



Dear Friends

12 May 2020

## LATEST CORONAVIRUS NEWS

We received the news this week that the coronavirus has reached Yei, with seven confirmed cases. Up till then, we think that the virus was confined to Juba. Officially there have been 120 reported cases in South Sudan and no deaths but almost everyone thinks this is a massive underestimate since there are few tests available and most health clinics have limited facilities.



The Martha Primary Health Care Centre (PHCC) has continued to serve the local people during the past nearly four years of civil war. The clinic has been busy, and The Brickworks has managed to keep it well supplied with medicines imported from Uganda and has topped up staff salaries at a time when the clinic's ability to pay its staff was very small. Getting medicines into South Sudan is a challenge so in April we used a pharmacy in Juba to supply what was required. The border with Uganda is now closed and all air travel is suspended.

Despite these difficulties, with money raised in the UK, mainly through the sponsored walk, the Martha Eye Clinic was able to host a successful cataract camp in early March, when 130 patients received cataract surgery. The post-op check-ups are in progress and the early results show that about 75% of patients report a significant improvement in their eyesight. The photograph shows a small selection of patients waiting to receive surgery.



The coronavirus situation in Uganda and South Sudan has brought a halt to most activities, including the closure of churches, schools and

colleges. This has brought further hardship to the local people who are now struggling to find food in the market. We received this information from South Sudan today:

Pray for those with no income who now cannot afford food, families sending children and women onto the streets begging, a huge increase in this over the last 10 days or so. It's hard for people here to stop greeting each other, hard to socially distance (neither are cultural norms) and that so many shops and businesses are closed means that many who had a way of making a living and putting food on the family table at the end of the day now don't, or they have to break the law to do so. A full lockdown would be very hard here – we don't have online shopping, most don't have anywhere to store food, so the options are simply move around to the market for food and risk catching the virus or stay at home and starve.

The programmes that The Brickworks agreed to fund in 2020 are largely on hold due to the lockdowns that the Governments have imposed. So:

- Schools in Yei and in the refugee camps are closed. (How could social distancing be observed with such overcrowded classrooms?)
- The Bishop Allison Theological College, the Yei Teacher Training College, the KajoKeji Christian College, and the KajoKeji Health Training Institute are all closed until further notice.
- The discipleship training programme for youth leaders in the refugee camps is suspended as is the lay training programme for the Diocese of Morobo.
- The lockdown caught Bishop Hilary on a visit to Arua, Uganda and with the border closed, he is stuck and unable to return to Yei. Several church leaders in Yei were arrested because they held church services, against government instructions.



Really, it is only the Martha PHCC and Eye Clinic in Yei that struggle on with our support and we are concerned that they may start to see COVID patients without any proper procedures or protection.

Please pray.

- ❖ That the COVID-19 virus may be contained and will not spread into the refugee camps or into the communities in South Sudan.
- ❖ That the Martha PHCC can continue to function safely and that supplies of medicines can get through to Yei.
- ❖ For all those affected by the lockdown and food shortages.
- ❖ For the new government of South Sudan and for peace to become permanent.
- ❖ For the leaders of the churches to provide wise leadership in these present very challenging circumstances.
- ❖ For the refugees in Uganda soon to be able to return to their homes in South Sudan.

Thank you so much for your love and support for our sisters and brothers in South Sudan and northern Uganda.

John and Poppy Spens and the Trustees