



# MRDA Update

Change agent for the community

MAY 2011

## CONFLICT RESOLUTION

MUNDRI

SOUTH SUDAN

INSIDE THIS  
ISSUE:

FROM THE 2  
DIRECTOR'S DESK

MICROFINANCE 3

GENDER ISSUES 4

CHILD-FRIENDLY 5  
INITIATIVES

CAPACITY 6  
BUILDING

CIVIC EDUCATION 7

MRDA CONTACTS 8

## Progress as Key Resolutions are implemented



Western Equatoria Deputy Governor H.E. Hon Sapana A. Abuyi (Second from left) is flanked by MRDA Executive Director Light W. Aganwa, WOYE MFI General Manager Gobindo Chakravartty and MRDA HIV/Aids Project Officer May Kilemeko at his office in Yambio on May 25.

By Moses Bukachi

Progress is being reported on the implementation of nine resolutions that were reached in April by delegates from Western Equatoria State and Lakes State during a reconciliation workshop that was organized by MRDA to come up with a plan that would help bring to an end cross-border clashes that have since February raged between the Jur commu-

nity of Mvolo County and their neighboring Dinka Atuot community of Yirol West County.

MRDA Update has learned that in mid-May, a key resolution was fulfilled when a contingent of security personnel drawn from the JIU was dispatched to the conflict zone to act as a buffer between the two communities following requests from both the Governors of Lakes State and Western Equatoria. It is understood

that the deployment of the soldiers has significantly helped to bring a sense of security among area residents and internally displaced persons of both Mvolo and Yirol West counties which bore the brunt of the tribal clashes.

Another key resolution involving the provision of humanitarian assistance to the displaced is said to have been partially fulfilled when the United Nations World

(Continued on page 2)

## Let's Make the Most of Available Opportunities

By Light W. Aganwa



Light Wilson  
Aganwa, MRDA  
Executive Director.

As director of MRDA, I often get a strong sense of fulfilment whenever I see positive trends that are the outcome of our work amongst the people of South Sudan. Being a development agency, MRDA is driven by strong ethos of public service as is seen in our mission statement which reads: *to work with the communities of South Sudan to improve their livelihoods while addressing the root causes of poverty and injustice.*

But alongside this sense of fulfilment, I am often beset by a nagging sense of despair whenever I see our people underutilizing available opportunities that could easily turn around their lives and place them on the fast track to social and economic advancement.

What I mean to say in short is that our people need to rise to the occasion and make the most of the available developmental opportunities.

Take for instance education. There exists a universal consensus that education, and particularly girl-child education is one of the crucial ingredients for a country's economic growth and sustainable development. Now that MRDA with the help of partners has brought this service to your door step, are you making the most of it?

Microfinance has often been extolled as a panacea for poverty alleviation and as a vehicle for improvement of human welfare. This has time and again been proven to be true in many parts of the world where both women and the youth have risen from obscurity to become key actors in socio-economic and even political development of

those areas. Which begs the question: are we maximizing our very own WOYE MFI?

As a gender-sensitive organization we have not overlooked the need to promote equity. We have made great efforts to empower you in this area and we feel that the ball is now in your court. Will you arise to the occasion?

Space will not permit me to outline all that MRDA has done with the help of partners, but one overriding factor that we cannot afford to ignore is that sustainable development cannot be achieved without sustainable peace. On this note, I take this opportunity to appeal to all stakeholders to rally together and see to it that the nine resolutions that were made during the April reconciliation workshop in Mundri involving Mvolo and Yirol West counties are implemented.

### Progress as key resolutions are implemented

(Continued from page 1)

Food Programme (WFP) brought food stuff to the IDPs. The resolution calls for the participation of the state governments, NGOs, the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management and people of goodwill to provide such assistance for a period of six months.

Meanwhile the executive director of MRDA, who has actively played a mediatory

role, shuttling between the capitals of the two states, submitted on May 25 a comprehensive report of the April workshop to the Deputy Governor of Western Equatoria H.E. Hon Sapana A. Abuyi, the Minister for Local Government and Law Enforcement Hon. Wilson Sadiq and to the Deputy Speaker of the state's legislative assembly Hon. Stephen Kayanga in Yambio. During the meetings, the executive director briefed

them of his plan to submit the same document to the Governor and Speaker of Lakes State and to continue advocating for the implementation of the remaining resolutions.

The leaders in turn briefed him of steps the government had taken to help bring to an end the conflict and assured him of their continual support throughout the implementation of the peace plan.

