priority of direct youth to youth engagement, and agreed that white flags would be despatched to the border areas. The agreement was affirmed with the traditional walking over the white bull, and all the principals swearing an oath to the agreement with their hand on Dak Kueth’s spear.



Left: Delegation of Murle Traditional and Youth Leaders arrives in Pieri with MAF flight from Pibor, 10 December

Over the coming 10 days, the intention is to redeploy to the field to lay foundations for the subsequent youth-focussed dialogues. A key first step is to strengthen the mutual confidence in peace between the Murle and Dinka Bor, which remains weak. Discussions are continuing with

UNMISS Civil Affairs and the Ministry of Peacebuilding around appropriate coordination of the follow-up steps.

29 Dec 2020

Planned inter-communal meeting in Pibor aborted at eleventh hour following political interference from Dinka Bor elites. Was planned to bring together representatives of youth and traditional leadership from Bor, Twic East, Duk, Ayod, Urur, Akobo and Greater Pibor.

Towards a meeting of armed youth in Jonglei

[04 Jan Update] After the December 10 Pieri meeting between traditional and youth leadership of the Murle and Lou Nuer, inclusion of the Dinka Bor side became the priority. Following meetings in Juba, two teams of two redeployed to Pibor and Bor, respectively. The objective was to establish the willingness of both sides' armed youth leaders to dialogue, to connect them directly by phone, and prepare for a face to face meeting in a location of their choosing.

From Pibor, the team moved to Gumuruk, where traditional leaders had called armed youth from the communities stretching to the Nanaam border areas with Dinka Bor. On the Bor side, there was a concerted process to bring on board the key youth leaders from Bor South, Twic East and Duk. The POF advisor from Greater Akobo remained in contact with the relevant leaders via satellite phone, as the other two discussions developed.

All the key Youth Leaders and their Paramount Chiefs ultimately agreed to Pibor as the location for the meeting, to be held on December 29. Following a misunderstanding around logistics, on December 28 afternoon it emerged that the planned flights would not be available for the meeting. Given the fragility of the process, on the Dinka Bor side in particular, and after consulting on the ground, POF decided to corral commercial charter flights so that the meeting could go ahead as soon as possible, with only 24 hours delay.

Four flights were chartered for the following day to pick up youth and traditional leaders in Bor, Poktap, Padiet, Ayod, Pieri, Lankien and Walgak, to join those from the Murle side who had arrived by land to Pibor. One flight was to leave from Juba with Government and other Juba-based community leadership to witness the meeting.

As the significance of the planned meeting began to resonate, there were talks in Juba into the evening of December 29, primarily among disaffected figures on the High Level Committee. Finally, at 7.15 am on December 30, 10 minutes before the flights were to depart Juba, it was clear that a small group of agitators had succeeded in preventing the meeting going ahead. The reason cited was that the meeting was an IO initiative.

In Juba and in the diaspora, there is significant condemnation of those who prevented the meeting. The Chief Administrator is returning to Juba to ask the High Level Committee directly for an explanation, and to request a meeting with the President to elicit his direct support for the process to continue.

The POF team returned to Juba to regroup and discuss follow-up. They have identified interim next steps to sustain the community level momentum that the talks of the last two weeks have built.

14-17 Jan 2021

Dinka Bor – Murle armed youth leader dialogue and exchange visit to Rumbek, Lakes State.

Murle-Dinka Bor Armed Youth Commitment to Peace

[18 Jan Update] The last minute cancellation of the December 30 meeting in Pibor led to a revision of the approach. Following discussion on different options, the team agreed to shift the next step to a neutral location, for a meeting only among armed youth leaders

of the three communities. The team settled on Rumbek, which would also give the opportunity for an exchange with the *galweng* on the approach of the grassroots peace committees, now active within the Dinka Agar.

