



**FRIENDS OF
IBBA GIRLS SCHOOL
SOUTH SUDAN**

NEWSLETTER
March 2015

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Friends of Ibbas Girls School
March 2015 Newsletter

Dear Friends of Ibba Girls School

1. A group of FIGS Trustees and volunteers has just returned from 3 weeks in Ibba, helping the local Board of Governors and staff to get the school successfully re-started for Year 2 - now doubled to 83 girls in total.
2. In spite of South Sudan's continued troubles at national level (see below), we continue to bring inspiring and hopeful news from Ibba and Western Equatoria State – more than we had dared to hope or pray for.

In this Newsletter:

1. We highlight 10 encouraging developments at Ibba Girls School – including new staff and students.
2. We share some vivid stories and photos from the trip
3. We ask you to celebrate International Women's Day Sunday March 8th by supporting one of our 80 students

Snapshot 1 - The Struggle to Get Schooling in South Sudan

Julia Saunders glimpse of struggle for education in South Sudan:

"Four up on a small motor cycle, Dad, Mum, daughter and baby and a pile of luggage strapped on the back. They left home at 5.00am and have been on the road for five hours. The temperature must now be pushing 40 degrees C. They are all covered from head to foot in red dust from the journey on the bumpy, dusty dirt road.

"What is your name?" I check my list, and to my relief she appears to be on the list of those selected. I'm told she has three more names and I'm given a different spelling each time they are repeated. This girl speaks four languages - a tribal dialect, plus Zande, local Arabic and a little English. She thinks she is ten years old (I think possibly older). She has no idea what her birth date is.

"We discuss the parental agreement. We assure the parents we will educate their

daughter well and within Christian values. But 'your daughter must be kept safe when she is at home during the holidays; she must not get married, she must not get pregnant, and she must be brought back to school at the start of each term'. When is the start of next term? I have to confess I have no idea as the government has not yet set the term dates for the year ahead.

"We take contact details. In this country of extreme poverty mobile phones are surprisingly common, and make a lot of sense, but whose phone number is it? I'm told it is the father's brother's son's phone, 'Oh, her cousin', I say. Next the difficult issue of school fees. The father produces from deep in his clothing the first hard saved instalment of 250 South Sudanese Pounds in well used notes (about £25), but will pay the second instalment in kind. We discuss whether this will be maize, groundnuts, chickens or a goat.

"We all sign the agreement. I stamp the receipt for the fees and welcome another girl child to Ibba Girls Boarding School. Girls and Nama our matron rush over to welcome her and to take her under their wing. No fuss, no emotional farewell. The parents and baby climb back on the bike; they are anxious to leave quickly. They have a long, hot, difficult 5 hour journey home before dusk. The roads are not safe to travel on at night."

New Head Teacher and Senior Staff Team Appointed

After a tough selection process which included an interview and teaching a 20 minute lesson to the girls, with candidates travelling for up to 4 days to reach Ibba (including some who had not applied or been short-listed but decided to come on the off chance anyway!) we have appointed an outstanding leadership team for the school:



Head Teacher: Aluma Richard Gamma.

Richard is from South Sudan's Eastern Equatoria State. He has a Masters Degree in Education Management, a Postgraduate Diploma in Secondary Education and a Bachelor's degree in Forestry – all from Makerere University, Uganda – plus experience as a Head-teacher at two schools in Kampala, as a lecturer at St Mary's University Juba and at Rombur National Teacher Training Institute.



Director of Studies: Ajidiru Vicky Dratia.

Vicky is from Arua, Uganda and has a Bachelor's degree in Education from Kyambogo University in Kampala; a Diploma in Secondary Education from the National Teachers College in Arua; experience as Head of Department and as a classroom teacher for English Language and Literature at Bulamu Seed School; as a trainer for a British Council programme for English language teaching in Rwanda; and as a team leader for the Forum for African Women's Education (FAWE) and a

Canadian NGO programme Taking Action for Girl Child Education.



Finance Manager: Sonaa Santino.