**More to come...**

## Shot in the Arm for WOYE MFI as SSMDf Approves USD 172,378 in Funding

By Moses Bukachi

In a significant development, the Southern Sudan Microfinance Development Facility (SSMDf) has approved a funding request by WOYE MFI totaling USD 172,378.

The deal, which is designed to enhance WOYE MFI's operational efficiency and to grow its clientele base among the rural poor, was sealed in Juba at the SSMDf offices on March 28, 2011 in the presence of the SSMDf team led by Mr. Joseph N. Buyondo (Team Leader), WOYE MFI Board Chairman James Smith, Vice Chairperson Milly Gabriel, Board Member and MRDA's Executive Director Light Wilson Aganwa, and WOYE MFI General Manager Gobindo Chakravartty.

The funding agreement has two components: a Technical Assistance Grant worth USD 72,378 and a Soft Loan to the tune of USD 100,000. While the grant is earmarked for the purchase of equipment, automation of operations, training of staff members, and development of a new business plan; WOYE MFI intends to use the soft loan to expand its microfinance business among the rural community of Greater Mundri.

Meanwhile, the General Manager of WOYE MFI Mr. Gobindo Chakravartty has exuded confidence about the future of WOYE MFI saying it was on track to achieving self sustenance. While speaking during a recent interview, the WOYE MFI boss revealed that only three microfinance institutions in South Sudan, among them WOYE MFI, had successfully applied for funding from SSMDf in 2011. He said the funds would be released in four tranches on a quarterly basis.

"With adequate funding support and improvement of operational systems,



It was all smiles at the SSMDf offices in Juba as SSMDf Team Leader Joseph N. Buyondo (in Maroon shirt) handed over a copy of the funding agreement to WOYE MFI Chairman Mr. James Smith as MRDA director (left), WOYE MFI General Manager (centre) and WOYE MFI Vice Chair (Right) and SSMDf staff looked on.

WOYE MFI will be capable of reaching many clients and growing its portfolio," he said.

"WOYE's performance is set to improve in its 3 year business plan. The Institution is set to reach Operating Self Sufficiency (OSS) of about 139% by 2013, becoming sustainable in the second year (2012) with OSS of 131%. The total asset base is set to increase by about 81% in the third year, with net portfolio growing by 77% from SDG 0.4 million in 2010 to SDG 2.5 million in 2013," he added.

Since it began its operations in 2007, WOYE MFI has disbursed a total of SDG 1,577,000 in loans to its Greater Mundri clients.

In March 2011, WOYE MFI inaugurated a new office in Mvolo County and recruited two new staff members as credit officers who are natives of the

area. At present, WOYE MFI has a total of 1, 215 active members.

### Who is SSMDf?

*The Southern Sudan Microfinance Development Facility (SSMDf) is a joint initiative of the Government of South Sudan, the Multi Donor Trust Fund and the Bank of South Sudan. It was established to champion the emergence of a strong and sustainable microfinance sector in South Sudan.*

*The SSMDf supports microfinance service providers' efforts to assist the economically active poor and the low income households to access financial services.*

## Advocacy for Gender Parity Gaining Traction in Mundri



Gender based violence survivors during a workshop organized by MRDA to empower them .

*Women are now realizing that they can transcend domestic boundaries and rise to previously unimaginable heights in South Sudan's social, cultural, economic and political landscape.*

By Moses Bukachi

**A**dvocacy for gender parity is gaining ground in Greater Mundri Counties where women, who have been restricted to stereotypical roles at home for much of their lives, are now realizing that they can transcend domestic boundaries and rise to previously unimaginable heights in South Sudan's social, cultural, economic and political landscape.

This was evident during a recent community meeting on gender based violence that was organized jointly by MRDA's gender program and the civic education department, attracting the participation of 46 persons including 24 men and 22 women.

During the meeting, participants listened in wonderment as facilitators took them through the journey of debunking age-old myths that had fostered a culture of prejudice and hostility against women, resulting in the stifling of their potential as development actors and stymieing of social advancement.

In a report filed after the community meeting, James Sapana a civic educator who played a leading role in the facilitation said that there was an outpouring of thanksgiving especially from women who until now had thought their role in life was restricted to domestic affairs.

"Female participants, especially old women, after the meeting felt the value

and weight of their roles in the society with one elderly woman commenting that she had thought since creation their role as women was [restricted to] getting married and producing children. She said she had now learnt that women can even do greater things than men," he said.

According to Sapana, there were also calls by participants for the meeting to be held again for the benefit of people who were absent.