Dynamics leading into the meeting



Above: (bottom left) Armed youth leaders discuss the issues; (top left) Turyal Peluk, Murle Red Chief, and Madhier Luk Yai, Dinka Bor Youth Leader, sign the Commitment to Peace, witnessed by Dinka Agar galweng; (top right) Thon Biliu Bol briefs the Lou Nuer leadership at Pieri airstrip; (bottom right) Liliy, leader of the Lou Nuer Armed Youth, reaffirms their commitment to peace at the Pieri airstrip briefing.

Late on 13 January two issues emerged with the proposed youth exchange visit to Rumbek.

First, following approval in principle from the Secretary General of Jonglei State, a meeting of the Security Advisors was convened in Bor. Whilst not identifying any specific issue with the proposal, they concluded that final approval would need to come from the Governor. This presented a major obstacle, given the difficulty in reaching the Governor over many months.

This team followed up directly with the Governor's Office Manager, who indicated that the Governor had left for Ethiopia in the afternoon. This left the Secretary General as the final authority, and he agreed late in the evening to give his approval for the meeting to go ahead.

Second, a misunderstanding had developed in the communication regarding the Rumbek proposal. This led to the Lou Nuer leadership rejecting the proposal of Rumbek, believing that it was somehow the result of IG interference and an unacceptable concession to the Dinka Bor politics. The community met over two days (12-13 January), and ultimately insisted that the meeting should proceed as originally planned for Pibor.

With communication limited to satellite phone, the source of the resistance was hard to gauge from Juba. Mick Comerford's participation in the spear ceremony in Pieri (one of six) elevated the engagement with Dak Kueth. As such, despite the negative message, the flight proceeded as planned to Pieri to meet with Dak Kueth and

the community leadership to assess the situation more directly and identify the way forward, before proceeding to Rumbek.

The Lou Nuer was firm in declining the invitation, indicating their emphasis on the relationship with the Murle and that they had no need to discuss further with the Dinka Bor. They also underlined the community needs for development resources, in particular around water, veterinary services, and communications infrastructure (Pieri, Nyakor, Yuai, Motot mentioned for the latter). Significantly, they affirmed their commitment to the peace process and willingness to participate in subsequent meetings within Greater Jonglei.

The meeting

The meeting went ahead in Rumbek from 14-18 January. After explaining the absence of the Lou Nuer, the process proceeded as planned. Both sides made direct statements, on the one hand challenging their neighbours, at the same time affirming their commitment to peace.

The meeting attracted wider attention from the Dinka Bor community, with ongoing efforts to undermine the dialogue even while it was underway. At the same time, others were calling with messages of support. In the midst of the surrounding politics, there was a strong message from the armed youth rejecting the interference of peace spoilers among town politicians.

During the meeting, one of the leaders, Madhier Luk Yai received news that one of his Chiefs had been killed in a Murle attack. This left a deep imprint on the discussion, and drew an impassioned commitment from the Murle leaders.

The leaders signed the Commitment to Peace on Monday morning, and responded to four separate radio interviews. The Dinka Bor leadership then passed through Pieri en route back to Juba, to convey in person the outcomes of the meeting to the Lou Nuer armed youth leadership: Liliy, and his Deputy, Thor Boliz. They again underlined the importance of resisting any political attempts to undermine peace.

The originally planned Intra-Murle dialogue is postponed until after the Juba High Level Committee meeting. A follow-up meeting of Armed Youth from all three communities is the next step in the engagement, as well as despatching white flags.

3-6 Feb 2021

*Lou Nuer-Murle-Dinka Bor
armed youth leaders
caravan through Pibor,
Pieri and Poktap to affirm
publicly the youth leaders'
commitment to peace.*

Jonglei peace builds momentum

[12 Feb Update] Murle, Lou Nuer and Bor Dinka armed youth leaders have spent four days, 3-6 February, moving together through Pibor, Pieri and Poktap to affirm to communities their commitment to peace. The initiative followed an earlier meeting of Murle and Lou Nuer leadership in Pieri on December 10, and a four day dialogue between Murle and Bor Dinka in Rumbek last month. Conditions are now strengthening for flood affected communities to move to higher ground in previously insecure areas, for humanitarian access to communities in famine, and the wider peace dividend agenda to build momentum. The delegation was accompanied by POF, WFP and UNMISS Human Rights Division, with transport logistics provided by UNMISS.



