

A local approach to peace in Torit, south Sudan

by Jeannie Annan and Christine Pagen

While the Comprehensive Peace Agreement is the foundation on which Sudan can grow as a peaceful nation, there is an urgent need to complement institutional reforms with sustainable bottom-up approaches to peace. A school in eastern Equatoria is showing the way.

Although education for peace is now integrated into post-emergency programming¹, some initiatives have been criticised for being superficial, Western-based and failing to engage with the participants' specific environment. Education is more likely to help develop attitudes and skills that make a lasting contribution to a culture of peace when the impetus comes from local initiatives.

St Kizito Primary School, a boarding school run by the Catholic Diocese of Torit, is an anomaly in southern Sudan. Not only does the school seek to educate all children in the surrounding area but it also has a vision beyond mere literacy and numeracy. As Sister Paskwina, a Sudanese Catholic nun who founded the school in 2000, explains:

"We wanted to start a school where children came from different areas, different ethnic groups. We have had problems in this region with fighting among ourselves and we wanted children to come together and learn how to live together in peace. We started with nothing. Now we have 1,500 children."

why we stay together when we are enemies. People can only change their minds about this through education."

Sister Paskwina describes how one ethnic group was planning to raid the cattle of another but aborted the attack on realising that both they and their intended victims had recently started sending their children to live together at St Kizito. Despite this success, however, mistrust of northern Sudanese and other ethnic groups, cattle raiding and violence are still endemic. Tackling the region's chronic insecurity will take time and will require law enforcement and economic growth.

Despite increased media awareness of Sudan's needs, donor support for schools in southern Sudan has diminished recently. Concerned about sustainability, many will not fund salaries or training. St Kizito and other schools have to work tirelessly to raise external support for basic operating costs. This year teachers have gone six months without salaries. Lack of food threatened to prematurely end the school term. The school charges a mere \$15 per year

for tuition, room and board but only a third of the families can afford this fee. Many of the students are orphans or unaccompanied minors.

St Kizito school does not necessarily provide a formula to be replicated but is showing how a group of determined people can work together to provide education for their children and work for slow but meaningful change in the community. The challenges they face show that this and other grassroots initiatives in southern Sudan require sustained international assistance in order to forge supportive partnerships for peace. In the words of a student: "We study in the middle of war and still do as well as those who study in peace. Tell people we need their support. We would really like to go to university after all this struggle."

Jeannie Annan, a consultant with Association of Volunteers in International Service (AVSI)², is a PhD candidate at Indiana University. Email: jannan@indiana.edu. Christine Pagen is completing a PhD at Columbia University. Email: Cmp2106@columbia.edu For more information about St Kizito Primary School, or to offer support, email: communication.kampala@avsi.org

1. See: 'Peace education: why and how?' by Pamela Baxter and Vick Ikobwa, FMR22 www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR22/FMR2213.pdf

2. www.avsi-usa.org

Bullet holes riddle the façade of this school in south Sudan.

St Kizito and the other diocese schools do not have a specific peace curriculum or run conflict resolution clubs. Their intuitive approach is based on the principle, familiar to social psychologists, that trust can be built among groups who collaborate and work together and that stereotypes can be changed by prolonged contact with members from another group.

"There are 24 different ethnic groups in the school and we get along together. We go home with each other for holidays. We dance each other's traditional dances. People ask us

