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Dear friends,

Happy New Year to you all, three months on! As this is the first *official* communication from me since then, I decided it wasn't too late to say it! I have to admit, I know jealousy isn't a good thing, BUT I am SO, SO jealous of all the snow you guys had last month! Last Sunday I feared I was actually living on the sun it was so hot! Apparently it hit 39°C; I am not sure whether it has been hotter than that here – it isn't me who owns the thermometer!



I had a wonderful Christmas with friends in Mbale, Eastern Uganda. The sad thing about working for an NGO, and not directly with the church, means that we had an enforced holiday over Christmas. It is important to leave Sudan during holiday time, so I wasn't here for Christmas itself.

Christmas break

I started my break with a few days in Kampala, staying with another CMS mission partner and her daughter; it was so lovely to spend time with them. On the Friday evening we went to Kampala Pentecostal church for their annual Christmas show! *Oh my!* Soooo professional indeed! It was a wonderful mixture of music, singing, dancing, involving

every member of the church; they have the 'Watoto children's choir' who also took part – it was wonderful to see such joy and vibrancy there. The performance is a gift from the church to the city each year, and has two shows a day for a full week – quite a commitment for many church members. Although I enjoyed the evening, I also found it quite emotional – for reasons I will explain a little later!

Dependency culture

Having received a few comments on my section 'dependency culture' in my last link letter (you can read the letter on the CMS website if you missed it) I have decided to continue that theme a little more in this letter! I would like to tell you more about my friend Mary's programme, which is directly working to eradicate this sense of dependency. Her activities, like mine, fall into the Church Empowerment Programme (CEP), and although our programmes are separate, we are seeing ourselves more as a CEP team and working together, which is great.

Baking for an ex-Archbishop!

Mary has recently had the Country Representative and the International Director of Tearfund here as the organisation supports her programme. She was able to take them to some of the communities she is working with and yesterday I was also able to go with them. It struck me as particularly funny to be invited and able to go on this day,

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Thinking...

as one of the patrons of Tearfund was also in town (at a retreat here for the Sudanese Bishops), the ex-Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey! (See photo on page 1)

It seemed a little surreal to me to have worked in Canterbury for almost six years, but it wasn't until I had left that I spent a day with an ex-archbishop! I was relieved to see him looking well, as I had been commissioned to make him a cake. Baking in Africa is always a challenge, and both chocolate cakes I attempted ended up tasting great, but looking terrible! He ended up with individual muffins as I felt such feeble and terrible looking cakes couldn't be served up! He actually did eat the chocolate cake on the day we went to the community anyway but by then, cut into small pieces, it looked even worse! *Oops!*

Participatory Awakening Process (PAP)

Anyway, Mary's programme is called PAP (Participatory Awakening Process), enabling the church and community to work together, and helping the church to be salt and light to the community. It is a five-stage process, and what the communities are doing is purely incredible. The five stages are:

1. Bible studies (using stories like the feeding of the 5,000 – Jesus used what was there already; he didn't bring things in from elsewhere!)
2. The church and community then share their own stories, who they are and where they have come from, which encourages each side to listen and work together
3. Information is then gathered to help the communities identify the real needs and issues among them

4. Once the information is gathered, it is validated and the community analyses the causes and effects of the problems facing them and the efforts that people are taking to solve the problems

5. The communities are then able to make decisions and plan for their way forward.

Peter Grant, Tearfund's International Director, actually said to us that he felt that this was the most outstanding project he had seen - a great encouragement for Mary's team!

True empowerment

The community we visited yesterday are meeting in a new church. This was built by Samaritans Purse, but not without help from the community. They all rallied together and provided materials and manpower to help the construction. We also had speeches from a number of the community.

Some things really stood out to us:

- One lady shared how after the PAP process, she and her husband now work together; previous to this, they had been very separate.
- The women shared how much more empowered they are as well because of this process.
- We heard how they are planning to build a school, and how the community raised enough money to send one of their own people for health training (he now works in the community), but currently has no clinic, no equipment, or drugs. I am confident that in time, this will change.

Water

Water is a big issue for this community. The women are the ones who carry water and it is not an uncommon sight to see women here carrying a 20-litre jerry can on their heads while having a toddler strapped to their backs, maybe even pregnant also! I can carry 20 litres – in fact I can carry two 20-litre jerry cans – but I can only lift them far enough to carry them. There is NO WAY that I could lift them as high as would be needed to get the jerry can onto my head!



True joy...

I am full of admiration for women in Sudan. The community has made 70,000 bricks for the school they are planning to build (see photo above). Making bricks requires a lot of water and the nearest water supply is three miles away, and the women were making multiple trips a day to enable the bricks to be made. It is, as you can imagine, back breaking and exhausting work, especially in the heat of the day. Bricks have to be made in the hot, dry season; they do not dry well in the wet season. But I witnessed a joy and vibrancy within this community that I have often noted is lacking in other areas of the country. They have learnt how highly God thinks of them; they have learnt that together they are powerful, and that their community is changing – for the better! They had a 20-year vision written on the wall too – they are not dreaming small! (See photo below right)

The reason that I joined them on this trip was because Jonas, the Tearfund Country Director, is encouraging us to continue working with these communities - communities that are allowing their minds to be transformed - to look at the importance of children and ministry to them in the community early in the process. We are therefore thinking of piloting this in two nearby villages, in the year-long Sunday school teacher training programme in Yei. If this is successful, then maybe in my next term we can concentrate more fully on these areas. It would mean that transport costs etc are also shared, and both the PAP team and my team (by then I have faith that there will be one!) would be able to travel together to monitor and encourage.

