



*A picture of joy. A boy receives a winter coat at one of JRS Education centres in Syria.*

## Smiles and laughter through the bitter cold

### Syrian Winter Appeal update

These past winter months have placed children and their families in harsh and dire living conditions as sub-zero temperatures has meant Syrians in poor insulated homes and sub-standard housing are at extreme and vulnerable risk.

With a lack of electrical heating and the prices and availability of fuel being unobtainable, vulnerable families have been pushed into desperation as they struggle to keep warm. The average salary for Governmental sector employees is 75,000 Syrian Pounds (18€) per month, which makes winter clothing one of the hardest things a mother or father can secure for their family in Syria. One jacket can reach up to 30,000 Syrian Pound (8€) which is almost half the salary per capita, let alone the struggle for a family of 5

children providing jackets for 150,000 Syrian Pound (37€). War and conflict and the destruction of infrastructure and livelihoods has left the Syrian economy in tatters meaning even the most basic necessities such as shoes and coats are inaccessible to many. The Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) centres have become a lifeline to vulnerable families.

### THANK YOU!

Over the winter months, your generosity has meant hundreds of vulnerable

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children have received life-saving winter kits to keep them warm and protected from the freezing cold. The winter-kit reached 786 children in Damascus, containing jackets, underwear and winter hats. In Aleppo, 521 children received jackets and shoes and in Homs and Al-Kafrun, 584 children received kits containing sweaters, pyjamas, underwear and socks! All kits considered the specific needs for each age group and all the children from each centre got to choose the colours they liked most for each high-quality piece of clothing which

they will wear to cope with the cold indoors at home as well as outdoors.

Although such a seemingly small gift – the winter clothes appeal hasn't just protected children from dangerous temperatures but has lifted their spirits also. One of the children from Bab Sebaa was joyfully shouting *"It's warm! It's warm! It's warm!"* while rubbing his hands on his arms to feel the jacket. In

the JRS centres, rooms echoed with the laughter of the children and it was said that the space felt too small to contain their joy and that of team members.

Across the JRS centres, many of the children were seen dancing and crying. One of the team members encountered a sibling of one of the children from the educational program in the streets of Al-Kafroun wearing the same jacket

because his brother shares it with him when he doesn't have classes to attend at the centre. *"I am wearing the jacket and the pair of trainers to school"* explained Ali, from Aleppo.

From the words of one mother who had been sick with worry over the cold winter months: *"Thank you for thinking of us, our needs, and our children without us even asking. You are very close to our hearts and you take care of us and our children"*

With your help and kind generosity, our winter appeal reached vulnerable families and meant parents and children already suffering from so much already could be protected through the harsh winter. This appeal not only saved lives but brought comfort and smiles on the faces of local children. From all of us at IJI and JRS – we thank you!

Author: Jesuit Refugee Service Syria.



## A Word from the Director

The Easter candlelight on Easter Saturday night is a sign of light and hope for our lives and history.

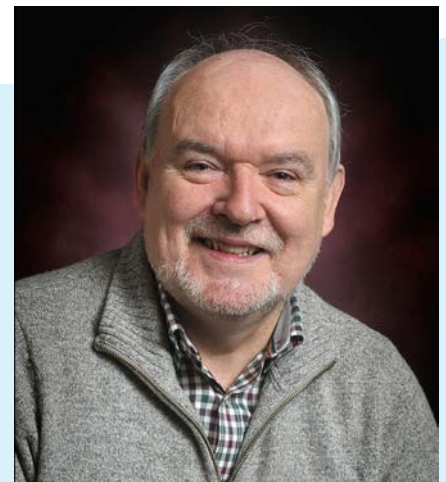
It shows us that Jesus is indeed our light. He has overcome the darkness and shows us the way. As we prepare for Easter 2022 the darkness of war has reached the doorsteps of Europe with the invasion of the Ukraine. We stand in solidarity and prayer with the people of the Ukraine as we do with the people in Tigray in Ethiopia, and Syria where we support people's efforts to live in peace at this time.

