



Kulu/Juba Team Trip Report - March 2007



From a Bible translation partnership to radio station research to famine relief distribution, Aid Sudan's mission trip to southern Sudan in March 2007 was unlike any we had taken before.

The trip changed before it even started, as just two days before the scheduled departure date Peter Swann, the team leader for the trip and Aid Sudan's Executive Director, went through emergency hospitalization with an ulcer in his esophagus. By God's grace, Peter was able to leave the U.S. just one day late and still catch up with the team in Entebbe, Uganda, where they had finalized plans for the famine relief distribution and gathered the necessary paperwork for the team's travel to southern Sudan.

The morning of Thursday, March 15, the Aid Sudan team of two American ladies and five American men boarded the small plane that was to take them to southern Sudan. The team was hosted and accompanied by Sapana Abuyi, the Executive Director of the Sudan Inland Development Foundation and a key Aid Sudan partner in our famine relief campaign and other work in southern Sudan.

By late morning, having flown over the vast terrain of southern Sudan, the plane began to circle around the city of Juba, the capital of the south and a key city the north had captured during the long-running civil war. Arriving at Juba International Airport, the team found the only paved airstrip in southern Sudan and drove away from the airport on the only paved road in southern Sudan! Juba is unlike any other city in southern Sudan and was quite a sight for the team members, with its somewhat reliable running water, electricity, and cell phone service.



The goals of the time in Juba included registering Aid Sudan as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in southern Sudan, researching the possibility of establishing a radio station in Juba, and meeting with an established Bible translation organization in considering a potential long-term partnership. The team was amazed at how God provided in helping achieve each goal!

As the team had lunch the first day in Juba, a Sudanese man suddenly walked up and began calling the name of Russell Jonas, Aid Sudan's Director of Sudan Projects and the assistant team leader on this trip. As Russell turned around, he realized that the man was Abraham Gai, a Sudanese friend from the U.S. whom he and Peter had met before. As the team visited and ate together with Abraham and he learned of Aid Sudan's desire to register as an NGO in southern Sudan, Abraham suddenly exclaimed that the man Aid Sudan would register with was his uncle and that he would take the team straight to him! The team was warmly received by his uncle, who is the Minister of Legal Affairs for southern Sudan and whose wife happens to be a member of the southern Sudanese church Peter attends in Houston.

Early Friday morning, the team eagerly welcomed David Giir, a Sudanese friend from Houston who had traveled through a different route before connecting with the team in Juba. It was David's first time back in Juba in more than fifteen years, and what an honor it was to see him reunited with family and friends! David gave the team great insight into how Juba had changed during and after the war.

As Aid Sudan's lead researcher on the possibility of establishing a radio station in Juba, David led the team to the office of an existing radio station. There was uncertainty as to whether or not the radio station directors might allow the team to thoroughly research their setup, but the team was received with open arms! It was an amazing opportunity to photograph and catalogue all of the different aspects to having a radio station in Juba. During the time there, the team was plagued by the sounds of the calls to prayer coming from the mosques, and our prayer is that one day soon the sound of the stories of God through Chronological Bible Storying over the radio waves may sound louder than the calls to prayer from the mosques!

Saturday morning, the team was privileged to meet with a Bible translation group interested in a long-term partnership among the Jur people, the tribe that Executive Director Peter Swann and his wife used to live among and the people who were to receive the famine relief supplies. The potential for partnership and impact is great and the meeting was a definite success.

By lunch time, the team was on board a Cessna Caravan bound for Mvolo, Sudan, the main village among the Jur people. As the plane bounced down the dirt airstrip, the people flocked to it as they turned out in mass! The team began navigating through the crowds and mud huts as they walked to the Mvolo Youth Lodge, the home to the mission team in November 2006. As the team arrived, they called out for Dosimon, the host for each team while in Mvolo. Dosimon came eagerly walking up and exclaimed, "I heard word that white people had landed on the airstrip, and I knew it had to be you!"



Team welcomed at the dirt airstrip in Mvolo

After visiting Mvolo, the team traveled to Domeri, where they were graciously welcomed and enjoyed a traditional Jur church service Sunday morning in the oldest church among the Jur people. In the service, the preacher told the story of Jonah, which is not found in the Jur Bible. The team was greatly encouraged by this message, knowing the impact of Chronological Bible Storying through Peter's teaching with pastors during his two years among the Jur.