Photos (top-bottom): Lily speaks to local women in Pieri; the Murle youth leaders are presented in Pieri; Thon Biliu, Lily and Turyal are welcomed in Poktap.

The communities of Pibor, Pieri and Poktap all met the delegation with elaborate receptions. In Pibor, the delegation arrived to coincide with the conclusion of the three-day Intra Murle Dialogue, and the official reception was followed by a dancing display that brought together two of the Murle age sets. In Pieri, the flight schedule allowed for an official reception in the evening as well as a further discussion the following morning, when

Dak Kueth also joined. The Murle were particularly struck by the welcome in Poktap, one of the communities with whom they have had the strongest mistrust.

With tents pitched, evenings provided an opportunity for less structured conversation. In Pibor and Poktap, these were primarily in smaller groups. In Pieri, a longer group conversation stretched into the night. Some appreciated the strong commitment they had felt in being received so warmly. Others lamented the lack of time to share more expansively with the Murle community in Pibor. Others reiterated their cautious optimism, noting that Murle leaders still had a lot of work to do on the ground to assure the sustainability of the peace. Others reflected on the way in which their cultures bless raiding, when in fact it has proved a curse. And others underlined again the dangers in allowing the external politics to pervert the needs and wishes of the communities.

Dak Kueth plays a central leadership role in the conditions for peace. In Pieri, he challenged Turyal directly, referencing ongoing attacks in some of the border areas. Turyal responded that time was needed. He referred to Achop Ziryna, one of the most active Murle raiders from the Lekuangle side, explaining that they had managed to engage him; the Lou Nuer would have seen the impact on that border. Reaching all the others would take time, but they are committed to the process.

A shift in the tide of youth and community sentiment

When the POF team first engaged in December with youth leaders like Kamalach (Manyabol) on the Murle side, and the Lou Nuer in Pieri, they were on a determined conflict mobilisation footing (concrete plans to attack were in place for December). The word peace was not there; only plans of revenge, inflicting more suffering, bringing more women and children, how much displacement could be effected, and where to source the necessary ammunition and arms.

With the cautious notes outlined above, the communities are now talking with a sense of confidence about peace, freedom of

movement, recovery of children, sharing businesses. There was a motif of rebuilding: relationships, reunification, roads, markets, livelihoods.

Significant barriers of mistrust have been breached, partly through a deepening realisation of the pernicious role of external politics. Both sides used to allege the Government's support for the other. Now they acknowledge the way they have been instrumentalized. Fundamentally, they are killing themselves in vain. Through the discussion, the leaders have been able to share their own personal journeys and the human impact on their communities. On meeting the neighbouring communities, some publicly shared their shame for what they had done.

More unexpectedly, the youth themselves are increasingly mindful and vocal around the role of women and elders in the next steps. The process was deliberately planned around the armed youth, and organically they created space for women. It is agreed that the next meeting will give a prominent place to women:

In Pibor, Liliy brought the messages from women in Pieri. They spoke directly to him: 'we know you are not ready for peace because you have been milking the blood of our children?' Before leaving Pieri, they scolded him: 'whenever an attack comes, you are the first to run, leaving us behind; you are a coward.' And they sent him with a message to the Murle women that they want to talk – women to women. They ask, 'why should we deliver children anymore, children who are dying? For what?'

In Pieri, the abducted women spoke. The woman appointed to speak was overcome with emotion and one of her sisters took over. They told the Murle that for them to be able to go back, the Murle need to accept peace. One of the women sent the youth back to Pibor with the clothes she had been wearing the day she was abducted, to assure her husband that she is still alive.