In our articles in our Easter newsletter, we read how your generosity through our Christmas appeal brought joy and peace to so many children of Syria as they lived the winter cold. Their smiles in getting just a warm coat is so moving. In South Sudan and Malawi we support children to go to school through the provision

of classrooms. There is an old Bantu proverb which says "elimu in unfunguo wa amani" - education is the key to peace. When we give children a chance to go to school and have the basic necessities of life, we provide them with a way forward out of poverty. This brings a new and real peace, joy, and hope to their lives.

This is the season when we receive and celebrate these gifts of joy, hope and peace. These are the gifts shared with us by the Risen Christ. When we share these blessings through our loving actions Easter comes to everybody and every day, we become an Easter community.

It is indeed also a season for giving thanks. Thanks for having survived the last two years of COVID and helping one



another to come through it. Thank you for reaching out to those in great need like the children of Syria, South Sudan, Malawi and Ukraine. When we do this the easter experience becomes real today.

Happy Easter to you and to all your family and thank you for being part of the family of Irish Jesuits International reaching out to those who seek peace, hope and joy.

You make such a difference.

Alleluya!

Fr John K. Guiney SJ, Director





Akujur Rualdit and Mary Ding are graduates of the MAJIS programmes where they learned sustainable farming. Photo: Fr. Wanyonyi Eric Simiyu SJ

## Build a classroom and change lives forever

### MAJIS, South Sudan

Back in 2014, IJI funded the Multi-educational and Agricultural Jesuit Institute of South Sudan (MAJIS).

In partnership with the Jesuits of East Africa, IJI sought to address food insecurity to an entire county, roughly 288 villages. The project focuses on women and knowledge transfer for sustainable farming, good agricultural practice & appropriate land use. Before the project in 2014, we spoke to women like Mary Ding, a mother of 6 children, who faced food shortages and relied solely on farming for survival. Since the programme started in Rumbek, hundreds of people, most of them women, have been trained in agriculture and farming and graduates have the skills that not only empower them by way of knowledge transfer but has strengthened livelihoods as women, like Mary, now produce surplus meaning their efforts in the field can both feed and support their families.

The MAJIS project has had a huge impact on the lives of local women but this Easter we focus on the needs of the local children who cannot receive schooling due to long and dangerous distances to nearby schools. In recent years, an informal primary school is being run by the Jesuits of the Eastern Africa Province but the farming centre cannot continue to facilitate the needs of both adult farmers and their children. Our campaign hopes to raise funds to build much needed classrooms near the MAJIS centre.

These are the voices of women from Akol-Jal in South Sudan who have benefitted from the MAJIS centre where they are learning sustainable farming. They talk about the positive impact the farming centre has brought them

and the concern they have for their children's futures.

Akujur Rualdit is married and has 6 children; the youngest is 1 year old while the oldest is 13. Like Mary, Akujur on their 10m-by-10m plots, grow a variety of crops including Sukuma wiki (Collard greens), Okra, Kudra (like kale), Amaranth (a type of grain) and Pumpkin leaves. The crops are used for both consumption and as a source of income.

*"We used to only eat one meal, during the evening hours, but now we are able to eat two meals a day."* Akujur, 2022.

When asked how the income from her farming has helped her, Akujur points to bedsheets hanging on the sticks surrounding her plot and said she used her income to buy them. She also bought a mattress and a goat. Mary said the income she earned has helped her in many ways, she buys maize flour and is able to use it to seek treatment when anyone from her family falls sick.

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*The MAJIS project has had a huge impact on the lives of local women but this Easter we focus on the needs of the local children who cannot receive schooling due to long and dangerous distances to nearby schools.*

Akujur has 3 children in the informal school while Mary said she has 1, the 8-year-old. The school was introduced when one of the Jesuit priests noticed the women farmers brought their children to the farm, but the children were left with nothing to do but play all day. He decided to gather all the children and assigned a local villager to teach them in an informal school setting for a basic allowance. Over time, more children wanted to join the classes. Both women said they were happy when the priest started the school.

