



## Together we can make sure this crisis cannot be forgotten.

By Shane Burke, Deputy Regional Director JRS Eastern Africa

I'm in Renk, South Sudan, in what is known as the transit centre, an enclosed space that receives those fleeing violence in Sudan, a conflict that still rages on.

An old man taps me on the shoulder and points to his ankle. Lodged in there is a pellet or a piece of shrapnel. The wound is dry by now. He has clearly been like this for some time, hobbling in silence. It is as if he knows the world doesn't notice the suffering that engulfs his country, Sudan, like a wildfire. He knows the world isn't listening. He walks away without complaining.

Humanity has failed the people of Sudan. The rights enshrined within the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights are just words for books and policy makers. Article 3, the right to life, liberty, personal security is a fairy tale. From Khartoum, from Darfur, from across Sudan, people run for their lives, from attack, from sexual assault and rape, from torture - thrown into a world of fear, isolation, and confusion - human rights, are only words, found at the end of a pen in some bureaucratic office far from here.

The people of Sudan don't want to leave their homes, their belongings,

### Contents

- [Together we can make sure this crisis cannot be forgotten](#)
- [A word from the Director](#)
- [Saved by mango trees](#)
- [WOWzers!](#)
- [The gift of a bike](#)

friends and family, their lives, their futures, their hopes, their dreams. But they have no choice. In exchange many get the harsh reality of Renk, where food and services are scarce, sickness is rampant, basic health and sanitation facilities are shared between thousands. And there in the middle of it all children run and play. They have experienced the horrors of war, they have lost loved ones, their lives have been turned upside down, yet they have the spirit to play. Even amid such tragedy there is some hope.

Humanitarian organisations are doing all they can, underfunded, over worked, overwhelmed – but they persist, catering for 100 times more people than they are equipped. They push on, giving some flicker of light within the dark desperation. Together, tired

and disillusioned, strongly committed and passionate they stand alongside teachers, mothers, drivers, students, cooks, all walks of life, now all equal, all stuck in this limbo together, their lives of yesterday, gone.

I am privileged to work with the staff of the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), serving and accompanying people across the East Africa region. Those in Renk understand the challenges the people are facing. They see the horror, the loss, and the pain in the people they care for every day. JRS gives these survivors a kind word, a safe space, a chance to breathe a sigh of relief, for now. JRS provides psychosocial first aid and physiotherapy to those arriving.

Outside the JRS facility two women arrive carrying a teenage boy. They are desperate, he is exhausted, he cannot walk, they have just arrived in the chaos of the transit centre after a long journey to escape the fighting in Sudan. They are driven and focused, only concerned about the boy's condition. A JRS staff member takes them into the JRS centre,

a small, hot room but a temporary escape from the madness outside. They receive cold water and a kind smile. They have a moment to settle. For now. These acts of patience, understanding and kindness characterise the staff of JRS and make me proud to be a part of such an organisation.

I sit with a group of amputees, huddled together in 40 degrees heat, sweating but happy to talk, happy to have a space to express themselves, a space to share their challenges, to get some comfort away from the harsh reality they currently find themselves in. This is a JRS counselling group supporting the psychosocial and mental wellbeing of hundreds of arrivals to Renk, where men, women and children all receive the gentle care of JRS staff. Desperation can be seen in its true and pure form in those who were lucky enough to escape Sudan with their lives. JRS accompanies them, at least for now.

Over 7.75 million people (1½ times the population of Ireland) have been displaced internally, over 1.5

million people have escaped across international borders to neighbouring countries, over 12,000 have lost their lives. And the numbers keep growing. These people have been denied their basic human rights and stripped of their dignity.

The people escaping Sudan are getting some limited relief for now. But the capacity of humanitarian organisations is being stretched to its limits with rapidly depleting resources. The people of Sudan, within its borders and in the camps just across its borders need to be seen. Their struggle needs to be known. They should not have to suffer.

I want to take this moment to thank those of you for your generosity, help and support these past months. Together we can make sure this crisis cannot be forgotten.

*If you would like to make a donation to the Sudan Appeal and continue to support Shane and his team help those in need visit: [www.iji.ie/donate](http://www.iji.ie/donate) or call 01 836 6509*



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# A WORD FROM OUR DIRECTOR

The Easter season is a time of welcoming and celebrating once again the Light of Hope. Coming into our lives through the actions of one man, Jesus Christ who died and rose again for each person.

In the past months our news is dominated by images and stories of war, death, and destruction for the people of Ukraine and Russia, Palestine, Myanmar, Tigray in Northern Ethiopia, Yemen and Sudan. However, our newsletter is focused on stories of hope and of people who make a positive difference in the world through their presence on the frontiers of conflicts. This newsletter also highlights the positive impact your support and generosity have on people in need.

