



## Reflection: Economic Development in Kuron/Kauto County 23 years of interventions

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*"It is the hard working farmer who should have the first share of the crops." 2 Tim.2:6*

### Peace Village Vision Statement

*A peaceful South Sudan inspired by Holy Trinity Peace Village Kuron*

### Peace Village Mission Statement

*To be a holistic model where individuals and communities of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds are empowered to co-exist and interact peacefully.  
(Strategic Plan Documents)*

In 2000, the Founder and Bishop Emeritus Paride Taban arrived with a small group of people on a tractor to start the Kuron Peace Village. This would be a humble start to something that would transform the entire area.

At that time, the road from Narus to Nachodokopele was mostly just a cleared path to an old British Base located in the area during the colonial times which was also used to access Nyanyangachor. However, in 2000 from Nachodokopele to Kuron Peace Village, there was no clearly

viable way to pass. There were no towns or market centers in this area. Even Nachodokopele at the junction of Kuron and Nyanyangachor, had nothing in the way of a marketplace.

Today, things are slowly changing. One can find small shops in Napil, Nachodokopele, Namurupus and along the road between the two places. Markets are emerging as entrepreneurs bring new ideas and creativity to the otherwise isolated area. Others are slow to react as they don't like to risk when they have so little. The forward-thinking local community members are serving as agents of change as they are willing to take the risk while others observe and learn from their efforts.

Any reflection has to take into consideration the multitude of programs and activities that HTPVK has facilitated over the past 23

years. Numerous people have been involved in various activities in order to improve the lives of the Toposa, Jie, Murle, Kachipo, and Nyangatun people of this area. Some of these programs have been more effective than others.

Maybe the question to ask is: What can a traditionally pastoralist culture do in order to diversify their customary ways, trading, production and increase their disposable income? To change from a barter culture to a self-sustaining business model does not happen overnight. HTPVK staff have been introducing several novel concepts over the years to the local community.



*Figure 1 Poor road conditions make travel difficult in rainy seasons.*



*Figure 2 Napil Market as seen from the air in 2022.  
Photo Courtesy of Jenny Davies, MAF*

## DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING CHANGE

The opening of the road with bridge from Nachodokopele through Kauto County and on to Boma has had a major impact on the communities in this

area. There is a line of communication between various villages and ethnic groups which wasn't there 23 years ago. Government Ministry traffic has increased with a parallel increase in basic services. Goods are more easily brought into the communities. Trucks with goods are commonly seen as in photo above.



The Kuron River Bridge, which was built over 20 years ago, plays a part in the movements of the local communities. **(photo right)** The only bridge on the Kuron River has served as a link between ethnic groups, a conduit for supplies and materials going north to Boma, and a symbol of unity and peace since 2000. The existence of a bridge allows year-round crossing of the turbulent Kuron River. It was said by an elder Toposa that before the bridge not many Toposa lived on the West side of the Kuron River. They tended to stay on the Eastern banks. However, with the advent of the bridge, many Toposa villages have sprung up on the west side. Not only because there is a health center in Matara but also because there is fertile land there.



The introduction of the wide blade Jembe **(left)** to replace the smaller and less effective emeleku allows for easier cultivation and breaking up of the ground which leads to larger field cultivation. With larger fields come larger harvests. **(below)** Larger harvests might mean a surplus to sell for cash. People who would normally consume all their produce are now able to sell the surplus and use the cash for other things. Kuron Peace Village has seen a

steady increase in sorghum being sold for cash.



Animal traction **(left)** is taking longer to be accepted but slowly some community members have adopted this method. Local villages did not traditionally form groups for agriculture. However, now through the intervention of HTPVK there are several communities who have banded together for mutual support and assistance. Slowly local communities are learning that united action is stronger than individual efforts.

A workshop for Economic Development pertaining to Agro-business was held on 17.September.2022 in Gumarieng. This community hosted Leroboi community to help them with developing their agricultural practices in order to earn money; one village helping another to

advance and develop. This type of cooperation between villages did not exist 23 years ago. Slowly, the idea of using agricultural products to earn cash is catching on. It takes time as those who are interested will begin and slowly others will follow. Local people need to see results before they will risk anything.



The introduction of Community Based Savings Groups has led to the “opening of our minds” as one Toposa woman puts it. The idea of using money to make money before the CMSG was introduced was not there. Although this program is in the infancy stages, it does seem to have some positive merits. The future will tell. (left community meeting for Savings Groups)

The construction of the MTN telephone tower in August 2020 was ostensibly for the use of the Holy Trinity Peace Village staff. (right) However, it has quickly become a wonderful tool for communication within the local communities. Where one did not ever see a cell phone in 2020, now just two years later in 2022, many people have a phone. The phone is still mostly used as a radio and music player but the businesspeople are happy to have this service now.



