

## Link Letter No.15 August 2013

**Dear all,**

### **Rain...**

As I write this letter, the rain is pouring outside. It is somehow comforting noise on the tin roof, but it's making me wish that I was wrapped up in bed! We are thankful that the rains are coming so well and frequently, but I have the same problem as many of you gardeners have – my weeds are growing faster than my planted seeds! In June I planted a “nursery bed”, mainly salad things, which have grown so well here before. However, when I got back from two weeks leave, the only things which had survived the onslaught of weeds were about five carrots and my fennel! Since I only have a few weeks until I am back in the UK, I have now given up!

### **A tough year**

The last seven months have been a real mixture of emotions, and feelings. It has been the toughest year for me so far with new, not always pleasant, experiences and situations and

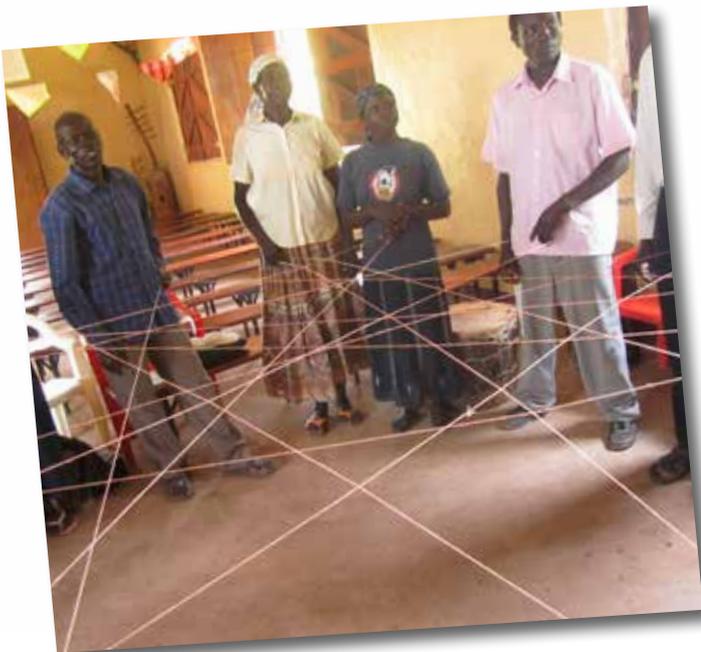


**Ruth Radley**  
CMS mission partner  
**South Sudan**

Ruth is a CMS mission partner seconded to the Children's Department of Across and serving in Yei, South Sudan. Across is an interdenominational Christian NGO that has worked in Sudan for over 30 years. Ruth's ministry includes developing child protection policies, leading trauma workshops and training Sunday school teachers. The years of war in Sudan make this work so vital to a future generation of Sudanese.

different things to work with and try to work through. Both the country and my (and other) organisations have been facing some very challenging times, on a much higher scale than normal. Some of these things have made me realise afresh how much trauma in people remains since the war, and sometimes I wonder how we will ever be able to move on – until these things are addressed.

Sadly, Across has had to cease working in one area of the country for the foreseeable future, due to severe insecurity and rebel activity. David Yau Yau, a rebel leader, has mobilised fighters to fight against the government army, the SPLA (Sudan People's Liberation Army). Most NGOs who were working with communities have been forced to withdraw, and many people have either



*A spiders web visual aid in the Goja community*

fled or been killed. The day after our team left, the rebels captured the town.

Since then the SPLA has recaptured the town and it has been safe enough for an Across team to visit and assess the damage done to the compound, but what they found was devastating. Buildings had been destroyed and a lot of equipment was stolen. Many years had gone into building the location up in difficult conditions; it is not a very accessible area to get tools and materials to, and it is so devastating for staff involved for this to have happened, not least as many of the people they were working with have been displaced – or even killed. The team also found that most of the village had been burnt down too. Though this area of the country is far from me, it's hard knowing how it's been for the community there, and my colleagues.

Things here can also change very fast. I am now continuing to write a few weeks later, and already there are big changes again! A few weeks ago the president removed the vice president and many of the cabinet members from their posts in a large government reshuffle. As you can imagine, in a post war country, there are many challenges. Many people feared as to what this would mean, but now the new cabinet are in place and the whole thing has been done very peacefully from all sides. On the way to our community, the morning after this news broke, Sam and I were discussing it and one thing he commented on was how scars are not yet healed from the war and people are still hurting and wounded. I share this information with you to simply share the need for support and prayer, for this fledgling country and her government and people. The former vice president appealed for calm, and that is indeed what we saw and experienced. Please continue to pray for the president and the new cabinet.

### **A rather unusual situation...**

Work wise we are going well. The new proposal has finally got off the ground, and whilst not without its frustrations, it's on the whole been going well and we've been happy with comments and enthusiasm from the communities we are working with. This project has also seen our relationships with a government department grow, which has been great, and even helped us with a rather unusual situation.



*Enjoying an energiser in the bible studies*



*Envisioning bible studies*

A few weeks ago I received a phone call from one of my colleagues. He had found a 12-year old girl standing outside our gate and crying – it was 8pm and dark – so he brought her inside for safety, but then didn't know what else he could do, so he called me! As in any country, you can't just take a child into your home; however, we needed to do something, to ensure this child was safe, so I rang the social worker for child protection we had so recently been working with. When I explained the situation, he asked me to take her into my home for the night, and he would visit tomorrow. I was then happy to do this. Without going into all of the details of her situation, suffice to say that it is not an easy one for her

or her family, and this young lady ended up staying with me for three weeks.

