

NEWS FROM DARFUR – 2020



Where do you start to help when people are so desperate that they risk their lives to make their voices heard? This is what happened in Sudan last summer – a mass uprising of people crying for help for the very basics of life. Shortages even of bread, made people despair. Yet there was no violence from the demonstrators, despite being met at times by fatal attack. Their voice was heard. General Omer Bashir, who held Sudan in an iron grip for 30 years, has been deposed. Sudan is on its knees after 30 years of a Government guilty of extreme corruption at all levels. The country is destitute, its people are destitute. Those living in remote villages in Darfur have an income as little as £20 a year. How can they feed their children? How can they provide medicines when they are sick? There is often a fee even for water. No wonder the people are calling for help. We cannot stand by and let children suffer, wherever they are. Every child matters.



For the first time since 2011 I have at last been welcomed back to Sudan. It has been hard ensuring that all our projects have run as planned whilst working at a distance. Each year we held Programme Meetings outside Sudan but not only was this expensive – I was expected to include two Government representatives in all our meetings – it also meant I could not see for myself how conditions have changed and therefore identify new ways to make a difference. Thanks to our wonderful team in Sudan, both in Khartoum and Darfur, we were able to continue to help families forgotten by the rest of the world and we know that every single pound we have spent in Sudan has gone to help those in such desperate need; but now we are in a position to do even more.

It could not have come at a better time. The new shared civilian / military Government is headed by a civilian Prime Minister whose vision for the country is shared by the new Ministers. We were fortunate to be invited to meetings with a number of senior Federal and State Government Ministers who asked my advice about how to implement sustainable development successfully. The reputation of Kids for Kids is not only high in Darfur, but in Khartoum too. There will be democratic elections in under three years, and if this new Government can maintain the standard that these extraordinary people have set, I have every hope that Sudan will at last be able to tackle the conditions of extreme poverty that exist across the country. But they cannot do it alone. The international community must help a country which has somehow survived despite extreme, widespread, and massive corruption.



Darfur at Last:

It was overwhelming to make field trips after such a long time. There are a few improvements since our last visit in 2011 – there is a new road going north, but for most of the hundreds of miles we covered we were still bouncing across deep sand tracks on gruelling backbreaking journeys. We were lucky as we were in 4 x 4's! Villagers walk or go on their donkeys. I have never known such desperate poverty. There are

shortages of everything. In both El Fasher and Khartoum we saw queues of over 500 cars at petrol stations. Every bread shop has a long queue, but it is in the villages where the poverty really hits you. A village we have adopted this year, Abu Sinait A, is populated by people who for the last 10+ years have lived in the internally displaced people's camps. How they have survived since moving to the village I do not know. Many lacked basic essentials, even kitchen utensils, but it was the stories of those who cannot afford to own a jerry can, that really brought home to me the desperate need. What these poor mothers do is borrow a jerry can from a neighbour, walk the many miles for water, and when they return, half the water they have collected goes to the owner of the jerry can. In summer, which is almost upon Darfur, temperatures soar to over 50 degrees and as the water table drops and all surface water has long since dried up, the walk for water can be 20 miles.



A picture of Ibrahim, and above with his mother, sister, wife, and two little children!

If we had had any doubts at all that what we do is of huge importance for allaying poverty long-term, the hundreds of people who waited to thank me were proof of how important Kids for Kids is to them. I had the extraordinary experience of returning to Um Ga'al after 17 years. This is the village where the little 9-year-old, whose walk for water had been the inspiration for the founding of Kids for Kids, now lives with his family. Over 1,000 people waited to meet me, it was overwhelming. Ibrahim is now 6' 3" and has children of his own. His firstborn son joined our Kids for Kids kindergarten last September. I literally could not speak when I met him. He could so easily have been lost in a sandstorm. He could have been killed in the violence that raged around his village or died from a simple illness. Instead he is tall, good looking and seeing him so happy with his family was overwhelming.

100 Kids for Kids Villages:

Mothers across Darfur watch helpless as their children die. But not in our villages. There are now 100 Kids for Kids' villages, over half a million people, to whom we have provided all the things that families have told us are the essentials to enable them to lift themselves out of abject poverty. Life in Darfur would be frighteningly basic for you and for me – our home, a hut built from straw and unable to mend or rebuild it when the crops fail. Water from a handpump at least half a mile away, wherever the drill has found a crevice to reach the water table underground. Up to an unbelievable 20 miles in the hottest months of summer in villages where there is not yet a pump. Walking for every drop. Our only transport, a little donkey. And the health of our children reliant on our crops. We would have no choice of food, instead eating the same assida every single day, every single meal. I am dreading hearing what people will have to eat when they reach the 'hungry months' of summer. The coming months may be the hardest ever.