In March, at the end of each dry season, the Jur villagers burn down the overgrown grass in their gardens. The 120-130 degree heat is a deterrent to burning during the day, and so the Jur traditionally burn at night. That Sunday night, the flames from a nearby garden were thrown many, many feet in the air and left an imposing sight for all on the compound where the team stayed. Logic dictated that the flames should have consumed the compound, yet in reality the fire was a sufficient distance away and the Jur, experts in controlling fire, gave the team no real cause for concern. However, the sight that night was amazing.



Children in Domeri gather after church

Monday morning, the team took the long-awaited drive to Kulu, the village where Peter and his wife, Shauna, had lived, and the place that was the start of the attacks from the Kulu Emergency. Just last year, the village had been burned down as the raiding tribe started there and then moved on to other villages, raping women and killing men. In the end, 106,000 were internally displaced and many lost all they had. In Kulu and other hard-hit areas, the people lost all the food they had. Having surveyed the area on the November trip, Aid Sudan began a famine relief campaign with a goal of \$50,000, but through an overwhelming response from supporters by the January 31 deadline over \$60,000 had been raised!

As the team bounced down the old river bed that led to the village that Monday, Peter warned them again of the devastation and the impact on the village. Yet there was hope that many had returned to the village and that it was beginning to be rebuilt, and as the truck rounded the last corner, that was indeed found to be true! The challenges remain immense, as all school books and supplies were burned up in the attacks and there is little medicine in the clinic, yet the school, clinic, and market are at least again functioning.



Elizabeth greets villagers in Domeri

Even with those signs of rebuilding came immense concern, though. As the chief of Kulu approached Peter, Peter was immediately struck by the very frail condition of his old friend. The team soon observed that throughout the village, the people were painfully thin and many children carried distended stomachs. Hurrying through the traditional greetings, the chief rushed to explain to Peter in the heart language that his people were on the verge of death. He told of how in February he had sent a desperate plea for Aid Sudan to come, because many of his people would otherwise die in March and April. By God's grace and divine plan, Aid Sudan was already on the way, and arriving just in time.



Sapana speaks to the people in Kulu

their ambassadors in the United States.

Gathering the people together, Sapana, who himself is a Jur man and our local partner for the famine relief campaign, began to speak to the people. He then quickly turned it over to Peter and Peter was privileged to bring the welcome news that food and seed was on the way! The chief and people were overwhelmed and eager for the supplies to arrive. The chief pointed to blankets children and women were using, blankets that the team had provided in November, as evidence of the impact of Aid Sudan. He then thanked Aid Sudan for being

Monday night, the team stayed in Mvolo, receiving a taste of traditional village life. Long drop toilets, fish from the river, and sleep under the stars or in mud huts gave the team a great experience of real Jur life.

Tuesday morning, Russell and the two ladies on the team boarded a small plane bound for Entebbe, Uganda, where they met their KLM flight back to the U.S. It had been a powerful trip, and the team all prayed together that the famine relief supplies would arrive before the remainder of the team had to leave the area.

As David Giir had remained in Juba to gather further research while visiting with family and friends, the four left in Mvolo included Peter and Brad Saltzman, Aid Sudan's chairman of the board. In his role with Living Water International, Brad was to accompany the other two team members to Yei, Sudan to survey work for Living Water International.

By Thursday morning, the first truck had reportedly reached Sudan after being delayed due to another truck that had run part-way off of a bridge at the border and closed down all traffic. Grateful that the truck had reached the border, the remaining team members were optimistic that the truck would soon arrive and Peter stayed behind as Brad and the other two team members left for Yei.

On Friday, Sapana and Peter received word that a new paperwork guideline had come out and the truck was to be delayed at the border until the new paperwork could be delivered, a process that could take days or weeks. However, Sapana called a friend who was an official at the border, and Peter and Sapana began to pray for the truck to be released. When on Saturday morning the truck had not arrived, Peter began to think that there was not much hope left. Yet late Saturday morning the sound of the rumbling of a large truck reached his ears and fifteen tons of relief food entered Sapana's compound! Peter almost began to cry, overwhelmed by the sheer size and volume of life-saving food for the Jur people.



