

Dealing with extreme poverty in SUDAN

Conflict in Sudan predates the birth of modern Sudan in 1956. However, it is in more recent years that this has become more widely known in the developed world. The internal conflicts have been



responsible for the deaths of approximately 2 million people and the displacement of over 4 million. The mass exodus of refugees from the south of the country began in 1985-6 but continues to this day.

Whilst the work of the SVP Conferences is carried out on a one-to-one basis, the Society in Sudan has responded to the desperate needs of the largest country in Africa by developing some major programmes. These include: foster homes for children, provision of clean water, health clinics, vocational training and baby feeding. All the work of the SVP in Sudan supports hundreds of thousands (of the millions) of people who have been displaced by civil conflict. SVP members there are responding to the desperate needs of the people in ways which astonish even the most experienced aid workers.

As member of the SVP Twinnage Committee responsible for Sudan, Ian Mawdsley visits the country regularly. In Ian's own words: *"To visit Sudan and witness the work of the members is awe inspiring. You have to visit to experience the atmosphere, the culture, and the effects of the social and economic troubles which have beset this great country. Huge swathes of the population barely exist but their lives are being made more tolerable by SVP workers."*

I find great difficulty in reporting in a way which truly represents the impact of the situation and the effects of the work. "How do we get the message across?" is the question on the minds of most visitors. At worst people are sceptical and at best supportive but don't understand the huge scale and impact. Finding the right words to use is important. I realised this when visiting a baby feeding centre during one of my visits. Instead of using the words "keeping babies alive" we could say "stopping babies from dying". Somehow that brings home the life or death situation with which we are dealing. Words seem ridiculously inadequate".

STRAINED SITUATION IN NORTH SUDAN

Relations between Christian communities and government authorities have deteriorated somewhat due to an incident that took place in late 2012 (the conversion of a Muslim woman belonging to a prominent family in the country). Coptic Churches were directly involved in the incident, and Presbyterian with Evangelical ones are particularly targeted.

SVP had to remind government officials that it is not a religious NGO, and that its relations with the Catholic Church have nothing systematic nor exceptional: SVP members are just Sudanese of goodwill who want to help their poorer brothers whoever they are.



SVP was ordered to produce 7 complete files on all its activities, its staff, its assets, and to dismiss 40 South Sudanese employees immediately, with the prospect of possibly rehire them, if authorizations are issued on a case by case basis.

We are hopeful that the general atmosphere will improve following the agreement of 12th March 2013 between North and South Sudan. The two countries have started to withdraw their troops

from their common border, which is the first step towards the creation of a demilitarized zone. The new provisions have set clear deadlines for the establishment of joint border monitoring. The two parties involved have committed to resume oil production (stopped since January 2012) and to open the border for trade, which will provide a vital boost to the economy of both countries.

Inflation is 46%, particularly for staples. The price of drugs has tripled in two years. Our medical program has therefore greatly reduced their distribution. However, the current exchange rate is favourable: 8 SDG for 1 €, which is twice what we used to get one year ago. Despite these difficulties, the management team of SVP Khartoum continues to run programs without exceeding their planned monthly budget.

The SVP IN Khartoum has successfully pleaded the cause of 51 Southerners, with the authorities, all newly qualified doctors, so that they can do their internship year in the North. Although these doctors will not be paid for this year, this is the only solution to enable them to exercise, as South Sudan does not have any University hospital.

SVP PROGRAMMES

Street Children Program



At the end of April, the end of the school year, fifty beneficiaries of the program will have reached the age (17 or more if waiver is obtained) at which SVP cannot legally keep them longer within the foster homes program. Those returning South will be supported by the Family Tracing and Reunification program established in partnership with the Red Cross. The number of children should be reduced to 192 by the end of the year. Over the years as many as 760 children have been supported by this programme at any one time.

Medical Program

The Comboni Health Centre located in the district of Haj Youssif, the will have to ensure greater financial autonomy. It is the parish that will be responsible for its management. However SVP wishes to maintain its support, as the centre is extremely appreciated for the high quality and low cost of care. SVP will now support the salary of three doctors only, whereas until now the Society used to fund part of the remuneration of 23 employees in the Centre. To compensate, the Centre will have to increase the prices of its services. These prices will anyway remain very competitive because they are presently very low. For example, blood tests or urine tests are currently performed for less than 34 pence, or a fifth of the price charged in any laboratory in the public sector.

Baby feeding

Over recent years around 12,000 small children have received five meals per week in 16 centres on the outskirts of the capital, including babies living in jail with their mothers. However, as a result of falling donations, the St Vincent de Paul Society in the Khartoum area have had to drastically cut programmes of support which have grown over the last 30 years. The 2 main reasons for this reduction in funding are



that donors in Europe are favouring new projects in South Sudan and a feeling of austerity which has swept the world in recent years. The baby feeding programme has had to be halved.

Towards greater financial autonomy

Several chicken farms have been established. The program has so far generated enough profits to finance the construction of two other henhouses at Gebel Awlia. The cycle time of 45 days will more than double from 9,000 to 19,000 chickens. The objective is to reach gradually 25,000 heads in order to contribute significantly to the financing of aid programs.

Drinking water

Water will continue to be distributed free to the schools run by the parishes and to the 16 Baby Feeding centres. Water from the Gabarona well will be directly sold by the two tankers to consumers, and not just to owners of donkey carts. The price of distributed water will be increased five-fold to make the program self-sustaining. Residents will now pay the equivalent of 6 pence for... 100 litres!

Fruit trees

In the Haj Youssif farm, 6,000 young fruit trees (citrus and date palms) should begin producing fruits in three years.

The total cost of all the support programmes in Sudan and South Sudan this year is £695,000. Our members in Sudan will still need our help for many years to come; but now, through the development of income generation programmes, they are clearly moving toward self sufficiency - even if the steps are small at the moment.

THIS IS WHAT WE'VE BEEN WORKING TOWARDS - FOR THE LAST 13 YEARS!