*"For a long time, there has been no functioning school around here, our children had nowhere to go before the school was introduced. The nearest school was far from Akol Jal, so they could not walk the long distance."*

*It was not safe."* Mary, 2022.

The MAJIS Field Officer – James Majang, mentioned one of challenges faced by children at the school is the inadequate number of classrooms. *"Presently there are only 3 classrooms (Kindergarten, Primary 1 and Primary 2) which were originally intended for training women farmers, but these were repurposed to be used by the children ... the villagers are still in need of more classrooms, because at the moment their children are unable to progress to Primary 3, onwards."*

This Easter our Lenten appeal returns to South Sudan where we hope to fundraise for the much-needed building of two classroom blocks to cater for 250 children within the next 3 years. Currently children must walk

12km to the nearest primary school, because this journey is too long and far too dangerous with risk of abuse and violence, children are without schooling and remain in the fields while their mothers work. Although such a simple campaign, the construction of the classrooms will have a huge impact and continue to empower and enrich the lives of the local communities, especially women, as the impact is twofold: firstly, local children are educated for a better future and secondly, women farmers are reassured that their children are safe and nearby.

You can help empower mothers and children today by donating to build classrooms that will change the lives of children now and in the future.

Author: Caroline Sanga, Programmes Officer  
South Sudan

## Stepping stones for a brighter future

St Joseph's primary school, Kasungu, Malawi.

Back in 2010, the first classroom blocks were built for the local children surrounding St Joseph's parish in Kasungu, Malawi. The school was later handed over to the government, but the Society of Jesus remained the proprietor and opened on the 6<sup>th</sup> September. At the time of opening in 2010, the school only had 300 learners and 8 teachers. Back then, there were only five classrooms with a single stream. Today, the school accommodates 1,300 learners with 35 teachers, most of whom are women (25). Proudly, St Joseph catholic primary school is one of the best performing schools among the 14 schools in the zone of Kasungu.

The school suffers from overcrowding due to limited classrooms and the demand for school places as the location of the school is right at the centre of Kasungu and is surrounded by many villages with huge numbers of



children seeking education. The school administration through the support of the Society of Jesus, applied for funding to construct a 1x2 classroom block that could accommodate about 40 pupils at a go and with support from IJI, a grant of €18,500 went to the construction of the 1x2 Classroom block.

Although the classroom block cannot fully address the overcrowding at the

school, it will still go a long way to provide some relief to the pupils who can take turns to attend class and learn. The headmaster of the school, Mr. Jester Banda, spoke of the classroom project and how it has given wider learning opportunities to local communities: *"the donation was a response to the call from the community on the need for extra space for pupils due to overcrowding and increased enrolment*

*as a result of the desire by many parents to send their children to school."*

Although there is still a need for more classrooms and girls' hostels as local children wish to study for brighter futures, the new classroom block will help teachers by way of teaching fewer children at a time in less crowded classes. The passion to learn and study is shown by St Joseph's amazing results, this year 96% of 'standard 8' students passed their primary school leaving certificate exams. Additionally, 9 students got selected to national and district secondary schools and over 37 students also got selected to community day secondary schools.

Project coordinator Fr. Oderick Mweemba SJ, reflected on the project and the great passion from local children for education and learning. *"The classrooms have come at a great time of need where there is increased*

*enrolment and demand for school places". He added that the school is "a stepping stone for a bright future for children and that when we get a conducive learning environment - the children will have a chance to go far with their education".*

One of the pupils, Chifundo Mbewe aged 13 who is in standard 8, thanked the Jesuits for constructing the new classrooms, in her words: *"the situation in the past was very bad where pupils were fighting for learning space in the classrooms. This affected our concentration during lessons, but with the new block we believe that our performance will also improve."*

Group village headman, Juma also thanked Irish Jesuits International for the school project expressing huge gratitude for the education of local children, including the construction of Loyola Jesuit Secondary school in the area in 2016.