In Poktap, most of the people welcoming the delegation were women. Dancing from the time the first aircraft came, soaking their clothes to get to the other side of the swampy airstrip edge and receive their delegates. Again, they wanted the Murle leaders to tell the Murle women: 'we are tired. Talk to your men to stop this.'

A nascent peace that needs nurturing

The current peace has **four cornerstones**: the commitment of spiritual and traditional leaders, the fatigue of the communities, the relationships steadily building between their youth leaders, and the hope of a transforming economic landscape.

There are two key threats that remain real. The first is that ongoing sporadic attacks are seized as a pretext to mobilise by those whose interests are served by ongoing conflict. The second is that a failure to deliver peace dividends leaves some communities with a feeling of no *economic* alternative to raiding, in turn leading to larger retaliatory mobilisations.

The first threat can be mitigated by widening the community ownership of the peace, including – at the appropriate moment – the community leaders in Juba, as well as a rapid on the ground follow-up that keeps channels of communication between the key youth leaders as open as possible.



Photos (top-bottom): combined Murle age sets present dances in Pibor; the official reception in Pieri; side meeting of the key youth leadership in Poktap to discuss timing for the next gathering.



The second calls for steady, highly visible peace dividends that respond to direct requests from the community. These can continue to be rolled out as more structural initiatives develop to sustain development over the longer term. Some of the processes, such as the return of women and children, can be managed across a more measured time frame, if necessary, as long as updates and communication continues to flow between communities. Early gestures will be

necessary, including as part of the follow up meeting in March.

Next steps

Register abductees, reach further into the communities with dissemination. The immediate next steps are focussed around the further dissemination of the peace, especially on the Murle side. This includes visiting cattle camps, the exchange of remaining white flags at border areas, and the fuller recording of children and women abducted to date, in preparation for returns.

Maintain Juba authorising environment. Whilst the armed youth strongly resist the involvement of Juba actors, there remains work to socialise the peace process with key leadership. And within Jonglei, the commitment is somewhat more fragile in sections of the Bor Dinka community, with Ajang Duoot sending a representative on the trip but not attending himself.

Prepare for the 15 March gathering in Pieri. There was an extensive discussion on the date for the next collective gathering. All the leaders recognise that on the Murle side time is needed to reach all the communities and also to register the abducted women and children. Without sufficient progress on this front, all agreed that a further meeting could prove counter-productive. Finally, the three sides agreed on a wider meeting in Pieri starting on 15 March, potentially with a ceremonial component in the border area near Weikol. The meeting will run for 10 days and draw together armed youth, women and elders from all three communities. The meeting has two objectives: first, to provide a forum for truth-telling, especially from the women, and second, to establish a more concrete collective agenda for development.

15-25 Mar 2021

Pieri Action for Peace

Pieri Peace Conference bringing together armed youth leadership, traditional leadership and women's leadership from the three main communities affected by the conflict.

[29 Mar Update] From 15-25 March, traditional and armed youth leaders and women from the Lou Nuer, Murle and Dinka Bor communities met in Pieri to build on the peace process underway since December 2020. The previous phase of the process in early February saw armed youth leaders from the three communities travelling to Pibor, Pieri and Poktap to affirm to communities their commitment to peace. During that visit, they requested a larger meeting that would also include traditional leaders and women.

The agenda for the Conference was in three parts: addressing the impact of the conflict, discussing the shifts that are needed to sustain peace, and identifying the concrete steps to support the implementation of the peace process.

Ritual and symbolism are more critical to the community than written agreements. With Spiritual Leader Dak Kueth assuming leadership of the peace process, the ritual component took greater prominence. Early in the process, the Dinka Bor declined to participate actively in the ritual slaughter of a bull. While they witnessed and verbally affirmed their ongoing commitment to peace, they refused to throw water on the bull, and this was interpreted by the Lou Nuer and the Murle as an equivocation. For more than a day this drove a wedge in the process, as both the Dinka Bor and Dak Kueth insisted that their position be respected.