Sonaa is a young and energetic South Sudanese man, 29 years of age, born in Ibba and until recently based in Yambio, WES, He holds a degree in Business Administration specializing in the field of Procurement and Logistics Management, as well as experience in finance management. He has two years working experience with Equity Bank South Sudan as Relationship Officer- Operations and Acting Branch Accountant. Picture shows Sonaa with Gary Bandy, FIGS Treasurer

All 3 have already started their work at IGBS. In next month's Newsletter we will tell the stories of the amazing personal journeys they have travelled to achieve education, and of the values and personal commitment which have led them to join us in Ibba.

[Welcoming Hugs from Nama: Loyalty and Love Shown by Existing Staff](#)

All last year's teaching and support staff returned for the new school year on time, keen and ready for the re-opening of the school for Year 2 on Feb 4.

They have proved to be an outstandingly loyal team, committed to doing whatever is needed to achieve the best possible opportunities for the girls.

Here are just a few inspiring examples we noticed:

- 1 The big loving hugs given by Matron Nama to each of the Year 1 girls as they returned to school, and leapt off their parent's boda bodas (motorbikes) into her welcoming arms
- 2 The many days of travel and work put in by Yoane and Simon and others in visiting each of the 10 counties of Western Equatoria State during the Christmas holidays to interview and test the many potential applicants for Year 2 of the school
- 3 The round the clock commitment to the safety of the students and staff shown by Ypetre and the other security guards.



80 Lively Girls Given The Chance to Learn

An additional group of 43 girls started Primary 4 at IGBS as planned at the start of the new school year in February, as last year's P4 group moves up into P5 – making 83 girls in total for Year 2, another of the annual stepping stones towards our goal of 360 girls by 2022.

Word is fast getting around that IGBS is an inspiring school, with imaginative teaching and high quality facilities (spacious classrooms and dormitories, solar powered water, electricity, satellite internet etc)

So there is now strong competition for the 40+ Primary 4 places each year. However, it is not first come, first served. IGBS aims to provide opportunities to

those with the best potential to learn, whatever their background, status or income.

So in January we sent a team of IGBS staff out into all the counties and villages of Western Equatoria State, to meet families, interview applicants and carry out a basic English and Maths test.

When these new students arrived to register at the school on Feb 14 and 15 Yoane and Julia (Acting Head until Richard's arrival) asked their parents or relatives to make a small contribution to the school costs (in cash or kind – eg goats), and to make a formal commitment to support their daughter's schooling for the full 9 years from Primary 4 right through to Senior 4 (by shielding them from the competing pressures from domestic work, child care, early marriage and pregnancy).

This personal commitment by the girls and their families shows in their thirst to learn – not only in the classroom work, but also in the after school activities, and the life in the dormitory and the school community.



Imaginative and Energetic Teaching

Three experienced UK teachers came to Ibba as volunteers this time, to help with the teaching in the first few weeks of term before the new Head-teacher and senior staff took up their posts. Commissioner Bridget as Chair of Governors immediately appointed Julia Sanders as Acting Head Teacher (from Feb 5 -16, when Richard Aluma arrived as the new head teacher; Julia's shortest but boldest headship ever!). Julia took charge with extraordinary energy and authority, organising weekly staff meetings, daily morning assemblies, timetables for classroom teaching and extra curricular activities, a regime for lights out, – in addition to interviewing and

registering all new students and their parents, and drafting a school development plan for discussion with Richard and the Board of Governors.

Meanwhile Caroline Holland was teaching imaginative lessons in English and Maths, and Paul Sanders was working with Yoane to prepare some of the most energetic science lessons imaginable – with practical experiments using planks and students to illustrate the principle of levers to lift weights, and ice transforming into water and then vapour to illustrate changes in states of matter. (Not to mention the use of singing and dancing and chanting to learn English words)



A high level group from the national Ministry of Education and from UNESCO who visited IGBS in the first week of term said it was **the most impressive and inspirational school they had visited.**

This is because IGBS is aiming to develop a working model of what good schooling can look like in South Sudan – in terms not just of the quality of the buildings and facilities, but also the quality of the teaching and learning.

