



Encouraging Nonviolent Play in South Sudan

Childhood is often cut short in countries experiencing active conflict. Many children in South Sudan have been exposed to various forms of violence throughout their lifetimes, resulting in significant trauma.

Since October 2016, USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) partner Nonviolent Peaceforce has facilitated twice-weekly mobile child-friendly spaces (CFS) to support vulnerable children in Unity State's Mayendit County. With few secure locations where children can play, CFS are essential tools for bringing children together to engage in age-appropriate play and learn life-saving skills.

Trauma resulting from exposure to conflict, the presence of armed actors, and the widespread use of weapons has resulted in a normalization of violence for the population of Mayendit. Children are frequently seen playing with replica AK-47s and hand grenades fashioned out of cardboard or mud.

Taking note of this trend, Nonviolent Peaceforce decided to utilize CFS to channel children's creativity into a different, nonviolent form of art. Nonviolent Peaceforce staff showed a group of children how clay can be used to make many different types of objects. By the end of the lesson, the children independently designed cattle, dogs, and people out of clay.

When asked about their artwork, one child said, "When this place is peaceful, I will be in charge of these cattle, and the dogs will be their guards."

Art classes such as these, which encourage nonviolent methods of play, are combined with life skills sessions, basic math courses, and games that encourage community relationship building, teamwork, and general safety, including mine risk awareness.

The CFS run by Nonviolent Peaceforce are essential mechanisms for encouraging creativity, learning, and life skills among conflict-affected children in Mayendit.