

# SOUTH SUDAN RED CROSS

## OUR SELECTED EXPERIENCE

### PRACTICAL RESOURCE PACK

#### Our context

With the declaration of South Sudan's independence in July 2011, the South Sudan Red Cross (SSRC) came into being. We obtained formal recognition from the government in March 2012 with the adoption of the South Sudan Red Cross Act. Our headquarters is in Juba and we have 10 branches located in the state capitals. There are five sub-branch units focusing on specific programmes, as well as a network of 23 Emergency Action Teams.

Western Bahr el Gazal is one of South Sudan's 10 states. One of the state's three counties, Wau, is inhabited mostly

by Faratit tribes, Luo (Jur Chol) and a Dinka minority. After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, Western Bahr el Gazal state was regarded as the most peaceful place in South Sudan, with its capital Wau being home to people from all over the country. In Wau town, residential areas are separated along ethnic and tribal lines.

The situation in Wau county deteriorated drastically after the state government decided to relocate the county administration from Wau town to Bagari (a less-developed town). The move prompted anger and discontent among the predominant Balanda community, who felt that they had not been consulted and that the state government's



A South Sudan Red Cross Emergency Action Team hones its first-aid skills in a simulation exercise.

decision was unconstitutional. Moreover, if Wau town were to be turned into a municipality, as planned, it would deprive them of the right to their land: as a county, it would continue to be owned by the Balanda; as a municipality, it would become multi-communal.

## How our acceptance, security and access were affected

When the dialogue process collapsed, the Balanda community staged a protest. Angry young people set up road blocks between Wau town and Bagari. On 6 December 2012 four people were allegedly killed and several injured when armed men opened fire on the protesters.

With tensions rising, there were several further reports of violence and arrests in Wau. The Balanda community organized a peaceful demonstration, which turned to tragedy when the army reportedly opened fire on the demonstrators, killing about 10 and injuring several others. Alarmed by the situation, the state government imposed a curfew.

The violence took on a new dimension when six Dinka people, including a woman, were killed in cold blood, triggering interethnic violence. In retaliation, angry Dinka youth reportedly went on the rampage in Wau town, killing and wounding people and burning houses. The state government stepped up its efforts to contain the situation.

Given the usual peaceful situation in Wau, no one was expecting the situation to deteriorate to such an extent. Movement was restricted, the injured could not be evacuated to hospital, and health workers were unable to reach their places of work.

## What we did and learned

The Wau branch of the South Sudan Red Cross had already prepared and positioned itself during peaceful times through the training of personnel, the setting up of Emergency Action Teams, the purchase of equipment, dissemination of the National Society's mandate and roles among all sectors of society and all communities, and networking with the authorities and other stakeholders. Volunteers came from diverse backgrounds and were recruited from almost every ethnic group in the town. These factors gave the branch the confidence to respond and helped ensure that they were accepted by all those involved in the clashes.

The Wau branch was able to activate the volunteers in their different geographical areas, communicating by radio with the team leaders and Emergency Action Team members. It prepared the pre-positioned first-aid kits and emergency kits for use. With the ICRC's help, it was able to go out and collect the wounded and evacuate them to the hospital. Since the nurses and doctors were not able to get to the hospital, the branch's good relations with the state Ministry of Health meant that it was able to transport them to their duty stations as they felt safe in Red Cross vehicles.

Our staff and volunteers were able to call on the Safer Access Framework elements that they had learned in training, remaining conscious of their own safety and security. Although they faced considerable risks, our staff and volunteers managed to gain access to different locations and to communicate with the different groups to allow safe passage for the wounded.

During the extremely tense days in Wau, the South Sudan Red Cross and the ICRC were the sole responders on the ground. Our actions were much appreciated by the authorities.