Richard and Vicky, Yoane and Agnes and the other school staff all share this vision for IGBS. The UK Friends of Ibba Girls School (FIGS) will send small teams of UK teachers each term to work “shoulder to shoulder” alongside them to share and compare the best of African and the best of Western approaches to leadership, teaching and learning.

Well-Designed “Green” Site and Sustainable Buildings

Architect Malcolm Worby joined us in Ibba to inspect progress with the building of the new dormitory and wash block, and the additional temporary kitchen.

One of the attractions of IGBS is that it is being built in a rural setting, on 73 acres of virgin Equatorial forestland, to a green and sustainable design by Malcolm Worby. As far as possible we are using local materials e.g mud bricks; wooden desks and furniture (made out of local mahogany!) and as much local labour as possible (e.g. for fencing, grass-slashing - and growing as much of the food for the school as possible).



Well-Managed Finances

Gary Bandy, FIGS Trustee and Treasurer, also came to Ibba to help in the interview, appointment and induction of Sonaa Santino as our new Finance Manager for the school (See photo above, with Gary).

This was Gary's second visit to South Sudan, and first time in Ibba and he now has solid first-hand experience of the school and how it functions which will help his work as FIGS Trustee and Treasurer in the UK.

Sonaa started at IGBS on March 1 and is responsible to the Head Teacher, to the Board of Governors and to the UK Trustees for managing the school's finances to the highest standards of probity and accountability, which includes receipts for all transactions.

IGBS as a Catalyst For Uplift of The Wider Community

We are very conscious that IGBS is much better resourced than other schools in the area and from the beginning have been committed to using some of those resources to uplift the wider community. For example:

- 1 FIGS pays for two teachers (Elias and Alison) at one of the main feeder primary schools in Ibba, St Peter's ECS Primary School, to help to reduce their class sizes
- 2 We share some of our basic school equipment with other schools in the area – pens, paper, scissors, staplers - much of it kindly donated by the National School of Government (formerly the UK Civil Service College) at Sunningdale when it was closed down.
- 3 We organise capacity building workshops with and for school teachers across Ibba, including both primary and secondary and government and church schools
- 4 We are developing plans with other stakeholders for an integrated programme of community economic and social development – including education, health, skills training, jobs and economic development

Women and War: The Continued Pain Facing South Sudan

Although Ibba and Western Equatoria State remain safe and calm, the situation facing South Sudan at national level and in three of the northern states continues to be troubling. The Addis Abbaba talks between the Government and the rebels seem to have broken down without agreement, and the UN, the USA, IGAD and other international bodies are now seriously considering economic sanctions, an arms embargo and freezing assets. The situation is very bleak.

The full horror of the 15 month conflict shows itself in the use of child soldiers by some factions, of the poisoning of land and water by leakages from an abandoned oil well, and of thousands displaced from their home areas by the conflict and by the famine.

Eduardo, the Catholic Bishop of Tombura and Yambio in Western Equatoria State, told me that the national peace negotiations which he attends in Addis lack a formal public process of Truth and Reconciliation (like the one led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in post- apartheid South Africa) to acknowledge and forgive the pain of long

standing conflicts.

The Catholic Bishops of South Sudan have recently spoken out courageously: “This war is evil. As a people we must not be afraid to name sin for what it is, and we hereby name this war as a sin... How will the nation move forward if money is spent on weapons of destruction instead of roads, schools, hospitals and development activities?”

These basic human needs are desperate. South Sudan has the highest maternal mortality ratio (MMR) in the world (2.054 deaths per 100,000 live births), and some of the poorest indicators of infant and child health, with mortality rates as high as 84 and 105 per 1000 live births, respectively.

7.3% of girls in South Sudan are married before they reach 15, and 42.2% between the ages of 15 and 18. This is contributing to the large numbers of girls who are dropping out of primary school before the end of the eight-year cycle. While around 37% of girls enroll in primary school, only around 7% complete the curriculum and only 2% go on to enrol in secondary school. Which is why we don't apologise for asking you to support Ibba Girls School which has been set up precisely to offer girls an alternative pathway.

