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Empowerment Builds Capacity for Stronger, Healthier Communities

Hailing from Kajo Keji in South Sudan, Diiko Juspine is a 19-year-old kuku girl whose life reveals a sad past. Growing up as a helpless girl was one of the most challenging occurrences of events in life. The girl child requires a lot of support and guidance from their parents unlucky for Juspine she did not get the opportunity.

At age 14 - the South Sudan civil war broke up between the ruling government and the opposition in 2013. She got separated from her parents. With one of her uncles who picked her up and fled with her to Uganda to seek refuge in 2016 where they settled in Zone 3 of Palorinya Refugee settlement in Obongi District, over 180 km away from home. Juspine who had so much desire for education joined school in kali primary school but could not sustain her stay in school. Besides dealing with the mysterious separation from her parents which downed on her as a painful experience filled with sleepless nights and traumatic days. The overwhelming household responsibilities and the fast development of her body made it very difficult for her continue with education hence dropping out.



Diiko Juspine and her son in her Refugee homestead in Zone 3 of Palorinya Refugee Settlement.

After two years, the young girl reunited with her parents in the same settlement. This happened at a time when she was already married to her South Sudanese husband (*anonymous*) - who she thought was her savior little did she know that he was adding to her stress factors. Together with him they gave birth to their son Emmanuel when she was 18 years. Before the son could barely make one year of age, she conceived her second born.

“I got married because I did not know what to do because life was very difficult, I felt I needed someone to share my problems with.” - Juspine Diiko during a monitoring visit in 2021.

To Diiko, this was a traumatizing experience - she was not ready for the second born but the husband insisted. In the community, among her peers, in her family she lost the respect, self esteem dropped and to make matters worse her friends started keeping a distance from her. Already in conflicts with her husband - no proper communication, negative attitude developed towards her. The poor girl could not access health services for her first son from Belle Health Centre III because she delivered outside of the health facility - a practice prohibited by the Ministry of Health. Furthermore, she needed antenatal services for the unborn baby but could not because of the fear.

In January, 2021 Rural Initiative Community Empowerment West Nile launched a project titled ‘Program for Adolescents and Children’s Education and Social empowerment (PACES)’ that aims at ensuring ‘*Children in primary school and out of school adolescents in Uganda have access to formal and non-formal education*’. This Program has 5 thematic areas namely; Bonga, Early Childhood and Education, Technical Vocational Education Training, Community Managed Savings Group and Psychosocial support.

The project is implemented in Zone 3 of paloriyna refugee settlement in Obongi district targeting the children, mothers, fathers, adolescent boys and girls, youth. Diiko Juspine participated in an awareness campaign on the project in March, 2021 during which she got to know about the opportunity that the project was offering to girls in her walk of life. She got interested and further consulted through the Refugee Welfare Council One of her village on how to get access to the project team.

The same year, she was considered for support under one of the thematic areas i.e., Bonga where she joined St. Emmanuel Bonga Centre in Zone 3. The project works through counselors under one thematic area of Psychosocial Support who frequently visited the center to offer counseling services to the rights holders. The few sessions held in the center on life skills gave Juspine the courage to approach the counselors in private and open up on her issues.

The psychosocial support offered to her made her look at life in a different way - she started to look at the positive side of every problem that she faces. She dealt away with the stress; she got the courage to visit Belle HC III for antennal care as well as acquiring an immunization card for her child - the referral from RICE West Nile made the process easier for the young lady. Upon self-reflection, she talked to the husband and both resorted to living peacefully as a family under one roof.

“The counselor was very kind, understood me clearly encouraged me to look at the positive side of everything...” - Juspine Diiko during monitoring visit by

Juspine’s story is one of the inspirational stories of the programme. Juspine hopes that the programme can reach and support more girls to have a shot at life. To her there are many girls in the settlement living her walk of life.

End of Story.