Famine relief supplies finally arrive!

On Saturday afternoon at 4 p.m. the two Ugandan drivers, Sapana, another Sudanese man, and Peter climbed in the cab of the large truck headed for Kulu. The trip should have taken about an hour and a half, but instead took eleven hours! The truck had a flat tire, which took three hours to repair, and then got stuck in the sand for an hour. The truck next encountered a spot where it very nearly tipped over, and Peter, the Ugandans, and the Sudanese had to manually offload two tons of food! After the truck barely stayed upright but made it through the tough spot, the five men had to carry the two tons over the bad spot and then upload the food to the truck. The entire process took four hours and finished at 2 a.m.! It was with great relief that the truck finally rumbled into the village of Kulu at 3 a.m. that Sunday morning.

Walking with Sapana to his old compound, Peter was overwhelmed to sleep on the ground under the stars at his old home. Awakened by gnats, flies, and bees at 7:30 AM, Peter and Sapana gathered the people in the village together as Sapana began to preach in his heart language, telling the story of the people of Israel and how through their suffering God always provided for them. Sapana encouraged his fellow Jur to remain true to God, and exhorted them to give God, and not man or any organization all the thanks and credit for the food.



Women team up to bring food to their homes

By 8 a.m. the distribution began, with an estimated 1,000 people coming through over the next several hours. The people were overwhelmed to receive the food, which was enough for a month for an entire family. Not only did Aid Sudan provide food for the immediate need, we chose also to focus on those facing a real threat to life and gave enough food for a month, plus seed for the future crops. Sapana and other local partners had been tremendous in purchasing and delivering the food, getting a lot of food per dollar, in addition to other relief supplies. The 50 tons of food in the

three trucks will save an estimated 2,000 lives across three hard hit villages in March and April, in addition to helping thousands of others with very limited food reserves and granting seed for many thousands for next years crop.

The desperation of the people was obvious, as women carried 110 lb bags on their heads from the distribution site to their huts, ripped them open, and immediately began preparing the food. During the distribution Peter asked his good friend Buksa about the corn that had been delivered, wondering whether or not he would have preferred another food item. With deep anguish in his voice Buksa replied, "It does not matter. We just need food."

Peter and Shauna's friend Asinita, the elder among the women in the village, approached Peter with two yams. Begging him to take them to America, she said, "I want people to see these yams and know that this is all we have to eat. You tell them that we are suffering and that we have no other food. You show them this food so they know we are not lying. You tell them, Peter. You tell them." With an overwhelmed and broken heart, Peter replied, "I'm not allowed to take this food into my country, Asinita. But I will take your picture, and I will tell your story. I promise you that I will tell your story, and I promise you that your story will be heard."



People in Kulu thank God for providing

At the sight of the men, women, and children – people who are not just mere faces, but long-time friends – receiving their life-saving food, Peter remained on the verge of tears much of the day. God’s grace on the Jur was evident in abundance as He provided for them in their critical time of need. In fact, the first rains of the rainy season came that day, cooling the 125 degree heat and announcing the beginning of the planting season. It was indeed very symbolic of God’s grace raining down on the Jur.

On the November trip Peter had asked his Jur friends what they would do with the impending famine. They had simply replied, “We don’t know. We just ask God for help.” What an honor and privilege it was to see God answer their simple prayers in such a powerful way!

Leaving the Jur area, Peter was able to connect with the other three men in Yei before flying back to the U.S. It had been an amazing trip, filled with images and experiences that are forever impressed on the minds and hearts of team members. For Aid Sudan, it had been a trip of tremendous significance with great research, potential long-term projects, and the successful delivery of life-saving food to the Jur people.

At last report the other two famine relief trucks have been delayed at the Sudan border, and we simply praise God that the first truck somehow arrived when it did. We pray for God to bring these other trucks quickly, and we trust Him, knowing He holds the Jur people in His hands.



Stephen with the kids at the orphanage in Yei

For all who gave so generously to Aid Sudan’s Kulu Emergency famine relief campaign, we extend yet again our heart-felt thanks, deeply grateful for your generous support. And for all who supported this trip through prayer, we humbly thank you. God is at work in southern Sudan, impacting southern Sudanese both physically and spiritually, and to Him be all the glory.