From the inception of the MTN tower small charging businesses have sprung up. Others earn small incomes through the sale of airtime. One Toposa man purchased four phones cheaply in Lodwar, Kenya during an Exposure Trip, and sold them in Kauto making a sizeable profit. The cell phone is here to stay. (photo at left shows women using cell phones which is quite common these days.)

Education is a major contributor to development. There are currently two Nurseries, one Primary and one Secondary School in Kuron. Although, there is no immediate impact upon the local economy per se, there are long term benefits from any education program. This generation will grow up with a much deeper understanding of how the world works and how they can be a part of it. Different ethnic children grow up together reducing hostilities. The future will tell how these children, who have an opportunity their parents did not have, will contribute to the economic development of their people.



Figure 3 Classrooms lack books and desks but the children keep attending.



**Mr. Amvelio Lootuk:** *I was gone for 3 ½ years and when I returned, I was surprised at the changes. There were new clothes, bicycles, even motorcycles, different foods, and now everyone has cell phones. There were never shops like this along the road and now people can buy these small items. My Toposa people are getting money and using that to buy things they never had before. Life is better.*

**Mr. Peter Lokom:** *I work for HTPVK and I have built my house in Napil. I used iron sheets and now the people around want to do the same. They also see that I built a latrine so some are saying they also want a latrine. I have planted fruit and indigenous trees and some of the Napil people are asking me for the seeds so they can plant. These people are copying my new system.*

## IMPACTS

### What has changed in 23 years?



Certainly, the opening of roads into isolated communities allow for greater interaction and exchanges. With the opening of a Kuron to Boma road, all manner of development became possible. Commercial vehicles now have access to Kauto County and beyond to Boma. Napil Market, which did not exist 23 years ago, began from re-settlement of local people from villages around Kuron Peace Village. Now it has grown with over 70 inhabitants, and has at least 9 shops (**photo above of one such shop**), a grinding mill, three motorcycles, and multiple minor businesses. The emerging market has become the hub for meetings, discussions, and cattle herders passing through. Despite the terrible road conditions and high cost of transportation, Napil markets supply such things as pasta, flour, oil, sugar, sorghum, candy, beer, sodas, domestic use items, clothes, shoes, animal medicine, beads, etc. Few of these items were available or even known to the local people 23 years ago.



Additionally, Namurupus has at least two new roadside shops that sell basic

*Figure 4 Typical Napil Market shop.*

*Photo Courtesy of Ide Gooden, MAF*

food and household items for the people.

These traders first started in Nyanagachor and have now expanded. There are more and more metal framed buildings and shops along the way. **(right)** It takes time to change a pastoralist from the wandering ways. However, some of the local communities have decided to try business and it seems to be working for them.



The Matara Community Health Centre has a knock on effect which builds up public health to result in greater production. Community health is better which means people are more productive in the field which means they can cultivate larger areas. That is good for the people. When people are asked which program benefits them the most, the majority will mention the Primary Health Centre as the first thing. They really appreciate and now see the benefits of keeping themselves and their children healthy.

### Commercial Business in Napil



**(above, women sell dresses)**

Napil is what the locals refer to as “*The Big City*”. It has become a central point for trade, meetings, and gatherings. Just since 2019, there have been three new businesses opened, several additional domestic houses constructed, and many people have backyard gardens with fruits and vegetables not seen 23 years ago. With Kuron Peace Village next to the market, this area is a magnet for human interaction in Kauto County.



Figure 5 Napil Market with 7 shops and grinding mill

The main buyers of any local products are most certainly the program staff and families of Holy Trinity Peace Village. Although good for the local economy, this market has limited scope and impact. Unfortunately, the main market is found in Kapoeta which is 265 kilometers away. This would take 4 to 5 days walk one way. Without a good road, trade and exchanges are quite limited. This is a sector of development which Kuron Peace Village is simply not equipped to handle. Construction of roads and bridges and bypasses requires more money and investment than a small NGO like HPTVK would have. Until large

investments can be applied to the infrastructure, there will be sluggish economic development of this area.

