



## June 2026 - Weeds of discouragement, seeds of hope

Dear Supporter,

We've just returned from our short visit to Yei and so wanted briefly to share some stories but mainly to thank everyone who prayed for us. We felt very supported and know that these prayers were answered. Travel went well; we stayed healthy all the time and we had some great meetings with all those whom we met. The war in the Middle East and the Ebola crisis has led many to cancel their travel to countries that border DR Congo and our plane from London was virtually empty. MAF also told us of a big drop in demand for their flights to the more remote areas of Uganda, putting strain on its finances.

Life in Yei is getting harder and the main issues we witnessed were:

- One pastor told us of the struggle he has to pay his son's school fees. His youngest son wants to study for three A levels but there is no money. All the family's animals were stolen by soldiers and even crops are picked before he can harvest them. Over the past few years, the family has become poorer and poorer and the pastor has nothing left. He says this is the situation for many.
- The virtual cessation of USAID means that many health workers have not been paid for 6 months. This affects 18 of the staff at the Martha Clinic and many staff throughout the country.
- We saw fields of maize that looked very weak and thin, due to the lack of rain since April. Families depend on their cultivation to supplement their meagre incomes and so a poor harvest will cause much hardship and hunger, maize being a staple crop. This is an effect of climate change.
- Ebola has not reached South Sudan but is a threat and the weak health systems would struggle to contain its spread.
- The villages outside of Yei remain insecure and annual inflation is still at around 20%.

But we also saw seeds of hope.

- We arrived at the Martha Clinic just after baby John had been born. The clinic is successfully delivering several babies a week.
- The new solar equipment that we donated earlier this year has made a big difference to the working of the Eye Clinic and Children's Ward, which share the power 24 hours a day.
- The Diocesan coffee growing project is in its fourth year. Each Archdeaconry now has its own coffee nursery beds with a plan for a co-operative in each location. Other Dioceses are now coming to Yei for advice on coffee growing.
- Those whom we sponsored at the teacher training college are now back in their schools and making a big difference.
- The Bishop of Panyana told us that 4 of the young people who had attended youth camps in past years were now ordained as priests and deacons.
- The Bishop Allison Theological College is doing well. It has a new Principal and an intake of 22 students. A new dormitory with spaces for 40 students is under construction, thanks to a legacy given to the Diocese of Salisbury for BATC.



As we departed after four days in Yei, we reflected on the many old friends we had met, particularly at the party organised for us by the Diocese on our last evening to celebrate 20 years since we first moved to Yei in June 2006. We saw how the work of the church continues and thrives against a backdrop of growing poverty. We attended diocesan devotions and prayed for rain and for the team of 30 evangelists doing an outreach in a remote rural area, at some considerable risk to their safety. We saw the daily work of the Martha Clinic staff and the high number of patients who come for treatment every day. We met with the Diocesan Health Committee and heard that although The Brickworks pays some of the staff, many of the other staff employed by UNICEF have not been paid for the last six months. We had useful discussions about how The Brickworks could pass responsibility for supporting the Martha Clinic to another organisation. We visited schools that were well led and doing very well despite many parents struggling to pay fees.

Our flights with MAF were brilliant, saving us lots of time and taking us direct from Entebbe to Yei. We were even able to help three South Sudanese friends with a free lift to Yei. Our youngest team member, Ben, whose dream is to be a pilot, was thrilled to be able to sit next to the MAF pilot on both journeys, finding out what life can be like as a MAF pilot.

As might be expected, we returned with quite a long list of things that we had been asked to help with, and the Trustees will need to consider these at their next meeting. We were very careful about our health while in Yei, particularly to avoid any risk from Ebola. Uganda has some Ebola cases and were checking every visitor entering or leaving the country. Yei airstrip had a health tent and we had our temperatures taken on arrival. Throughout our visit, we tried to touch elbows rather than shake hands but that's a funny way to greet an old friend. So far as is known, there are no Ebola cases in South Sudan and we pray that will continue and that South Sudan can avoid this terrible disease.

We haven't assembled all the photos we took in Yei but here are a few. We will show more at services we'll be speaking at in Andover, Winchester and Burton in Kendal, as well as at our Annual Meeting, which will be in the autumn.

On behalf of the Trustees and those we work with in South Sudan, thank you very much for your prayers and ongoing support.

John and Poppy Spens,

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New solar equipment at Martha Clinic, two new classrooms at St Philip's primary school, Poppy visits the Eye Clinic and a full classroom at St Philip's Primary.