Our key project, goat loans, provide not just milk rich with proteins, minerals and vitamins and diversification when crops fail, but they give women a livelihood. The most successful beneficiary, after two years when she has passed on kids to another family in need, has a flock of about 22 goats all her own.

Something unbelievable when a goat now costs £50 – remember their annual income. It is the road to a better, albeit, simple future. Give a Goat and we can give you a personalised Certificate – and you are giving a gift that transforms life for a child.



In Sudan natural disasters take many shapes. Not only is there a shocking lack of infrastructure because the previous government concentrated on defence and security, neglecting the welfare of its people, but drought is now much more frequent. 18 years ago it was cyclical, every seven years, and people had coping mechanisms. Those have collapsed as drought becomes more frequent, and violence has taken its toll. There are pests such as locusts and rats that attack the crops, and disease threatens both flora and fauna. Mosquitoes have spread malaria, so that at Christmas there were 8,000 people with malaria in hospital in El Fasher, the regional capital. Many more were unable to reach hospital.

Our aim has always been to prevent problems from becoming catastrophes. We provide two mosquito nets for each hut. I am told that those alone have reduced the incidence of malaria by two thirds in the villages. How about giving Mosquito nets? Just £15 and you are giving life.

Our motto is ‘One goat at a time’- and every two years another family, and then another and another, reap the benefits of that one goat loan. Remember just £50! It is the same with all our projects. Everything we do is sustainable – no not the buzz words you hear other charities using, but the real thing. Real measurable difference. And how do we know – well one leader walked 90 miles with his little donkey to come to tell me that every year, before Kids for Kids adopted his village, children had died needlessly, heartbreakingly, from malnutrition, malaria, infections which they could not withstand, because they were too weak - all preventable. He wanted me to know that not one child had died like this since we – since you – helped his village.



Last year, a year when conditions have been the worst I have known, and with little prospect of improvement unless the international community steps in quickly, we honoured our promise to adopt **eight more villages**. We start 2020 working with these communities and supporting our existing villages. In October 2019 alone, our **midwives in 21 of our villages delivered 154 healthy babies**. They provided health care pre and post birth and advised mothers, many of whom had virtually no education and cannot read or write, how to care for their newborns. They also teach women the dangers of female genital mutilation.

Ever since violence started in Darfur, travelling anywhere has been fraught with danger. With no health care in villages, many problems have gone untreated because of the dangers of travelling long distances. In our villages we also train first aid workers – it is not enough, but they make a real difference when there is no other health care within reach. Just **20 first aid workers** in one month **treated 214 people**. They also teach hygiene and because they are on hand, they prevent problems from escalating.



There is also no veterinary care in the villages. When lives depend on the health of their animals, training paravets and providing veterinary drugs is one of the first things we introduce in every village we adopt. **In November our paravets saw 2,766 animals.** And we are now building **five Kindergartens and three Health Units.** Despite the enormous difficulties created by the lack of fuel, the drilling rig has dug **five successful handpumps,** and there is **clean water for another 1,250 people.**

Climate Change: A Daily Reality in Darfur



You and I know from the news of drought and wildfires across the world, with soaring temperatures, and of exceptional rain even in our own country causing unprecedented floods, that climate change is a reality. In Darfur, families are at the forefront, facing the encroaching desert – sand covering everything and even in every mouthful they eat, as the wind blows across the flat and increasingly barren land. This is the reality of the climate emergency, of life at the sharp end.

We have been planting trees wherever we can. When I first asked the village leaders if they wanted trees, they initially said No, because they attracted birds which would eat their crops. Now, with education, they are begging me for trees. Yet caring for them is challenging. When every drop of water has to be carried, often for miles, it is a labour of love, of optimism and of hope. To see a green canopy over straw huts, is a beautiful sight. To sit in the shade of a tree, when temperatures soar, is beyond price.

Please help me to plant more trees. Offset your consumerism by giving back something life-saving – whether it is a little goat, a donkey, mosquito nets - or a tree. There are families in Darfur, out of sight, who need our help. Don't wait for the world to respond - let us help the helpless, together.

Patricia

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Kids for Kids