Both her parents had died, in somewhat distressing circumstances and as we and the government department worked with the family, it seemed that they did not understand what was happening, but something was seriously disturbing this girl. She was traumatised, which was evident in her behaviour. It was probably some of the most trying three weeks of my life.

She was not used to having boundaries, and was unable to/didn't listen or obey! My tongue was very black and blue from things I wanted to say, but as I knew a lot of this behaviour was not her fault but as a result of experiences she had been through, I didn't. During her time with me, I saw glimmers of who she truly was created to be; she could also be so much fun to be around, and when you played a game with her, whether she won or lost, she enjoyed it which is a rare thing here. I also saw glimmers of her starting to respond to the boundaries I was giving her. It was hard not to do lots of fun things with her whilst she was here, but I recognised that if I had done that, she would never have wanted to leave. She has now been taken to another area of the country to live with a relative, and we pray that there will be someone to understand her and help her through this time. Although she lived with me, both Sam and Robina were invaluable in working with her and the family to try to come to some understanding. I am so blessed to have such a team – Sam especially understands children and their behaviour, and Robina also has some training within this area.

### **Dealing with grief**

What we all found difficult though was knowing that this child was one of so many children who for one reason or another are struggling in life, often through mistreatment at home, which is not often wilful, but more through ignorance of children, their needs, or their value in God's eyes. As we cared for this young girl, we each held heavy in our hearts that she represented so many more that we couldn't care for in the same way. I wanted to put a budget in to be able to care for children like this, to work with families, do more than the large trainings as we have been doing, but it has been pointed out to me that that is a whole project in itself. Maybe one day we can eventually take it up, but for now we are not in a position of being able to do so. It has helped me to see that children's grief and loss is not understood at all. Funerals here



*Here this damaged bridge is literally wide enough for the vehicle. I love driving here, however, London in a few weeks will stress me out!*



*I was blessed in June to take some much needed time to rest and chill out on the Kenyan coast*

are very loud occasions, with loud weeping and wailing from many people. I think that this is much healthier than our “hold it all together” funerals, but I have often wondered who walks with the children through this very scary time, and I know that the answer is often no one, simply because it is not understood.

I recently had a break, and this was one thing heavy in my mind. We feel that we need to start addressing this area of children’s grief. Grief in children, like most things, is expressed through behaviour. Often children do not have the words, or indeed the understanding, to express how they are feeling, so they do it through their behaviour. The problem comes when that behaviour is not understood. Thus we end up with children being branded as naughty, because their behaviour is, so they become naughtier as that is what they believe they are. This then follows the child being labelled “stubborn”, so they become more so – because that’s what they believe they are – and so you see the cycle continuing. If we could understand more about how children grieve, and make allowances for behaviour, and understand how to help children through these times, then I think we would see a lot of difficult situations solved. Of course, this will mean that we need to work a LOT in this area. This has also led me whilst I was away to somehow assess the way we are working in our original proposal. I have written a concept paper to GZB, the Dutch Reformed churches mission league, who support this programme. Currently we are travelling to communities to train them, which in the one sense I love, but there are many challenges. For one, most people dig in the fields to provide for their families, so often they will not arrive for training until 11 or 12am, or even 1pm. This means the time we have with them is very short. Added to this, our vision was to keep training the same people so that they would have a good knowledge of children and all their different needs, but for many many reasons, this has not happened, meaning once again that many people have gained something small, but not many have gained enough to really make a difference. I have just written a concept paper to GZB, explaining why we feel we need to change our strategies, that although we are seeing some changes, we believe we could see more.

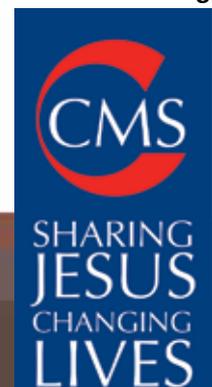
### **Child advocates**

We are proposing that each community gives us two-three people (we may help in the finding process) who will become child advocates in that community. They will be people with a heart for children and a heart to seeing their community develop. We will train them centrally in Yei, for five days three times a year. As they will be residential, we will have much more time with them to train, and we hope also working this way will give us the opportunity to arrange some practical times with them, where children (or adults, depending on what we have taught) come and the participants are the ones to teach/work with them, whilst we observe, giving us time to be able to give feedback as well and discuss. The agreement will then be that these people work in the fields/their shops or do whatever they do to provide for their families in the mornings, then two or three afternoons a week, they will be expected to work in the communities, either house to house visiting families, and sharing in that way, or gathering different groups in the community to be able to share what they have learnt. We feel that this might well be a much better way of reaching communities. We would also travel to the communities occasionally to meet families who have been worked with or groups, to hear from them and see how things are changing. If GZB agree to this change – it will need an increase in budget, as bringing people to be residential is far more expensive than training in the communities – then we would then need to write a whole new proposal to submit to them, another thing I will need to do before I leave in a few weeks!

So, as you can see, life is far from boring! Blessings – and thanks for your continuing interest and support.

*Ruth*

[www.cms-uk.org](http://www.cms-uk.org)



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