For the Dinka Bor, the sacrifice was a pagan ritual at odds with their communities' wholesale conversion to Christianity. For Dak Kueth, the ceremony was a unifying ritual where each party could invest in it the meaning of their own faith tradition. He also strongly criticised the Dinka Bor for what he characterised as a double standard: accepting his authority in the attacks against the Murle, but rejecting his authority in unifying ceremonies for peace. The process reached an impasse when Dak Kueth concluded the Dinka Bor were not serious, invited them to return home and declared that the peace Conference would continue between the Murle and Lou Nuer.

After a series of internal discussions and shuttle diplomacy, the Dinka Bor finally accepted to participate fully in a second ceremony, after which the process could continue as planned. The ritual component then culminated in a final ceremony at Dak Kueth's homestead on the morning of Mon 29 March. Inviting the entire conference to his home, Dak Kueth described how one of his white bulls had been struck by lightning the previous night. It lay in the middle of his homestead, as he asked for another bull to be brought to be sacrificed for the peace. Before it was killed, the communities were asked to reaffirm their commitment, and once the bull was dead, the delegates stepped over both bulls as Dak Kueth sprinkled them with water.



Photos: (top) armed youth leaders step over the ritually sacrificed bull; (over page) women's representatives from the three communities meet to discuss resolutions.



As well as the plenary sessions, there were opportunities for the communities to meet amongst themselves to distil responses to questions that had been directed towards them in the larger group. There was also a substantial session where women, youth, and chiefs met separately in inter-communal

groups to discuss the peace and proposals from their particular stakeholder perspective. An extensive set of resolutions emerged, which were subsequently validated in the plenary sessions. They covered the return and reunification of abductees, cattle-related violence, traditional justice and governance mechanisms, the dissemination of the peace and measures to strengthen development.

April-May 2021

Dynamics affecting the PIERI Peace implementation

[05 May Update] The ongoing sporadic attacks in the border areas. These appear to be perpetrated by youths primarily of the kurenen age-set in the border areas of Murleland. It is partly a function of the internal Murle divisions between the age-sets: the pressure from the lango age set that has pushed kurenen away from a number of the towns and villages, as well as the belief among the latter that it is their entitlement to accumulate their wealth and status in the same way as the age sets before them. More broadly, there is a perception that the current ongoing raids are restitution for the losses suffered in the 2020 offensives of the Lou Nuer and Dinka Bor.

The thefts and violence on the roads, particularly between Gadiang and Manyabol. Whilst these have been serious, their incidence has been exaggerated in many reports. In the one case where two people were killed, this was because the driver refused to stop. In general, the youths are stealing personal belongings and cash and allowing vehicles to proceed. Government-instituted escorts have helped in some measure. Although the rate of violence is overall relatively low, the narrative on the Lou Nuer side is that they are being attacked and killed 'daily'.

Mobilisation of the Gawaar Nuer youth under the spiritual leader, Makuach. This is a dynamic that has been developing for some months. Following failed attempts to persuade Makuach, he began moving towards Murleland, hoping to mobilise support from Lou and Dinka Bor on the way. This support has not been forthcoming and on arrival around Gadiang on Sunday 2 May, he had still not found allies to attack. The information has reached the Murle side, a number of villages have been evacuated of people and cattle, and the youth are prepared for an attack. (This dimension of the conflict is no longer linked to the perception among the Ayod community that they were not properly included in the Peace Process. This has been addressed directly with the community and they are now engaged positively.)

Ongoing children and women reunification process. On all sides, after the initial confidence and trust that was built, the process has slowed. This is partly as a result of issues on the ground in the management of the process, and partly as a result of the increasing insecurity and uncertainty. Nonetheless, the process is continuing and more women

and children are arriving for registration on all three sides, as well as some proactive identification driven by the youth leaders and authorities on the Dinka Bor side. If there can be an exchange between Dinka Bor and Murle soon, it will build further confidence in that relationship, and will also pave the way for further returns between Lou Nuer and Murle, without further perceptions of bias in the process.