Some enterprising locals have walked their goats and cows to Kapoeta where the sale price is much higher than in the isolated rural areas. However, as mentioned, this takes time and a certain amount of familiarity with Kapoeta and the buyers. People from Kauto County don't necessarily feel comfortable in Kapoeta and are reluctant to go there for business. There needs to be more interaction between markets and Napil is limited in this way.

**Comment Anonymous Woman:** *One of my boys is trying to get into business but he has no education. My youngest is attending in the Primary. When he finishes the two of them can do business together. They can help each other. I hope this happens. It is good to have something more than just cattle.*

That being said, many are diversifying their agricultural activities in ways not seen in the past 23 years. Numerous individuals are raising chickens and eggs for sale. Others are selling goats and hunting bush meat for cash and even bringing odd animals such as tortoise, crocodile, and bush pig, in the chance that someone would like to purchase. Fish have become a rather common source of income for the local communities as it is easy to catch and sell to Peace Village staff.

**Comment Toposa Male:** *The first time I saw spaghetti I thought it was the guinea worm and I stayed away from it. I didn't want to eat it. Now I know what it is. I like the taste.*

Sorghum is the staple food amongst the people. (right) However, over the past 23 years, new foods of all types have been introduced. A few of these have caught on



and one can now see some local villagers growing and selling tomatoes, okra, maize, egg plant, Sukuma wiki (kale), pumpkin, bananas, gudra (kind of a green leaf vegetable – "mutere" in Uganda) and ground nuts. Some local farmers have even recently sold sweet potato (yam) to the HPTVK staff. None of these food items were found in this semi-arid area 23 years ago. Additionally, the fact that the Napil market sells wheat flour, pasta, tomato paste, and onions might be an indicator of changes in local taste patterns?





Honey has always been a sweet food for the tribes around but now there is a local market selling to the HTPVK staff. Beekeeping for cash sale is also on the rise in the sense that more people are trying to cultivate bees and collect honey. **(left)** This again takes time as the only market is the Kuron Peace Village. One of the beekeepers has learned that he can sell his honey at a much higher price in Kapoeta. If roads and transport improve, these sellers will earn

much more income in Narus and Kapoeta.

Baking classes for women has been offered in the previous years. This was proposed as an income generating activity. Everyone loves to eat the bread, however, the women simply do not have the appliances and the charcoal to start a business or even cook in their homes. Investment would be seen as too risky. The current market is only the HTPVK staff and bread does not keep long in the semi-arid heat environment. This idea has not caught on yet.



Figure 6 Bread making workshop



What does it mean when bananas are routinely stolen from the Kuron Peace Academy Plantation site? As all things have good and bad sides, could this indicate there is a growing desire and demand for bananas? To date there are a dozen individuals who have planted banana and matoke for consumption and sale in their private home compounds. **(photo left)**

The villages of Namalia and Karukochom have a lot of bananas and matoke. (Matoke is a hard version of banana which is boiled before eating - **photo to right**) Namalia Village is known for their banana cultivation. There are also about 12 families around who have planted Banana suckers. Cassava is a drought resistant crop which was introduced by HTPVK. This is well received by local people. Many villages have planted the cassava around their homesteads as an extra food during the year.

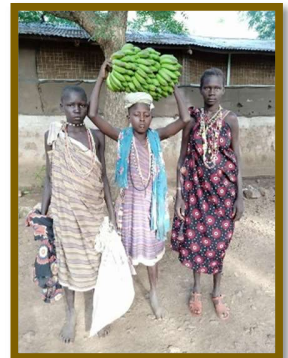


Figure 7 A girl belonging to Mrs Cicilia Natook from NAMALIA VILLAGE hawking fresh maize for sale in Kuron.

Lentils, maize and wheat flour were introduced by the WFP food programs. Now people have developed a taste for these grains. There are quite a few locals trying to grow maize. However, this crop is not very drought resistant and only does well if there are sustained rains. In 2022 most maize died in the field due to lack of rains.

A major issue, as always, is transportation: getting the product to the best market. Even though a road exists in Kauto County, its terrible condition, lack of maintenance, and several impassable spots in the rains curtails travel on this single means of movement. If a person walks to Kapoeta and back, it can

take up to 10 days round trip and the person would have to carry any items by hand. A trip like this does not necessarily appeal to the average villager who doesn't have the time for long trips. Of course, HTPVK has vehicles which often go to Kapoeta, but this would be an artificial situation and not sustainable. So, most Toposa, Jie, Kachipo and others from the Kauto County, are discouraged to sell their products in Kapoeta where they could potentially make much higher profits.

