

Eliza displays the difference between filtered and unfiltered water.

Photo courtesy of Medair



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Fostering Healthy Communities in South Sudan

Since 2011, USAID Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) partner Medair has been one of the few organizations providing lifesaving health, nutrition, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) services to conflict-affected people in South Sudan's Renk County, Upper Nile State.

In Renk's Abayok internally displaced person (IDP) settlement, Medair facilitates Care Groups for women to encourage healthy household behaviors. In each group, a local promoter oversees a network of volunteer mothers; provides training on health, nutrition, and WASH issues; discusses potential barriers to healthy behaviors; and helps volunteers practice sharing the information they learned. Each volunteer then meets with her neighbors to share the message, helping encourage

positive behaviors in the community. Topics discussed include information on personal hygiene, proper diet for pregnant and lactating women, hand-washing, and early health-seeking behaviors. Care Groups also provide information on how to use and maintain the approximately 800 water filters Medair has distributed to community members in the Abayok IDP settlement.

“Before we had the Care Groups, we had illnesses like diarrhea, and we didn't know what to do. We relied on the traditional knowledge of our mothers and grandmothers, but we were suffering a lot,” said Eliza, a 34-year old mother of five children.

Now, Eliza is the local promoter in Abayok. Twice a month, she meets with approximately 60 volunteer mothers who in turn spread messaging to nearly 560 nearby households. Eliza believes the Care Groups have resulted in positive change. “There's still diarrhea and malaria, but nowadays fewer children have diarrhea and illnesses among children are reducing. People are now washing their hands, using the resources they have to support better diets, and sleeping under mosquito nets. This all reduces illness in the community.”

With USAID support, Medair facilitates 51 Care Groups in Renk, with nearly 600 women volunteers reaching an estimated 6,100 households with behavior change messaging.

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