The aim of holding such meetings, according to MRDA's gender officer Regina Banduwa, is to reduce violence against women and at the same time change attitudes regarding restrictions that have for a long time hampered women from participating in social development.

"Our aim is to reduce gender based violence in society. We know we cannot get rid of it entirely but we can at least reduce it. Also, when the girl child is educated and the woman is empowered, they can participate in development. We want women to take part in development and not to be left behind," she said.

## Testimonies of Scholarship Beneficiaries

### Objective of Project:

*To provide scholarships to girls to keep them in schools*

By Moses Bukachi

**S**abath Garto Sabit was born to peasant farmers 16 years ago in Amadi Village of Mundri West County, South Sudan. At the age of 11 she watched as her father lost his battle with illness, leaving her mother behind with the colossal burden of fending for the large family of eight children.

For years to come Sabath worried herself sick as she watched her mother struggle with her meagre resources to make ends meet. But in 2010, help came in the form of a scholarship offer from the Swedish Paper Company (SCA) which disburses funds to school girls through the agency of Oxfam Novib and Mundri Relief & Development Association (MRDA) as part of its corporate social responsibility initiative with the aim of keeping the girls in school.

“Previously I used to worry about school fees, shoes and uniform, but now I no longer think about it,” says the grateful P8 student at Hai Malakal Primary School.

Sabath likes Science and aspires to be a doctor when she grows up. She cites teenage pregnancy and lack of school fees as the two main factors that result in girls dropping out of school.



**Sabath Garto Sabit (Right) with her classmates at Hai Malakal Primary School, Mundri West County.**

For **Tabitha Luwa Morris**, 17, the scholarship programme, sponsored by the SCA Company through Oxfam Novib and MRDA came as a welcome relief from a difficult childhood that involved at times waking up at 3:00 am to bake bread



**Tabitha Luwa Morris (right) attending class at Baya Primary School, Mundri West County.**

that she would later sell at the market to raise her school fees.

The only child of a peasant mother, Tabitha learned to grow up quickly following the death of her father. This meant forgoing the pleasures of childhood in order to stay in school.

“I would wake up at 3:00 am during weekends and school holidays to bake bread that I would later sell at the market to supplement what my mother gave me so that I could pay school fees and buy uniforms, books, bags, pens,” says Tabitha, a P8 student at Baya Primary School. “After receiving this scholarship, I became happy because it changed my life. I am now encouraged and have ample time for my studies.”

Thanks to the scholarship, Tabitha is now assured of completing her studies and has set her sights on reaching university after which she plans to pursue a career in politics.

Asked why she is interested in politics, Tabitha says: “I want to be a member of parliament in order to bring development to my country.”

And asked if she would readily accept a marriage proposal in the course of her education, Tabitha is resolute in her answer: “I cannot agree. I want to continue with my education. I will tell him that if he wants to marry me, he should first wait until we finish our education.”

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***“I will tell him that if he wants to marry me, he should first wait until we finish our education.” - Tabitha L. Morris.***

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## My Educational Trip to the Institute of Gandhian Thought

By Regyta Bilal

One of my dreams while I was in school was to work in Mundri, my motherland, where I could offer my services to the community.

In 2010 my dream became a reality when, after graduating from University, I got a job with MRDA, which is the largest NGO in Mundri. As soon as I began to work, I got a chance through the organization to fly out of Sudan for a eight-month post graduate diploma course in Nonviolence at the Institute of Gandhian thought in India at a place called Warda in Maharashtra State.

It is not a simple thing to spend eight months away from home, friends, or from all the people you love and care about. These eight months became an entire chapter in the history of my life; a chapter written in India about all the nice things I learned in the company of people of diverse cultures, races, religions and ways of thinking.

But for me, the eight months in India were not spent in vain. I came to learn more about the subjects of violence and conflict which normally happens in our daily lives; and for sure, had I stayed in Sudan I would perhaps never have gained all this knowledge that I have today.

This course helped me a great deal to assess my life. It also helped change my attitude and behavior at both personal and social levels. But this certainly did not happen with my own effort but with the help of nine very supportive colleagues from different parts of India. This is the kind of course that we the youth need, because it not only changes our attitudes but our lifestyles too.

The late Mahatma Gandhi was a great freedom fighter who led his movement through the philosophy of nonviolence. He was fondly referred to as father of the nation and he at one time said: "In complete Nonviolence, there is a complete absence of hatred."

For me, it is such words of wisdom that inspire in me a desire to read and know more about this man Gandhi and the ideals and thoughts he espoused on economic, social, political and cultural affairs.