[Celebrate International Women's Day By Supporting One of Our 80 Girls](#)



Sunday March 8 is designated by the UN as International Women's Day. Please celebrate by signing up to support one of our 80 girl students, through their schooling.

FIGS has committed itself to raising the capital and revenue funding to support the

building and development of IGBS and its staff and students over its first 10 years.

During that 10 year period we will work with the South Sudan Trustees and Board of Governors to increase the share of funding coming from South Sudan in terms of:

- 1 Fees and contributions from families (with bursaries for those who do not have the means to pay)
- 2 Contributions from the South Sudan government and donor agencies (e.g. UKAID)
- 3 Small income generating businesses and co-operatives linked to the school (e.g. agriculture; livestock; honey; guest house and training)

We have had a number of very generous grants from family trusts recently which are helping us with building the new dormitories and staff accommodation

Our top priority now is sponsorship for the 80 girl students.

Help to Sponsor The Ibba Girl Students

Sponsoring Students at IGBS

A good number of people have shown interest in 'adopting' a girl- student at Ibba Girls' Boarding School. Whilst FIGS is very busy fundraising for buildings, many Friends of the school prefer to focus on the children, and are attracted to the more personal approach of girl-student sponsorship.

We've not rushed into this, as FIGS did not want to set something up for just a few of our girls, and be seen to be giving preferential treatment to them. How can you fairly choose which girls from a class to support? Rather our aspiration has been to identify sufficient sponsors to support everyone in our two classes of girl-students. With an increasing interest in such as scheme, our aim now is to run a sponsorship programme from early 2015.

The level of sponsorship being recommended is at least £27 per month [per student](#) (plus Gift Aid), with 40 pupils per class. Whilst this is higher than some child sponsorship schemes, this helps to reflect the much higher costs associated with running a residential school for adolescents, in the challenging conditions of South

Sudan.

As a sponsor you would get regular news about one class of girls as they progress through the school, until they 'graduate'. At minimum you would be sent information about the entire class of students twice a year, with names and photos. It is intended that during their time at the school each of the girls in the class will have been profiled at least once in these reports, so that you will get to know their individual stories.

Because various trustees and others from FIGS regularly visit Ibba, we know personally the girls we are talking about in the updates.

Please Sign Up A Monthly Standing Order To Sponsor A Student

If you have not already done so, please make [International Women's Day 2015](#) the time you sign up a standing order to give £27 per month (plus Gift Aid) to help support the first 80 students at Ibba Girls' Boarding School.

South Sudan's conflict-torn and oil-dependent economy means that the full cost of supporting a girl-student at the school (including costs of teaching, equipment, boarding accommodation, food, electricity, transport, security, health and pastoral-care) – is much greater than this.

So in these difficult circumstances, your contribution of £27 per month (about the same as a monthly mobile phone subscription!) will make a real difference will be matched locally by:

- 1 Small contributions in cash and/or kind from the parents and families of the students
- 2 A small per capita grant from the Girls Education in South Sudan (GESS) programme sponsored by the UK Department for International Development (DfID)

Please do it now – and please ask your friends to do the same. You will find the details below.

If you are interested in supporting an Ibba girl-student in this way, please email Chernise Neo (chernise.neo@gmail.com) to discuss any queries and also copy in Gary Bandy (FIGS trustee and Hon Treasurer) at gary.bandy@mac.com. They will then send you more information, along with Standing Order & Gift Aid forms.

Snapshot 2 - Julia and Paul's Thoughts From Ibba

Paul and Julia Sanders, two experienced teachers from Warwickshire, spent nearly three weeks at Ibba Girls School as volunteers in February. Here are a few stories about their experience around the school.

"We helped to get the school up and running for its second year; we helped to recruit staff, including the new Head Teacher, we sorted out timetables, unloaded bunks for dormitories, hung up mosquito nets, taught lessons, ran after school activities, attended meetings with the Board of Governors and enrolled new girls. This last activity told us much about life in South Sudan - here is just one story.

"Having cleared the storeroom which was to be converted into a temporary classroom, Paul was labelling the drums with a pen and offered it to Salwa the cleaner to label the next one. She indicated she couldn't write, so taking her hand we wrote the word 'cup' together. She then proceeded to copy the letters onto the next drum. It was the following day that she approached me to help her to read and write. Interesting what prompts the desire to learn.