The recent classroom expansion of St Joseph's primary school means improving the quality of education for the local children who have shown such dedication over the years to study and enrich their futures. The chair of the School Management Committee and Parents and Teacher Association thanked the Society of Jesus, in particular Fr Sebastian Malambo SJ and Fr Oderick Mweemba SJ for their ongoing support and thanked IJI too, expressing the positive impact of the building project on future student learning and the hope that learners from St. Joseph catholic primary school will continue with their secondary education at Loyola Jesuit secondary school continuing those vital stepping stones to brighter futures.

All of this could not be possible without your ongoing support and for that we thank you.

Author: Norbert Tembo, Development Officer of the Zambia – Malawi Country Office.

## The Road Ahead

We've been reflecting as a team on our year just past, in preparing our Annual Report and planning for the launch of our new Strategic Framework 2022-2027.

Sitting at my desk in Gardiner Street, never did I think we could have such an impact as a small NGO. Through your support and humble solidarity with those in the Global South, we've managed to make some lasting change to people's lives at a time when they've needed it most.

COVID19 has made us a global village in ways, yet the disparity between the countries with access to vaccines and those with not, is still stark. An additional 1.5 million children lost their caregiver in the last



### Education:

- 7,401 students supported in primary & secondary education
- 857 teachers trained
- 7 schools refurbished



### Human Rights:

- 10,800 children with access to improved education facilities due to advocacy
- 28,200 people with improved access to water and sanitation due to advocacy
- 19,100 people with access to improved health services due to advocacy



### Safe, Resilient and Sustainable Communities:

- Emergency relief items distributed to 26,372 refugees
- Increased household income for 80% of farmers involved in our climate smart agricultural projects



### Health and Well-being:

- COVID19 prevention measures reaching 6,152 people
- Improvements in emotional well-being amongst 31% of refugees accessing psycho-social care
- Ante-natal care provided to 683 women





*A mother and her baby attend a JRS support group in Maban, South Sudan.*

year, due to COVID19 alone. The latest figures suggest that a minimum of 6.7 million children around the world have experienced the death of a caregiver since the start of the pandemic. While we feel the squeeze in Ireland of rising fuel costs, rising costs of our weekly groceries and watch startling images of Putin's tanks invade Ukraine, we get an ever so slight glimpse of what life is like for the majority of people in his world. Uncertainty of what lies ahead each morning is a daily reality for most.

Our partners work with people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes. Conflict is the main cause of their displacement. We reached 25,868 displaced people in Tigray, Ethiopia last year with emergency medicine, emergency non-food items (pots, pans, blankets, cooking utensils), emergency relief food and cash transfers to those most vulnerable.

In the years to come, climate change will be the main underlying cause of

displacement. People are already being forced to scuffle over the limited resources available (fertile land and water). The Global South is responsible for just 4% of the world's carbon footprint – yet are experiencing the effects of it most harshly. This is already the focus of many of our partners who work with rural female small-holder farmers developing climate smart agricultural techniques to improve diet, reduce malnutrition and sell surplus in the local market as a means of bringing income for their households. Last year we supported afforestation projects – including the planting of 70,199 tree seedlings in Kasungu, Malawi.

Our colleague Tim, based in Kenya was told in his last visit to the women in Rumbek, South Sudan of the struggles they go through to get a successful crop yield. Their bamboo fences are constantly being eaten by termites with their crops then being trampled on by wild animals or robbed at night. Tim was shown how your support is helping

erect a more permanent fence – just a simple gesture that has made a world of difference for these women – a chance to harvest their crops that they've worked so hard to yield to feed their families and sell the surplus.

The reach of our work across 14 countries can be at times overwhelming – that a gesture from Ireland can impact on someone as far away as the remote arid mountains in Afghanistan. Last year, our support enabled 2,999 children from the oppressed Hazara group in Daikundi Province to be taught English, Computer Studies and Peace Building.

As we near the end of the Ignatian Year in July'22, which has been a year dedicated within the Society of Jesus to focusing on what really matters, we can take stock of the impact we've had on others and renew our energy for the work yet to be done.

*Author: Emer Kerrigan, IJI Operations Manager*