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Under Tree Schools is a Registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation No 1117679
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Dear Supporters

November 2024

The last 6 months have been a difficult time for our staff and girls at our school in South Sudan. And the previous period was not exactly easy – see our last newsletter on our website.

We have been continuing to send the schools funds to pay their 21 teachers and 18 admin staff, plus running costs including hygiene kits.

But costs of food and everything else in South Sudan have risen greatly over the year. The exchange rate between US dollars and South Sudanese Pounds was 2,100 SSP per dollar in April. By July it was 2,900, in August it was 4,000 and in September 4,800. Prices of food in the local market will have risen by at least as much in SSP terms. The school tell us that there is a lot of hunger in the area. We ensure that our payments in SSP keep up with the exchange rate changes, but it must be very difficult for people whose money does not rise in this way.

This summer we would have liked to give the staff a substantial increase in pay in sterling terms, but our funds would not enable us to pay such an increase on an on-going basis. So we sent the staff an extra month's wages in August as a one-off indication of support. We have also changed the frequency of our payments. When we sent money every two months, the value of the wage in a teacher's hands fell a lot from start to end of that period. So now we send money every month, so they always get the latest exchange rate each month.



A second shock for the people of the village was the serious flooding that occurred in July. And it has continued to rain since. The rain plus the overflowing river have devastated the lower lying land round the village. The flooding has killed the growing sorghum crop, a staple food stuff for the local people. That will have had its own effect on prices of food. The school and its compound are fortunately on slightly higher ground and so above the floods. But a great many homes in the lower lying area were flooded and families forced out. Among them are 15 of our teachers.



A documentary worth watching:

BBC Africa Eye Documentary: Life at 50°C: South Sudan's Poisoned Floods:
A Climate Crisis Unfolds
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=2dg-0ik1NKM>

The usual free deliveries of food for the girls' lunches from the World Food Programme have been very sadly much curtailed. We have learnt that there have been only two deliveries so far this year, each supplying enough food for lunches for 17 days we understand. So the girls go home after school without the warming meal we believed they were getting. Apparently, there is just not enough supply of pulses and other vegetables in the region for the WFP to continue its normal supply to the school.

The WFP has advised the school to increase the amount of food it grows at the school. So a teacher has been picked to lead a group of several dozen girls to cultivate the area, based on the existing plot that the girls have managed over recent years as part of their horticultural training.



But school goes on. We have recently had a detailed report from the headmaster, with the results of the September end of term exams. All the girls are tested on the 7 or 8 subjects they study, and records kept of each girl's progress. An amazingly high number of 481 girls sat the exams this time, and over

75% passed. We had been used to a number of the girls who registered at the start of the year failing to attend regularly, but this year virtually all are there.

So classes are quite big. Normally we have seen 20-30 girls in the top year, year 8. But this year there are 61. And every one of them has signed up to do the final national examinations at the end of the year – and of course if they pass, they are able to go on to secondary schooling. We think that this is a really good sign that the school is succeeding in its mission of preparing girls for the option of having careers, rather than marrying and having babies at the traditional age of 15.

We are very pleased that the headteacher is continuing his training sessions with the teachers, setting high standards both for the staff and the girls. He reports that the teachers are working hard to ensure that the girls enjoy learning and want to gain knowledge, and that they get used to being punctual for lessons. This will be so useful to the girls in their life afterwards.

There are regular meetings of the parent teacher group, who support the school, another sign that the school is working well with the community it serves.

We often learn things as a result of passing comments made by the headteacher or our WhatsApp contact Angelo, the IT teacher. We were told that there are 3 boys in year 2. We thought that boys were only allowed in the preschool class (where girls bring their little brothers when they are responsible for them during the day). It turns out that teachers are allowed to register their sons to attend the school if they wish. Angelo says that he found that this was much better than sending his son to another school, which he thought did not provide such good teaching!

Back home in England we are very pleased that Tom Wright has agreed to join our board of trustees.

We are as you know totally dependent on your generosity in funding the school. Thank you so much for your individual donations and for those given by organisations with your encouragement. They are so important to the mission of the charity. In the last few months, we have received very generous donations from our devoted group of supporters in Switzerland, as well as from the Belron Ronnie Lubner Charitable Foundation, St Mary's Church Barnes, and others.

Do encourage others of your friends to make a donation to help the future of the girls at our school. Donations, one off or regular, can be made through our website, at no administrative cost to you or us, and of course we can normally recover Gift Aid on top of the donation. <https://www.undertreeschools.org/support-us.html>

Thank you all for enabling our school to continue its vital work.

We send you our best wishes

Geoffrey Barnett, Peter Boyling, Helen Chauncy, Dan Sullam, Tom Wright

Trustees of the Under Tree Schools Charity



Clearing the school compound