POF activities

Greater Akobo. From 19-23 April, the Bor and Akobo Advisors travelled to Pieri and through Duk and Ayod (Ayod, Pathai, Riang, Pagak, Pajut, Patuet, Yuai) with a team of community mobilisers, youth leaders, and a representative from the Jonglei Ministry of Peacebuilding. This included attempts over two days to reach Makuach directly, but by this stage he was deep in the bush. The focus instead was on the Ayod community more generally and the perceptions of exclusion from the process to date. This was successful, and the community are prepared to engage with the ongoing process.

Unrest was increasing among the wider youth of Lou Nuer in response to the ongoing sporadic raids and road incidents, and so on 23 April POF deployed three further personnel to Pieri to meet with Dak Kueth, authorities and armed youth to restore some confidence and share clear and accurate updates from the Greater Pibor side. The team held two meetings with Dak Kueth, as well as a number of informal engagements with Liliy, Thor Bolith (youth leaders), and the authorities. The situation was more stable after some days, before the Gawaar situation intensified.

Greater Pibor. At the same time, POF's Pibor Advisor and Areas Manager were in Gumuruk, Pibor and then travelling up to Kottome, where a second set of raided cattle had been intercepted. On the instructions of the Chief Administrator, these were despatched back towards Uror, in coordination with the authorities on the Uror side.

As of Monday 3 May, the situation remains unstable:

- The location of the Gawaar youth is unconfirmed, but reports they were returning to Ayod appear incorrect; rather, they are advancing into Murle territory.
- The threat of an attack from Gawaar has also interrupted the return of cattle, as youth prepare to defend their communities. This will likely clarify in the next 48 hours.
- Lou and Dinka Bor youth leaders are still rejecting any Gawaar attempts to mobilise them.

Activities in the field over the next two weeks will focus on monitoring and supporting positive dividends of the peace; in particular supporting coordination of cattle returns. In Juba, the conversation will focus on collaboration around medium term follow-up activities, including the structures envisaged in the Pieri Action for Peace.

Peacebuilding principles

Through the process that is outlined above, and learning discussions along the way, the POF team has distilled 10 peacebuilding principles relevant to the engagement in Greater Jonglei:

1 Situating dialogue in a process: dialogue events should only be supported if they are part of a systematic process with clear accountability mechanisms.

There are myriad dialogue events across South Sudan on a regular basis. Often these are not situated as part of a longer-term process, with material support only provided by peace partners for specific peace dialogue events. Whatever monitoring mechanisms may be agreed in theory, in practice there are no resources for implementation and invariably the next dialogue will be in response to further violence, and so the cycle continues. At each stage of the process in this Greater Jonglei engagement, the more prominent milestones (the spear ceremony, the Rumbek Dialogue, the Pieri Conference) are necessary but insufficient engagements. There have been dynamics in each case after the events that would likely have led to a larger mobilisation without the sustained engagement on the ground.

2 Engaging those directly responsible for initiating violence: the risks of engagement with armed actors need to be overcome.

In our work both in Western Lakes and in Jonglei, we have found the prevailing narrative singularly describes armed youth leaders as criminals and perpetrators of human rights violations. Focussing on this dimension tends to characterise them as a problem to mitigate rather than exploring the possibility they could make a substantively positive contribution to the peace. In both contexts, and in most (but not all) individual cases, we have found that the line between violence-oriented choices and peace-oriented choices is more fluid than it is perceived externally, generally linked to an economic choice. There is agreement on the need to engage the key actors; too often this ends up being only the key actors we like.

3 Working through traditional structures, practices and leadership: prioritising and valuing traditional conflict management mechanisms at the community level.

