

# WHEN THERE IS PEACE, THERE IS FOOD

## Local Churches Leading Peacebuilding Efforts and Providing Social Services

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Since its 2011 independence, South Sudan has never truly known peace. Despite its oil wealth, South Sudan is among the world's poorest countries where 8 out of 10 people live on less than \$1 a day.

Although it has fertile regions, landlocked South Sudan is among four countries that are suffering from historic near famine conditions. Nearly 20 million people in Yemen, Somalia, northeastern Nigeria, and South Sudan are facing famine due to drought and war.

"Bullets and guns will not restore South Sudan," said Bishop Joseph Garang Atem, Episcopal bishop of the Diocese of Renk. "We have thousands of acres of fertile land, but we need help to cultivate them and grow our own food."

The county of Renk, located on the banks of the White Nile River, has been largely spared from much of the famine and violence that are ongoing in other parts of South Sudan. It is a multi-ethnic region and is home to thousands of internally displaced persons who have fled fighting and famine. Despite this, it remains one of the most productive agricultural regions of South Sudan.

"Our farmers are growing sorghum, millet, sesame, and sunflower and are exporting them," Atem said. He added that Renk could feed the whole country—if access to quality seeds, extension services, training, and irrigation were supported.

The World Food Program and the Food and Agriculture Organization report that South Sudan's 2015 net cereal production of 921,000 tons was 16 percent higher than the average production in the previous five years.

Helping traditional farmers and others in South Sudan is difficult. South Sudan is the world's most dangerous country for humanitarian aid workers. Yet, foreign aid remains critical to South Sudan's future. The United States, through the

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), is the biggest foreign assistance donor. In 2017, American taxpayers provided more than \$740 million worth of projects, most of it to ease the near famine conditions and provide food.

But we know that efforts to boost food production and improve nutrition must go hand-in-hand with peace building and reconciliation.

In the largely Christian South Sudan, which is about the size of Texas, local churches are leading peacebuilding and social services efforts with support from USAID, other country donors and some U.S. churches. The Episcopal Diocese of Renk, for example, has a formal partnership with the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago and the Diocese of Virginia, which includes the historic Christ Church in Alexandria, Va.

Women are critical to South Sudan's future and they are being trained to be peacemakers and to start small businesses.

"One woman approached me one day and told me, 'Bishop I now have money, and if you need help, just come to me for a loan,'" Atem said. "They also conduct reconciliation meetings with soldiers in local villages or in their barracks because mothers are traditionally greatly respected in South Sudan. They can 'command' their rebel sons to drop their guns."

Local solutions led by church leaders and women will make the difference in South Sudan.

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—Bishop Joseph Garang Atem,  
Episcopal bishop  
of the Diocese of Renk.

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