

Learning Snapshot:

Protection

When the Hatchet was Buried for Peaceful Co-existence in Uganda and South Sudan

Background

Jane, a single mother in the Palabek Refugee Settlement, rises each day with the weight of responsibility. Her five-hour journey to fetch water consumes time she could use to cultivate her small plot of land or guide her children through their studies. Jane's story mirrors the struggles faced by displacement-affected persons (DAPs), underscoring the urgency of initiatives like the COMPASS project.

Similarly, Mohammed, a farmer from the Eastern Equatoria State of South Sudan, has witnessed the transformation brought about by the cross-border peace agreement facilitated through COMPASS. For years, his community faced violent conflicts, limiting access to fertile land. Now, for the first time, Mohammed feels secure enough to cross the border freely, accessing land for farming without fear. Likewise, Amina, a youth leader in the border district of Lamwo in Northern Uganda, organizes cultural competitions to bridge gaps between host and refugee communities, fostering peaceful co-existence and safety.

The Project

The [COMPASS project](#), implemented over 30 months in Northern Uganda and South Sudan, focused on improving livelihoods, promoting safety, and ensuring access to basic services for DAPs. Its impact is tangible. At baseline, only 9% of participants felt safe. By the endline, this increased to 21.4%, with 71.2% reporting they felt either "safe" or "very safe," surpassing project targets. Knowledge of human rights improved by 6.9%, with 80.8% of respondents expressing confidence in their understanding of rights and safety. This transformation was largely driven by youth- and women-led peacebuilding interventions and sustained cross-border dialogues.

For Jane, these changes mean fewer days spent fearing for her family's safety. Improved infrastructure and community engagement allow her children to attend school regularly. Mohammed now sees his yields increasing, enabling him to support his family. Amina, empowered through training, leads efforts to maintain harmony between refugees and host communities.



Youths in a cultural dance at a cross-border dialogue on the border of Uganda and South Sudan

Yet challenges persist. Some men in the community feel that rights-based interventions disrupt traditional norms, creating tensions within households. In South Sudan, inconsistent access to services and volatile security continue to hinder progress. Still, the overall trend is hopeful. Happiness levels, as measured by the Oxford Happiness Index, rose from a mean score of 2.37 to 2.57. Improved access to healthcare, education, and vocational training further enhanced community resilience.

The COMPASS project highlights the power of integrated, community-driven solutions. Expanding financial inclusion, fostering inclusivity in peacebuilding, and scaling successful interventions like cross-border agreements are critical next steps. By investing in these initiatives, we can amplify stories like Jane's, Mohammed's, and Amina's; ensuring that DAPs find safety, empowerment, and happiness in their daily lives.