Shane Burke, an Irishman from Sligo, writes about his work in South Sudan at the border, as thousands of families flee war and bombing campaigns in Sudan. Leading the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS) emergency reception team, Shane updates us on the emergency response in Renk, a transit centre which is receiving refugees, many of whom are travelling by foot with just the clothes on their backs. JRS are providing aid, including food and water as well as psychosocial support, as many refugees are left grieved and traumatised. Thanks to your help these past months, we have continued to support Shane and his team in their vital humanitarian work and brought hope to those in desperate times.

In his article “Saved by Mango Trees”, Joe Munnelly, IJI Communications Officer recounts his profound connection to Malawi during a project visit last October. Despite witnessing heartbreaking devastation from Cyclone Freddy, Joe finds hope in organizations like the Jesuit Centre for Ecology and Development (JCED). JCED are dedicated to empowering communities and advocating for sustainable practices, as well as lobbying their government to take heed of local concerns and to prioritise natural disaster risk management in order to protect communities in the future.

Spotlighted in our newsletter is Irish teacher Ursula McCague who shares with us her experience volunteering in Kitale, Kenya. Ursula volunteered with the World of Work (WOW) Programme which is a six-month project dedicated to empowering street youths between the ages of 18-24. WOW focuses on teaching life skills, providing education and housing, and promoting overall wellbeing. In her article she talks about how her experience taught her so much about resilience, hope, and the power of community.

Finally, this newsletter shares with you our Lenten campaign. ‘**On Yer Bike**’ is an IJI fundraiser to allow the purchase of bicycles for teachers in South Sudan. Teachers travel long distances by foot to teach in classrooms ranging from schools, grass huts or simply in the shade of trees. This campaign is about giving teachers in marginalised communities a helping hand so that long journeys are shortened, and energy and time can be spent where it really matters – in classrooms. As a result, the local children can learn and be given the chance of a brighter future.

In wishing an Easter full of hope I also invite you to join in the peace prayer of Pope Francis.

*Now, Lord, come to our aid! Grant us peace, teach us peace; guide our steps in the way of peace. Open our eyes and our hearts, and give us the courage to say: “Never again war!”; “With war everything is lost”. Instill in our hearts the courage to take concrete steps to achieve peace.*

Wishing you a peaceful Easter and let us spread that peace through our words and actions.

**Fr John K. Guiney SJ | Director**

# Saved by Mango Trees

By Joe Munnelly, IJI Communications Officer

I felt such an affiliation with Malawi. Known as the ‘warm heart of Africa’, I saw firsthand how Malawi and its people live up to their reputation when I travelled for several project visits in October last year. From its capital Lilongwe to rural villages like Kasungu, it still amazes me how surreal such visits feel, seeing these places and meeting the people and communities I often write about sitting at my desk in Dublin.

Although Ireland and Malawi seem worlds apart, there is one thing that unites us and that’s the climate and how rising temperatures is affecting our weather. Although not to the same extent, abnormal weather is becoming more and more common in Ireland from flash flooding along the West coast to storms and tornadoes. For us in Europe, it’s easy to fool ourselves and shrug off the urgency to combat climate change but for places like Malawi – they don’t have that luxury.

The UN Sustainable Development Goals is about realising this universal challenge and prioritises 17 goals that not only looks at climate change and healing the environment but addressing socio-political issues as well from eliminating gender violence to sustainable economies and quality education for all.

These are big goals and require cooperation and teamwork as well as the recognition of the unfair burden placed on the global south. “African nations are responsible for an estimated 4% of greenhouse gas emissions, but are increasingly on the frontlines of the most devastating climate impacts, including lethal droughts and floods” (Forbes, 2022). Despite the global south contributing the least to rising sea levels and the devastating effects of climate change – the developing world face the brunt of the climate emergency facing us all.

A major partner of ours is the Jesuit Centre for Ecological Development, or JCED, in Malawi. For almost a decade now, we have supported them in several projects which are empowering



vulnerable communities by not only strengthening livelihoods but building capacity and resilience to the growing challenges of climate change.

From tackling the problem of soil erosion by tree planting to sustainability focused on livelihoods, such as the Mbira eco-stove project empowering women to not only support themselves financially but also reduce the use of firewood which has caused severe deforestation in Malawi.

