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

April 2021

Our school for girls in South Sudan has been active over the last few months – at least as active as is possible when the country's schools have been in lock down to prevent the spread of Covid.



The Government closure of all schools started in April last year, and most year classes have not been allowed in school since then. An exception was made for the top year, year 8, as they had end of school examinations to prepare for. So the 25 girls in year 8 had the undivided attention of the school staff since the autumn!

Rather than the mornings only school of past years, they worked full days, six days a week, to catch up with what they had missed earlier in the year. They took their final examinations in early February. The Headmaster, Bak, reported to us that "a number of girls said that the exams were so good". They took science, English language, social studies, maths and Christian religion, some also took Islamic religion. Each exam was two and a half hours, they had to work hard! We look forward to hearing about their results and how many of them will go on to secondary school.

And of course how many of our secondary school graduates go on to training for careers. We hope, like everyone at the school, that the Government will reopen the schools soon depending on the Covid cases in Juba which has the worst of the pandemic in the country. In countries like South Sudan such long school closures mean truly no education, families have no laptops to continue online learning like here. It also increases early marriages. The chances of early vaccinations in the country areas of South Sudan are certainly not imminent, and local public health provision in such areas is very limited. So the message, like in the UK, is to wear masks and socially distance. We are told that Covid has not reached Malek Alel, though there have been a few cases in Aweil, the nearest big town, twenty miles or so away.

It has been our priority to ensure that the school remains in good shape to restart when they can. We have of course continued to pay the teachers and non teaching staff, so that they have enough to keep their families fed. Prices of food are very high as the economy of the country is in serious trouble and there has been near famine in much of the country (though not near the school).

We have continued to increase the wages as the exchange rate has depreciated.

As we said in our last newsletter the teachers have used the down time profitably by arranging an in-house training course.

One new item we will be financing in future will be hygiene kits for the girls. Unless the older girls can feel comfortable coming to school, they will of course otherwise stay at home. So we have sent funds to cover the coming year's needs.



As well as academic lessons the school aims to offer the teaching of sewing, IT and agronomy to the girls. We have just sent funds to buy two more sewing machines (the climate is not conducive to a long life for equipment). The school has been able to sew the uniforms, so here's the production line at work!

After a break the school has again appointed a sports teacher who is on the pay roll as well. We have always encouraged the girls in playing team sports, including basketball and football and they had been playing in a local league. We have just sent money for new uniforms for the teams and for equipment such as balls. We go through quite a few, in the hot sun and rough terrain they don't last forever!

We have bought new solar power equipment. Batteries had been failing and some panels were cracked, so electricity for lighting and equipment was not working after dark. They were using generators fuelled by petrol.

To get the solar parts our IT teacher didn't pop into a nearby town. It took a month and a return journey of 1800 miles to travel to Juba and on to Kampala in Uganda. The truck back to South Sudan broke down and we lost contact with them for a bit, a few days of some concern ... Fortunately they eventually got home safe and sound, and also did not get Covid which is more prevalent in Juba and Uganda. Now the new equipment is in place, the system is working well and the school can stop emitting carbon.



At Christmas we sent funds to enable the school and chapel community to have a big Christmas meal and celebration together. We added money to enable them to re-decorate the chapel which was looking tired after more than 7 years.



We have also bought them a sound system for services – until now they have had to use a loudhailer when speaking to reach the back of the chapel.

It seems that the chapel has become the hub for all the surrounding areas of the Anglican Archdeaconry. There have been two large meetings held there with numbers of people coming from a distance. They would like funds to help them with an evangelisation programme in the region. We trustees are not planning to use your donations to fund this as we are focused on the school and community in Malek. But our Swiss friends based in Winterthur, near Zürich, who have been such strong supporters of UTS – including paying for the building of the chapel – want to provide funds for this work; we are happy to provide a route and a process to get their funds to Malek.

We must update you about the Charity Commission inquiry into the charity. Their final report has now been published. They have criticised trustee decisions in the period to spring 2019. However, they are satisfied with the new arrangements put in place by the charity in 2019, including our process for getting funds to the school and our checks that the money is being spent properly. Since the start of last year the new team of trustees continues to support the school on your behalf, and keep its work with successive generations of girls active and positive.



Of course, all that the trustees are able to do for the girls in Malek Alel is only made possible by your financial donations for the school. Bak, the Headmaster of the school, here on the photo, is constantly expressing his thanks to you, the supporters of the school, for making it possible to keep on teaching the girls, and giving them life opportunities that they would not get otherwise.

So we all thank you and send you our warm wishes,

The Trustees of Under Tree Schools