

Report of my time in South Sudan, 15.-22. April 2023

2023: I am invited by the Swiss consulate to offer a NVC workshop: first for the staff of the consulate and in the second part for different NGO's working all over in South Sudan, like UNFPA, Red Cross, FAO, Nonviolent Peace Force, Plan International, Peace Canal, Care, Peace and development, Whitaker Initiative, Church, and more – so many organizations which include the word peace or nonviolent in their name and never heard about NVC. I am very astonished, because for me the basis of the needs is missing. NVC was new to all of them.

We started the workshop off with the 4 corners game (a game to distinguish between needs and strategies) and participants walked around engaging in it even before they had had time to take their seats. After one minute they were laughing. Any possible tension was gone. This was expressed in one feedback as well: no line up of chairs, no screen, just an activity – light and easy for everyone to go with.

In the further introduction the people were asked to respond to this question by filling the blank : If you are president of this country what would you do? Answers in the following sequence were: take care of the **security** of my country, improve the **economic situation** and raise the level of **education** and **move freely**. They introduced themselves as sisters and brothers, even a general or director of the organization.

My thoughts on this:

- Even to our workshop the National Security sent one man to attend the workshop without announcing it beforehand. Only with the power of the Swiss consulate and an one hour talk could we avoid his presence. (protection of autonomy and privacy for all us and participants!)
- One pp avoided talking about his experience even in our circle. He was afraid of any later retribution.

Life situations shared by the participants:

- A 12-year-old boy was forced by soldiers to eat 5 cups of raw beans mixed with soil.
- Young girls were arrested for 3 days over Christmas with no food and a fine afterwards for wearing trousers.
- A young man (participant in the workshop) took up these girls voices in the respective community and was arrested subsequently.
- In South Sudan the practice of blood compensation is changed to child compensation: if one member of family A is killed by one member of family B, then someone from B must give a child to A. No more blood (killing) nor money is exchanged, they take a child. "And this child is supposed to be raised in obedience, beaten, raped, used as a servant."
- Child marriages are very usual, especially in the rural areas.
- One girl refused to be married, they took her into the forest and took out her eyes. She is now safe in a hospital in Juba.

I invited two of my "Ruhpolding family" members - that I have been in connection with for many years and who are both on their way to certification - to this training as assistants: Mubarak Alhassan from Ghana and Joseph Bazirake from Uganda. They confirmed spontaneously and lead different sessions on their own with enthusiasm. Mubarak stated that he had never had a chance like this, and both said that this togetherness and our exchanges helped them to gain more learning insights and they gained a lot of self-confidence. This is how I like supporting people from the global South.

I thank Puddle Dancer for their support in e-books. This allowed the participants to prepare and to have a better insight themselves. Some asked for more NVC literature.

Some feedbacks from the participants:

- I wish I had this training 10 years before. I would have been able to contribute to the quarrel of South Sudan youth who are killing themselves without knowing there is a way they could solve their ways peacefully.
- I have consulted many books to improve my communication skills, but none had an influence and impact on my communication like this NVC training, bravo!
- I am listened to – my expectations are fulfilled.
- I am worth it and will take care of myself.
- Role plays reflect real life – (we tried to take use their examples of lived situations).
- High level to have learned: patience, humility and self-confidence like in no other place before.
- Day 1 she was skeptical, called it "non peace violence", next day: curious and will continue.
- Need is not an English word anymore; it has a deep meaning to me.

- If all of us would know NVC, we would not have a problem in this country.
- I feel empowered by this fundamental knowledge.
- You are not leaving anything behind (we collected their points through an inquiry ahead of the workshop)
- NVC was not presented, we played it, lived it for this short period of time, even concerning the use of the mobile phones during the session.
- This is a flexible training, and everybody seems to be accepted and involved.
- I sense love and empowered confidence to learn more.
- What I learned is a way of life, NVC can create a safe space for everyone.
- NVC is a language with great impact in the society. The world will be with less hate speech and less violence.
- ... need this training in the beginning of every project.
- This is enriching in peacebuilding.
- I learned from the animal about the responses (4 ears).
- “Am very grateful, for the three joyful days we spent together, the more importantly, I came and get connected to so many faces across South Sudan and which was not possible to happen but through the opportunity of NVC training made it possible. Mrs. Gitta and Mr. Joe , Mubarak, am really excited ! I learn that this just a beginning and not the end. Gitta, thank you for all the massive work you put together, specially the way all the exercise was carried out and training procedures ensuring materials are made simple and quick to learn from, your humble confidants, incredible experience – all are appreciated. I wishes you all the best and hope to meet again.”

The most exciting feedback for me was: At the beginning only half of the participants planned to come on our last day, because this was an official holiday. At the end, all participated except 2; they were in the field. I celebrate the power of NVC in our togetherness.

My impressions about South Sudan:

Only one street downtown in Juba is paved, all others are muddy or dusty. They have **no water system** neither drink nor sewage. The drinking water is carried by trucks from the Nile, slightly treated. It is a rumor that the next possible president might relocate the **capital city** to the middle of South Sudan because he is born there. Therefore, external aid avoids any financial support in the **infrastructure**. If the infrastructure would be stable, **investors** would come to invest in this country. South Sudan has as a **natural resource, oil**. So bottom line, it could be a country with access to basics for all inhabitants. There is supposed to be a small group of people who take care of themselves and collect he income from the oil. (equality) “The country is not poor, it is poorly managed.” This is a quote of one participant of the workshop.

- Some young men on the streets walk around with a **gun in their trousers waistband**. I am scared. (reliability)
- Policemen take out car drivers and check the car until the find any little irregularity and then fine them. On a 5 min. way, I saw it about 3 times. I got mad, because instead of arbitrariness I like openness and respect for each other.
- The members of the different NGO’s fly to the field work, because it is not safe to go by car.
- People are living in simple **huts or in the cemetery**.
- Livestock rustle is very common and in big amounts, including killing each other with spears or guns. (Herds are up to 1000)
- Parents send their children to beg into the streets.
- Because of the past civil war, the population seems to be weak, therefore diseases like Malaria, can be deadly.
- Since the civil war in 2013 the illiteracy rose to about 75 % (a quote from one pp). Many children live on the streets as orphans or are displaced or became child soldiers.
- There are conflicts between Muslims and Christians. Christians don’t have rights in a satisfying amount.
- 72 % of the people are between 15-35 years old (a quote from one pp) – what a human resource!

My presence in South Sudan was exhausting, emotionally and physically, (39 degree Celsius) and at the same time I was deeply satisfied, because we could spread some NVC seeds.

Gitta Zimmermann April 2023