## CHALLENGES

### What has not changed in 23 years?



Many local people continue to resist change and prefer the traditional ways. As a traditional pastoralist community, cows and goats are still seen as the number one possession of any local ethnic group. These "assets" are carefully cultivated and cared for. However, today there are more and more cattle keepers willing to sell animals to trade and barter in order to have cash in hand. HTPVK has never had a veterinarian service which might have been well received by the local cattle herders and built up their trust. As cattle are the number one concern of every ethnic group, there could be an unmet need for this assistance. The current situation is that the pastoralists regularly treat their own animals without any outside veterinary services.

**Comment Toposa elder:** *Twenty years ago, there were no shops. Now there are some individuals who know the benefits and how to organize themselves for making profits. This is good. We only suffer because the road is so bad.*

There are inadequate markets for sale of products here in Kuron area. The isolation from main markets of Narus and Kapoeta inhibit the growth of Income Generating Activities (IGA). Through Exposure visits to Kapoeta, Narus and beyond to Uganda and Kenya, HTPVK hopes to open the minds of the locals who might be interested in the future to start up some sort of business. These trips have influenced those who have

travelled but the numbers are a small percentage of the total population. HTPVK continues encouraging other forms of income even as progress is slow.

The male youth have very few opportunities for work. There are no jobs in this area outside of the Kuron Peace Village and occasional NGO contracts. Most of the young men are restless and have nothing to do. Unfortunately, this leads to less than ideal outcomes. Youth will become obstinate and begin to look for trouble and this has been a frequent problem in Kuron Peace Village over the past two decades. The VTC was designed to give young men something to do while creating potential jobs for them. However, it has not worked out so well



Figure 8 Male Youth need some work or they resort to unacceptable behaviors



as only very young are coming and the older ones, who are the target group, stay away. Today, there is not much interest amongst the local ethnic groups to attend the VTC.

Unemployment and lack of activities can lead to less desirable outcomes. Sadly, homemade alcohol (moonshine, liqueur, Kwete) has become one of the major business activities in this area. It is lucrative, simple, and readily available. There is money to be made in the sale of local brew. There is also money to be made in the buying and selling of guns. Several local area men are involved in this dark enterprise. Lamentably, these two businesses are also hurting the culture. HTPVK does not condone nor support these types of business. HTPVK and local leaders have tried several times to curb the sale and production of alcohol but to no avail.

An arising issue in late 2022 and into 2023 was the concern of “threats” to local businesses in Napil from a small group of people who are jealous of their success. These people have approached the grinding mill operator and forced him to reduce his price per kilogram in spite of a rise in costs of fuel. What the locals don’t understand is market pressures and how to operate at a profit or the business is not worth it. Hence, they have forced him to reduce his prices to the point where he was not making any profit. Therefore, he is obliged to close. What this has done is eliminate a service which was well received by the women but is now not available. Most say this is out of jealousy and greed.

Another incident occurred in late 2022 when men went to the store of one owner and demanded free drinks or they would do damage to the shop. The owner was forced to acquiesce to their demands or risk losing everything. This again has made him less likely to continue operations in the area.



Figure 9 Roads are impossible to travel on during rains

Two hundred kilometers of road cannot be maintained by HTPVK. It is too great an undertaking for such a small NGO. The road remains rather neglected and has not received timely repair and maintenance. (left) During the rainy season many places are impassable curtailing the development of local markets. HTPVK does not have the resources or the expertise to do regular and constant upkeep. Without Government involvement, the poor road conditions will continue to

impede faster economic growth in this area.

## LESSONS LEARNED



Figure 10 The abandoned Market Stall

Local markets are emerging albeit slowly and with some setbacks. The working model of business does not necessarily follow the same pattern as established markets in faraway urban areas. One must learn that the local ethnic groups have their ways, and they are more savvy than given credit for.

**Not Listening:** An example is some time ago, a “Market Shelter”

was constructed in Napil

town. (Left) The donor driven idea was that the sellers would have a place to sell their products. What wasn’t taken into consideration were the thoughts and ideas of the population. The women don’t have time to sit in a place that is outside the center of the Napil market and wait for customers to arrive. These astute business people know who their customers are and where they are. They simply take their products to them and sell on the spot. This is a much more efficient and time saving method. Hence, the market shelter has never really been used and sits idle to this day. If Toposa leaders had been properly consulted there might have been a better result from the construction of this building.