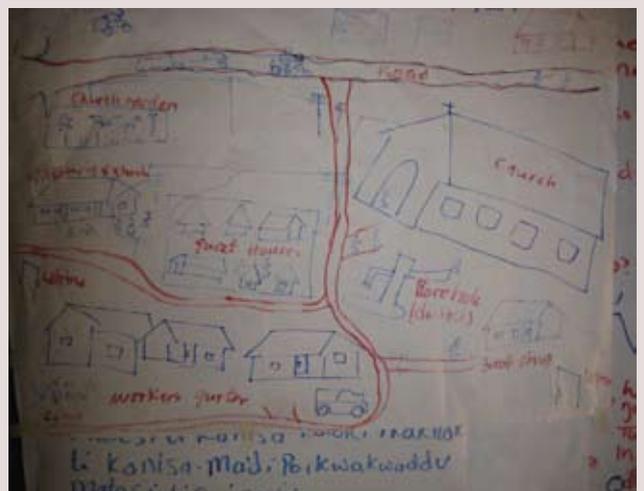
I am also looking at ways of incorporating children's ministry into other programmes in Across, so we don't remain a standalone programme. Children are not separate but are a crucial part of the community, and many programmes we have will come into contact with children as well as adults.

Culture shock at Christmas

At the start of this letter, I commented how, at a Christmas celebration in Kampala, I had been a little emotional. Allow me to now explain. When I arrived in Kampala I had gone to buy a few things in town, and I actually experienced a slight case of reverse culture shock! I had come from Sudan where – apart from singing the odd carol and some decorations in the cathedral – there was no hint that this was the Christmas season with no trees, no decorations or any of the crazy madness that we have in the UK. It is really quite a nice way to run up to Christmas! However, I got to Kampala and found a nodding Santa at the door of one supermarket, and a bizarre big bubble thing that was blowing polystyrene bits around for snow (very strange!) and sooooo many people, more than usual, and I was finding it hard to cope after so long in Yei! I was struggling more, however, as my thoughts were still very much in Sudan, and remained so over the whole Christmas period.

Lord's Resistance Army (LRA)

Some of you may have heard on the news that Ugandan, Sudanese and Congolese armed forces joined together



mid December to assault the LRA, in an attempt to capture their rebel leader Joseph Kony. Although at that time Yei had not been directly hit, many, many areas of Southern Sudan had been, with truly horrific stories. That added to the continuing uncertainty regarding the ICC decisions (which you will now, I am sure, be aware of. The ICC did indeed make a decision to issue an arrest warrant for the president. As yet, we have not felt any changes here in the south, but please keep praying as other areas of the country have been affected) made for a very interesting time.

Joy to the World

Singing carols with phrases such as *Joy to the World*, and reading scripture referring to Jesus as the Prince of Peace, I couldn't help wondering how the people of Sudan felt when they read and sang these things (even though I know and believe these things to be the truth). Whilst I was in Kampala, and during the whole of Christmas, my mind was very much on Sudan, praying for my friends and others that I didn't know, and wondering what was happening.

I found it particularly surreal to be in the celebration in the Church in Kampala, just the day after arriving, knowing the suffering going on in so many parts of my wonderful adopted country. Just before the ICC announcement, I read on the BBC website that there has been a tentative peace deal signed in Darfur as well. Please pray for this as whilst Darfur is far from me, it is still a part of this country.

Children

Those of you who know me well will think it very strange that I haven't used this opportunity to tell you more about children! Let me give you a brief update on my work here before I sign off. The weeks running up to Christmas here were a little mad! I found myself facilitating five different workshops in a very short space of time. I love facilitating, but the planning I always find a challenge, especially in this new environment and culture. But it was great, though! One of the workshops was with Sunday School Teachers (SSTs) here in Yei. I was SO encouraged by that.

Out of this, and through other explorative work that I have done, a plan for the following year is emerging, monthly training for SST's, going to three schools for devotions, and working with the teacher training college run by Across. I am SO excited about the latter, training teachers who will go out all over southern Sudan, and *who see children as God does!*

So at present, I am writing another proposal. Please pray that we find funding. We are finding ourselves hit here with the economic crisis – although it wasn't expected to hit Africa until June time – and are hearing of some of our donors being badly hit and sadly needing to seriously scale down the amazing work that they are doing, as they can't physically afford the work.

Working with children who are hurting...

In the last few days also, I feel that the Lord has given me an opportunity to work with children who are really hurting – as well as children already in the Kingdom – *this* is my heart! Children healed of hurts, and knowing how precious they are. We are planning on doing a pilot day with some money generously given for my projects, and if this goes well we will look at writing a proposal for funds for a longer programme. I then think that as we are training the SSTs, maybe once this other project is up and running, we can invite them along to see children's ministry in a different form to Sunday school. My brain is running wild at the opportunities! It may be taking a while for my work to really get going, but I hope once funds are in again it will just snowball from here!

So – as ever – THANK YOU for your love, support and prayers! I feel so very blessed to have so many people supporting my ministry here in so many ways.

Ruth x



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