Given that over 80% of its population are without electricity, Malawians, especially those in rural areas, rely on firewood and although it is illegal to cut trees at commercial scale – urban demand for charcoal has meant

Malawi’s fruitful landscape has been swiftly stripped of tree cover. Not only does deforestation contribute to global warming and extreme weather – the absence of trees has left communities physically vulnerable.

Land degradation is literally a matter of life and death.

In March last year, Malawi was hit by a devastating cyclone. The tropical Cyclone Freddy had swept across the country. Phalombe, in the south, was one of the worst affected areas and was literally cut off, making emergency and rescue services inaccessible when the country was plummeted into crisis. When I travelled to the district in October, I saw with my own eyes



the scars across the valley mountains. Cyclone Freddy was the largest natural disaster the country could remember, the sheer force of which broke the banks of the mountains causing mass destruction.

Visiting Phalombe was a very harrowing experience visiting communities affected by the cyclone which caused huge mudslides that literally buried villages under sand and boulders the size of cars. Roads and bridges collapsed, and maternity hospitals were swept away with mothers and their babies – so many heartbreaking stories.

I listened to mothers' stories of desperately placing their children up onto Mango trees as the mountains collapsed in the early hours of the morning almost a year ago.

One woman described how she frantically struggled to climb branches & refused her pleading children's hands reaching out to assist her as she feared holding on would risk pulling them into water. She thankfully survived, running

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away from the mudslides and was able to return to her children still up in the trees.

But from these stories of desperation and grief is hope. JCED have been major amplifiers for the voices of marginalised communities, especially those effected by the cyclone. Addressing deforestation in the aftermath of disaster has become a priority, as the loss of tree cover meant there was no resistance or buffer as mountains collapsed.

JCED, as well as providing emergency aid, have been working to bring about sustainable farming practices which incorporates forestry. 80% of the population are smallholder farmers – working with local communities to enrich soils and plant trees is looking to the future.

As amplifiers for the voiceless – JCED have been doing astounding work lobbying their government to take heed of local concerns and to prioritise natural disaster risk management to protect communities and lobby for protective and pre-emptive environmental policy.

JCED do this with passion and most importantly, with young people and through their 'in this together' campaign lobbied the government with insightful actions that would reflect climate crisis they find themselves in. Hope and dedication is what is driving these climate champions in Malawi.

My experience there will never be forgotten, and the stories will stay with me forever.



## WOWzers!

By Ursula McCague, Teacher at Gonzaga College, Dublin

I had the pleasure and the privilege of volunteering with the WOW (world of work) program at Edwina Gately House in Kitale, Kenya. The program is led by Tim Flynn and a local team including Dalmas, Rahema, Mariam, Dennis, Collins, Collins, (yes two) Godfrey and Doreen. The six-month project is dedicated to empowering street youths between the ages of 18-24 that focuses on teaching life skills, providing education and housing, and promoting overall wellbeing.

I joined the team for WOW 5 in early June 2023 (that being the fifth group to take part in the program). When I arrived, the group were in their fourth month of the program. The routine and relationships had long been established and each member of the program had their role within the grounds of Edwina Gately House. On my first day I joined the group for a local lunch of ugali, sukuma and omena, prepared by the group. I anticipated a difficulty with the language barrier but their high standard of English was far more impressive than my attempts at speaking Swahili. Sharing the lunch with the group on the first day was probably the best initiation into WOW 5. From that point on, a foundation of mutual respect was formed and their warmth and openness from the group was truly infectious.

The structure of the day was clearly laid out. The WOWzers, as Tim affectionately calls the group, would arrive at 8.30am, wash their clothes and assume their roles for their morning tasks. The morning tasks included feeding the animals (dogs and rabbits), tending to the vegetable garden, cleaning the grounds and preparing breakfast and lunch. Doreen and Godfrey would lead the group counselling sessions and life skills session after breakfast. These sessions were an integral part of the program. They provided a safe space for the group to have an open conversation about both challenges and successes in their lives. Doreen would also provide one to one sessions for any members that required any additional support. These sessions

covered a range of essential topics, from financial literacy to health awareness, aimed at equipping these young adults with the tools they needed to navigate life's challenges.

As a teacher of Irish, I was unsure what skills I could bring to the table but Tim was keen to introduce some fun afternoon activities. With that, I took some board games, chess sets and badminton rackets with me. We started an afternoon session with board games, introducing various games and guidance on how to play them. The eagerness and enthusiasm of the group to learn something new was incredible to watch. Over the course of the month, nearly all members of the group became really invested in playing chess. It was very impressive to see how quickly they picked it up and how their tactics and strategy improved on a daily basis. Tim invited the Kitale chess club in to discuss tactics and how to improve their game and they kindly donated more chess sets to the program.