Figure 11 Toposa women bring their produce to Peace Village where they sell everything

**Transformation toward a cash-based society:** The idea of handling business and hence, cash, is not new to local ethnic groups. However, when attempting to grow the programs, there is a real need to educate and train people on how to handle things in a systematic way. There are many indications that the communities are slowly moving toward

a cash economy. Twenty years ago, none had cash, but today one sees that there is plenty of cash floating around. Along with this there needs to be instruction on how to use money more efficiently and effectively. This is what is new to the people around Kauto County.

**Gumariang Community Member:** *This idea of CMSG is new to us. We don’t know how to handle money. I am afraid to take a loan because I am not sure what I am doing. This is where we need help.*

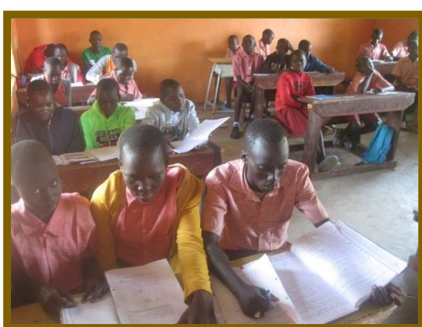


Figure 12 Students in St. Thomas Primary

**Education for long term impacts:** Knowledge is a key to creating a better life for the local groups over generations. Currently, with two Nursery schools, a Primary and a Secondary school and even a Vocational Training Centre, many youth are getting a rudimentary education which enhances their dreams and aspirations. These schools can change the way they view the world and their role in that world. As these schools are integrated with several ethnic groups represented, the environment also

becomes a place for cultural exchanges which should lead to greater understanding and acceptance of others in the future. HTPVK schools have graduated several individuals who went on for further studies and are now working to improve the very people they grew up with. If one discusses sustainability then education has to be a central part of that plan.

A **Community Savings Management Group** was begun in Gumariang community. The idea was to provide an opportunity to give out loans to individuals with money pooled by the community itself. The loans would be repaid with 10% interest in a specified time. The first three loans were handed out in May. Two of those people have made a profit, repaid the loan and the interest. However, the third has not yet repaid to the community. The idea is sound and welcomed by the community but unless the handling of the loans is done strictly and professionally the future continuation of such programs would be in doubt.

**Lereboi Community Member:** *We have never made charcoal here. We don't know how to do it. We want to do this to make money. Is there someone who could show us how?*



Figure 13 Entrepreneur Mr. Zecharia and his wife brought a grinding machine to Napil market as a business venture.

**Working the market prices:** The idea of holding back from selling crops until the price rises is also new but catching on with farmers who have managed to harvest surplus sorghum. Farming groups are learning that if possible, they hold their excess harvest until a more favorable price is evident in the markets.

**Lack of market workings:** If people continue to do things in such a way as to prevent a favorable environment for business, then those businesses will simply close and go elsewhere. At the moment, the community around this area needs some education on the importance of developing local businesses and how market prices work. There will be no

development as long as unreasonable demands are made upon the entrepreneurs.

Programs are strengthened when targeting particular people who are visionary and willing to take the risks. There are those villagers within the surrounding communities who are forward thinking and creative. These individuals are serving as **"Agents of Change"** amongst their own people. They have the respect of their fellow villagers. They are the ones who bring in new ideas and technologies to stimulate yet more people to look for such advantages in the future. HTPVK has had several employees over the years who have graduated from the system of schools. These individuals returned after their studies and are now influencing their own people in many ways. As more and more receive this type of experience, change might come easier and faster.

## SUMMARY

There are multiple examples of economic change in the Local Communities in the area around Kauto County. Some of these changes are quite obvious, while others are more subtle. Some change comes quickly, and other change takes patience and perseverance. There are more and more reported cases where people are talking about building better housing, latrines, or purchasing a motorcycle or starting a business. Whereas Holy Trinity Peace Village was the initial motivator for change, now those individuals who have taken on new ideas and methods are serving as **"Agents of Change"** amongst their own people. They are the ones inspiring and motivating others toward more economic development.

The overall economic impacts of Kuron Peace Village on this area have been positive. The question for the future will be how to continue guiding the various ethnic groups into the future without harming



their traditional culture and norms? As HTPVK approaches twenty-five years of working in this area, there is much more work to be done and much more thought to be given concerning these and many issues.

As one agricultural HTPVK report states: “... *We will continue to awaken the spirit of ... enterprise in the pastoralist community...*”



( Sources: Interviews with Holy Trinity Peace Village staff, local farmers, women, Bonga Girls, Community groups, students, Business people, and visitors. All photos are the property of Holy Trinity Peace Village except where noted. produced by: Gabe Hurrish January.2023)