There needs to be a locally-guided balance of tradition, modern religion and the modern state. Some have viewed this as mutual exclusive. The role of Barchoch Lual and the Red Chief line, Dak Kueth and the legacy of Wundeng, as well as the strong influence of modern religion on the Dinka Bor side are all factors in community perception of peace initiatives, as well as the level of commitment to any agreements. Agreements need to identify the locally meaningful signs of commitment. These will rarely – if ever – involve a written document. Documents can be included as a supplement for a literate audience, but the traditional practices should be central; for example, the spear ceremony that launched this current process, the killing of the white bull, and so on. Processes need to mediate the diversity of these rituals and the associated belief systems. As the narrative of the Pieri Conference shows, it was not substantive issues that proved the primary point of contention, but the ritual ceremonies themselves.

A key consideration here is also the role of women, who are culturally not given a central leadership role in the traditional structures. And whilst the traditional structures can resolve issues if empowered to do so, the remedies can perpetuate structural violence against women, particularly when the issues relate to resolving cases of abduction, forced marriage, and gender based violence. The process of integrating women's voices meaningfully into the traditionally male-dominated structures is likely to be slow and incremental. However, this is not the only strategy. Based on the suggestions of the women themselves, and the emerging effectiveness of groups

such as the *kabarze* in the Murle community, POF is working to create separate forums for women to build confidence and formulate strategic approaches to influencing male dominated spaces. When these women's spaces are accompanied with connecting points into those male-dominated spaces, our impression is that considerable progress can be made, even whilst the visible structures remain ostensibly male-dominated.

4 Addressing historical memory: dialogue is more effective where there is a structured element of dealing with the past.

Among all actors, there is a deep need for psycho-social support. This needs to include victims and perpetrators. Our programme's impression is that one-off output-driven trauma healing workshops or trauma awareness training has limited results, unless it is linked to longer term engagement. POF has only addressed a small part of this need, situating truth-telling centrally in dialogue processes and creating space for personal experiences and impact to be shared. This has been sufficient for actors to move into a new phase of peacebuilding engagement, but does not fundamentally address the broader psycho-social needs. Symbolic reconciliation is also central, and needs to happen through traditional practices and leadership. While the Greater Jonglei engagement has created some effective space for sharing the impact of conflict, and has also created important connection points for humanising the adversary, the full legacy of conflict remains largely unaddressed at this stage of the process. It has also become clear that the women often play a more natural role in the sharing of impact around conflict, whereas men tend to focus more on the attribution of blame. This underlines in yet another way the importance of creating spaces for women in the unfolding process.

5 Learning from other relevant South Sudanese experiences and traditions: despite contextual differences there is value in sharing dialogue experiences across locations.

We have focussed on distilling principles from different locations that can provide a lens for exploring similar issues elsewhere. That said, we have encountered one key pitfall in wider peace programming: attempting to transpose a programme design directly from one location to another, and believing it is possible to short-cut the process for arriving at the design and neglecting the trustbuilding steps that are indispensable to community ownership. Importantly, trust is not built through one-off 'community consultations' or 'participatory workshops' but through an iterative process of engagement among equals. The approach we are taking in Greater Jonglei has ended up with many features that are similar to our Dinka Agar engagement, but we still had to go through all the steps to build the relationships of trust on the ground. Nonetheless, the opportunities to share experiences across those contexts has been useful. The way in which the *galweng* of the Dinka Agar observed and contributed to the Rumbek Dialogue between Dinka Bor and Murle armed youth leaders was mutually beneficial in this way – reinforcing for the *galweng* the direction of the process they had been part of for some months by that point, as well as giving a more relatable reference point to the armed youth from Greater Jonglei.

6 Responding flexibly and rapidly as the context changes: inflexible activity programming, often based on traditional logframe approaches, will invariably fail.