My thanks goes to MRDA for giving me this rare opportunity. Usually what is in the mind will eventually come out sooner or later, and I truly look forward to sharing with my



**Top Picture:** Regyta Bilal during a cultural fete organized by the Kerala community. **Bottom picture:** Regyta Bilal with colleagues performing daily chores at the Institute of Gandhian thought, Maharashtra State, India.

people what I learned during my eight months away from home.

*Regyta Bilal is MRDA's Assistant Communications Officer attached to the Civic Education Department*

# Embracing Dialogue in Education

By Derek Oakley

The word dialogue comes from the Greek *Dia-logos*, which means 'through talking'. So dialogue can mean conversation. But what makes it different from other types of conversation and how is it relevant to our work in the Centre for Democracy and Peace Studies?

## Dialogue:

- ◆ Is open-ended, without a structured agenda, and sometimes without a time limit, though there may be a guiding theme;
- ◆ Is intended to promote deeper communication and understanding between participants;
- ◆ Values equality and the strengthening of trust between participants over the achievement of strong conclusions.

Thus we can see that dialogue can be distinguished from, for example, a negotiation, or a lecture. To be effective in dialogue requires us, as people, to be active communicators, listen deeply to someone else's perspective, and be prepared to challenge and even change our own thoughts and feelings as a result.

Dialogue can make us feel very vulnerable, particularly if we are discussing very serious topics. The challenge is to be able to continue the conversation **despite** feeling fear or discomfort, so that we can learn and also educate the 'other' or 'others' in the conversation about our own perspectives.

## Dialogue and Peace Building

Because dialogue obliges us to embrace and consider difference, we could end up talking to our worst enemy. In war we often dehumanize the 'other' in order to justify violence and death. Dialogue promotes peace through a fundamental respect for the humanity of the other and for their right to be heard. By voluntarily participating in dialogue with those we disagree with, we are working to build greater understanding, solidarity and ultimately, to build peace.

If we wait until people are fighting and dying in a conflict before engaging them in dialogue then our efforts may be strained. In entering a dialogue we are creating an imaginative and emotional space for movement, for change, for transformation. As we develop a relationship with the other in the dialogue, we can begin to test one another and to test our own responses to critical questions, coming to know ourselves better in the process.

## Dialogue and Peace Education

Traditional education favours a 'banking' method whereby the teacher deposits knowledge in the student's brain to be remembered later. This is adequate for simple knowledge e.g. the idea that  $2+2=4$ , but would not be a good way to teach quantum physics, which requires a much greater degree of initiative by the student. This way of teaching can be considered authoritarian and oppressive, especially if the knowledge valued by one part of society is forced, through the education system, on to others. This in itself can be considered as a form of structural violence.

The Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire pioneered a new approach to education, working with poor and oppressed people all over the world. To Freire, education was an inclusive conversation, or dialogue, that is not just one way or top-down but pluralistic and multi-directional. He argued that true education is not detached from life and all of its injustices and struggles, but can only come from people at all levels of society, but especially the dispossessed and oppressed, understanding and articulating their own experience of the world and deciding what actions they wish to take to change it.

Many others, including the CDPS team at MRDA, have been inspired by Freire to explore how people learn and ways to facilitate the active participation of learners in their own education and promote peaceful resolution of problems and conflicts in the process. The role of a teacher or facilitator in such a situation is not merely to force information into people's heads, but to adapt and respond to the conversation the group creates, only adding their own knowledge where appropriate, and to ask questions that keep people thinking and talking in a way that is considerate and respectful, even though there will be disagreements.

Educators therefore have a responsibility to work in a way that addresses peoples underlying values as well as their knowledge, and support them to develop the skills to own and articulate their own knowledge and learn from others. These principles inform our peace work with communities in South Sudan, whether with the next generation in schools or their elders in workshops. If our students and trainees are equipped to engage in dialogue through education, then this learning should be reflected in their approaches to challenges and conflicts in their lives as they build the new nation of South Sudan.

***Derek Oakley is a consultant with MRDA's Centre for Democracy and Peace Studies (CDPS)***

## BRIDGE GUEST HOUSE



Tucked away in the remote township of Mundri, the Bridge Guest House offers a serene and quiet environment where guests can rest comfortably as they avail themselves of a wide range of facilities including a library, a conferencing room and DSTV. For further enquiries, please call +249929259974. All are welcome.



Staff members of MRDA pose for a group photograph with visitors from *Initiatives of Change* who came to Mundri in the month of May to explore possibilities of working together with MRDA's Centre for Democracy and Peace Studies.



### Mundri Relief & Development Association



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#### Your Feed back

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