

Short visit to Savings and Loans Groups in Wau, Southern Sudan

12th – 15th March 2010

Team:

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Background:

Pauline and I travelled to Wau in Southern Sudan, flying via Nairobi, Kenya and Juba (capital of Southern Sudan). Our aim was to visit the rapidly growing village savings and loans groups that have recently been established by Five Talents, in conjunction with our local partners including Word Concern. Five Talents has been active in Sudan since 2007 establishing an innovative pilot scheme in Lietnhom which combines literacy and business skills training with capacity building to create local savings and loans groups. The project in Lietnhom has transformed into a village “community bank” in 2008 (the only provider of financial services within 100 miles). The skills and experience gained in Lietnhom are now being used to establish new groups, most recently (2009) in Wau (112 miles south of Lietnhom), now with over 200 members. The Five Talents project leader on the ground is the Reverend Thomas Anei, a former child soldier who came to faith, trained as a priest in Kenya, attended Five Talents’ microcredit training course in Kenya in 2006 and then returned to Sudan in 2007.

Day 1 – Juba – meeting with the Archbishop of Sudan, the Most Reverend Daniel Deng.

Having arrived in Juba and before our onward flight to Wau we called at the Episcopal (Anglican) Church of Sudan’s provincial offices there, just to see if Archbishop Daniel Deng was there and to offer greetings. We were immediately ushered in to his offices and we chatted for almost 2 hours. It was a good opportunity to speak with him about Five Talents and the work being accomplished with our partners in southern Sudan. The Archbishop knew in detail about the Village bank in Lietnhom, and was keen to learn more about the activity in Wau. His view was that the programme in Wau should be more high profile and that Wau is kind of place to showcase what can be achieved – which is actually happening.

After the meeting we met with Peter Macharia, World Concern’s Country Director for Sudan. World Concern is the local co-ordinator for the project in Sudan. Peter provided us with a strategic overview and a detailed update on the Sudanese projects as well as kindly arranging our accommodation in Juba.

Day 2 - Wau – unexpectedly hosted by bishops

We arrived in Wau on Friday 12th March, and were met by Thomas Anei and Harun Matuma, World Concern’s local project co-ordinator. By coincidence on this weekend Wau was also hosting the enthronement of



their new Bishop, Bishop Moses Deng Bol, on the Sunday, and when Bishop Moses heard we were coming we were invited and made honoured guests. We were graciously received by him – he actually strode across shook my hand and said ‘you must be the famous Shona’, well I certainly won’t forget that welcome!!

We ended up being hosted with all the Bishops and the Archbishop who had journeyed to Wau for the enthronement, being given accommodation with them and sharing their food. As a Five Talents’ Trustee this created an excellent networking opportunity which I used to speak about our work and to underline the point that we bring expertise not money in the form of cash, and that what we bring will in time generate much higher “returns” than any cash we could bring.



Days 3 and 4 – visits to savings and loans groups

Thomas and Harun took us to two loan groups on the Saturday, one male, (18 blacksmith’s who are already in business making farm implements, fishing spikes and knives), and one female (23 women who are making beauty products – shampoo, lotions and something that stops your husband ‘straying from the marital bed’!!). We also visited a female group (17 women) on the Sunday afternoon. All three groups were newly formed and seemed very motivated by the opportunity to save, borrow and invest in their businesses.



There was a stark contrast between the men and women – the men being loud and more boisterous – but nonetheless very welcoming and we shared a lot of laughter. They were also very attentive when I gave my testimony and asked them numerous questions about how they market and price their products. They have invited me to go back and conduct some business skills training, which I am very keen to do! The women were quieter, certainly to

begin with, although we did have some giggles with the ladies making the beauty products. Elizabeth (above central, with cap) was particularly articulate and is standing in the elections in April 2010.

Day 5 – return to Nairobi and home

It was unfortunate that we didn’t have time to see some more groups which Thomas had wanted us to do on the Monday, which were the more established ones, but that was our only opportunity for a flight back to Juba to make the connection to Nairobi. I am very keen to return to Wau, spend more time there and go to Lietnhom. It was a very good opportunity to get much closer to the operational coal face which I found incredibly helpful.

Shona Passfield
30th March 2010