Of the 20 members of the group, only 4 graduated from school therefore many lost out on learning opportunities over the years due to their home life and personal circumstances. Some of the games introduced aimed at improving their mathematical skills while others

aimed at developing their reasoning skills. Another afternoon activity that I focused on was developing the computer literacy skills and organisational skills. Most of the males in the group had some computer experience, however, 3 out of the 4 girls in the group had no computer literacy skills at all. They were absolutely delighted to take part in computer classes and again, extremely eager to develop their skill set.

The support that the WOW team provides to this young group is exceptional. They offer emergency accommodation on the grounds of Edwina Gately House for any member that may have health issues. During my time there, they housed a young pregnant woman until they could find suitable accommodation for her.

Housing the group was another critical aspect of their work. By the time I had arrived, nearly all of the WOWzers were housed. The team ensure that members have a safe, stable environment, which often is their first experience of a secure home. This stability allows them to focus on their personal growth and education. Educational initiatives are tailored to individual needs, ranging from basic literacy to vocational training. By the end of the 6-month program, the WOW team aim to have all members housed, training in a field that suits the individual or earning an income.

Tim and the local team leading these efforts are truly admirable. Their understanding of the community's needs, combined with their dedication and empathy, make all the difference.

They are not just leaders; they are mentors, friends, and sometimes even parental figures to these youths.

My time in Kitale was amazing and it taught me about resilience, hope, and the power of community. The progress made by these young adults, from uncertain futures to paths filled with possibilities, is a testament to the impact of this initiative. Their stories of hardship turned into narratives of hope are inspiring and I believe that each of the groups have gained an invaluable experience like I have.

*Ursula is an Irish teacher at Gonzaga College who volunteered in our Jesuit teacher overseas programme last year. If you are a Jesuit school teacher who is interested in volunteering contact, Joe: [communications@iji.ie](mailto:communications@iji.ie)*



## The Gift of a Bike

This Lent we are supporting teachers in getting to school and women farmers getting to the market.

In South Sudan, generations have not had the chance to go to school. Adults are attending the equivalent of our Junior & Senior Infant Primary Classes, it being their first chance to get an education. Even teachers have had limited chances to upskill and gain a qualification for their role. Half of the teachers in South Sudan haven't even finished secondary school, let alone had the chance to go to teacher training college.

Teaching as a profession, is not something most aspire to in South Sudan. Government pay is very low, and it's common to go 3 or 4 months without any pay at all. Classrooms are packed with eager students and resources to teach them are little.

South Sudan is in the midst of a child rights crisis. This April and May, it will be seeing its worst humanitarian crisis in its 13-year history, as the newest country in the world. Our schools are keeping many children from

starving. The majority of our students report that they often don't have any food at home, and rely completely on the porridge that is served at school.

Our teachers walk up to 10km to get to school, leaving their homes when it is dark and unsafe. In Cueibet, our teacher trainers from Mazzolari Teacher Training College travel on the weekends to Abiriu and Cuecok, to upskills teachers who are teaching Mon-Fri in schools, but have had no formal training. The weekends are their only chance to upskill.

In Akol Jal, our teachers have long and unsafe distances to travel, in order to reach St Peter Faber Primary School. This is a place that is so unsafe, men aren't willing to sleep there at night, and walk into Rumbek town to sleep. Cycling gives the teachers a chance to leave in the morning when the sun rises, so as to make the journey a little safer.

One of our secondary schools, Victor-Luke Memorial Secondary School needs bicycles for their teachers to get to

school, so that they are not walking to school in the dark.

As World Bike Day approaches on the 3rd June, we aim to provide teachers in some of the most challenging rural areas, a means to travel to school. Our Jesuit schools in Ireland are getting involved, raising €1 for every 1km cycled to school. Our Jesuit social centres in Ireland are clocking up their odometers in their offices. With every €150 raised,

a bicycle will be bought locally for a teacher or woman farmer overseas.

We aim to reach 15,000km in order to provide bikes for teachers in South Sudan, social workers in Kenya, radio journalists in Tanzania and female farmers in Malawi.

If you would like to join our odometer, raising €1 for every 1km you cycle, please contact us on [info@iji.ie](mailto:info@iji.ie).



## PLEASE GIVE THE GIFT OF A BICYCLE TODAY

Thank you for your continued support. Your generosity changes the lives of people affected by global injustice and inequality.

I want to help today. Here's my gift of:

1 x bicycle €150     2 x bicycle €300     3 x bicycle €450

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For more information on the issues in this newsletter, visit [www.iji.ie](http://www.iji.ie)



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