"Vicky Dratia the newly appointed IGBS Director of Studies told us a story about her mother who travelled for miles to reach the baby weighing clinic and presented the card where the baby's weight would be recorded. Little did she know the card she handed in was for recording the weight of maize! Her mother declared that she would ensure that in future no daughter of hers would make the same mistake. All her children would learn to read.

"On the days leading up to the start of term, returning students would arrive by motor cycle often with parents and bags piled high. A cry goes up from the students already back, as they rush over to hug/lift up and carry their newly arrived friend. The sight of Nama (matron and head cook) prompted the new arrival to drop everything and rush over for a loving hug. A really touching sight.

"During our time there it was a common sight to see Nama wandering to the kitchen with three pans balanced on her head. By way of a joke I said to Nama. "I bet you can't run with those pans!" To my amazement and her delight she proceeded on her way at a steady trot".



"Wandering around the school grounds and nibbling on anything that looked edible were a number of goats. The original three females and one billy had expanded to a flock of nine. Sadly they were destroying all the cassava crops planted last year and the bushes lining the path. Apart from the 'coffee beans' they dropped on the verandas, their cries were a constant distraction when important discussions were taking place. The solution was to get them tethered, but this was easier said than done. Twenty girls chasing a single goat around the school grounds did more for personal fitness (of humans and goat) than solving the problem. The solution was to hand over to the security guards and sure enough come morning the goats were tethered. Asked how this was achieved the answer Yepeta gave was that you had to sneak up in the dark when they were asleep and grab them.

"Mice appeared to be an issue for some in the staff accommodation and store room. Yoane's solution was to chase them around the bedroom with a broom, which proved to be very successful. I however went for the mouse trap solution baited with John's favourite food - the home made peanut butter lovingly prepared by Nama for human consumption turned out to be the perfect bait for Ibba mice. So what happens to the dead mice you may ask? Bury? Burn? Throwing the dead creature out into the scrub resulted in its almost instant removal by a large bird of prey.

"Simon the driver/school assistant has to contend with the most challenging of road conditions on his trips out to pick up staff and food. The murram earth roads, ungraded for many years contain large gullies and dips causing the driver to pick the best route through as if on a roller coaster going at a snails pace. John took pictures of a lorry with trailer fallen on its side after unsuccessfully negotiating such obstacles. It was with this in mind that I undertook wheel-changing training with Simon. Although he had been told what to do, he was grateful to have the opportunity to do it for real. Simon is the man you see when things need fixing on site, and a very conscientious member of staff he turned out to be. He was quick to learn, take up suggestions and made things happen. It was lovely to meet his sister who a day earlier had given birth to a baby girl in the family tukal (grass thatched hut)."



Girls lined up for school

Supporting The Running Costs Of The School

Warm thanks to the 500 of you who have donated so generously to get IGBS up and running. It simply would not have happened without your help!

[Before you forget, please sign up right now to contribute £27 per month](#)

We will make sure you get regular progress reports from the school and about the 80 girls. Alternatively, there are 4 ways to make a donation:

1. **By Cheque payable to:** Friends of Ibba Girls School, to our Honorary Treasurer Gary Bandy at: 12 Ash Grove, Chinley, High Peak, SK23 6BQ
2. **BACS Transfer for the credit of:** Friends of Ibba Girls School, Co-operative Bank;
Account No: 65525782
Sort-Code: 08-92-99
Please add your name as reference.
3. **By Text** by texting FIGS14 followed by the amount you wish to give to 70070
4. **Virgin Money Giving** please click on the 'Donate' button.

Of course we are continuing our fundraising for capital cost - for the buildings and resources required for the next in-take of 40 girls in March 2016. If you feel you're able to contribute please do so by clicking on the 'Donate' button below! Every contribution counts and anything you do will make a huge difference to our cause!

Thank you!

With our best wishes and warm thanks for your continued support and generosity.

John Benington Chair, on behalf of the Trustees and Friends of Ibba Girls School

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