The process of consolidating a negative peace is not complicated, but does require political engagement and ability to respond quickly to emerging opportunities. From the POF exploratory phase, whilst plenty of indications were identified of what would not work, it was less clear what exactly would work. Ultimately, it was a question of sustained engagement and being ready to respond when an appropriate opportunity arose. In this case, it was a meeting with Dak Kueth which then precipitated a chain of opportunities: the first on a two-week horizon, the second two and half weeks (aborted at the last minute); the third after another two weeks, and the fourth after a further two weeks. Critically, each step was a function of the confidence and trust built, and was identified by the interlocuters themselves, so could not be pre-programmed. This may be seen by

some as an outlier approach to peacebuilding programming, whereas we consider it should be more and more the essence of effective peacebuilding. Following the sporadic attacks after the Pieri Conference, Dak Kueth indicated at one point that if there were not tangible signs of others' continued commitment within five days, he would not hold back the youth from mobilising. We were able to deploy a team within this timeframe to work with the communities on both the Lou Nuer and Murle side to navigate these dynamics and the rhetoric returned to a relative calm.

7 Transparency and clarity with communities: ensuring that communication with communities is clear about what is and is not possible, and wherever a commitment is made, following through on that commitment.

There is a high level of scepticism within communities towards externally led interventions. In our conversations, a significant element of this is a perception of historical unmet expectations and unkept promises. In some cases, the challenges in delivery are understandable, but too often actors don't take the time to communicate that message clearly back to the affected communities. Often, but not always, POF has done this well. In the case of the Pieri Conference, there were considerable challenges as a result of a failure to manage Lou Nuer community expectations properly, particularly in terms of the resources available for Lou Nuer community members who were not part of the official delegation to the Conference, but were chosen by the community to observe the proceedings. A message had been communicated, but had not been discussed sufficiently that there was a shared understanding among the key authorities on the ground.

8 Working with trusted local partners: taking time to understand and triangulate the dynamics of the local actors, then working closely alongside those who can facilitate entry points.

Lack of collaboration on the ground undermines progress. The territoriality that external actors often perceive amongst South Sudanese institutions is sometimes replicated between international peace partners. POF could not have made progress without careful investment in collaboration with local partners, spiritual and traditional leaders, with State and National Government actors, the Ministry in Juba, and with other international agencies. A key frustration has been witnessing situations where another peace actor has not shared plans, or has attempted an intervention that could be more effective through a collaborative approach. Much more can be achieved beyond simple information sharing, so that activities of different actors are mutually visible, but this minimum standard can avoid pitfalls in the wider process.

9 Keeping the external politics at an appropriate distance: maintaining an authorising environment through engagement with elites and government; keeping them updated, but maintaining ownership at the community level.

The external politics are both enmeshed in the local dynamics and distant from it. We have encountered a growing realisation among armed actors that they have been instrumentalised by elites; in main towns, in Juba and in the diaspora. The local communities are now increasingly adamant that the process must be led at the community level, and this higher level interference is strongly resisted. As described in the narrative above, we have experienced both the power of the elites to sabotage activities, as well as the power of the local communities to ensure activities go ahead even with resistance from some elites.

10 Taking a 'system' view of peace dividends and focussing on community priorities: progress in social relationships can only be sustainable with the realisation of substantive peace dividends, and the community may weigh factors in unexpected ways.

In the follow-up to the Pieri Conference, the centrality to confidence and trust building of the return of women and children who have been abducted has been categorical. In the popular narrative, the primacy of cattle to the communities is often emphasised. Yet since the Pieri Conference, it has

been clear in POF's analysis that the ongoing return of women and children can be perceived as a sufficient dividend to hold back agitation of youth to mobilise for raiding. In one case, a Lou Nuer armed youth leader who was called by satellite phone to discuss the implications of an ad hoc raid against his community (which the POF team considered might be taken as a pretext for mobilisation), made clear that they were busy celebrating the return of women and children and they would return their attention to those more material issues in due course.

Nonetheless, materially speaking, the armed youth leaders themselves have bluntly presented their dilemma to us: among other things, cattle raiding is their economic activity. In this sense, their commitment to peace is provisional and subject to visible signs of economic progress where they can see a viable activity for themselves. The status of some youth leaders, derived from raiding, also needs to be factored into negotiations; they need to feel that future benefits are commensurate or superior to both the material and social capital they realise through raiding.