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Under Tree Schools is a Registered Charitable Incorporated Organisation No 1117679
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Dear Supporters

April 2024

We have quite a lot of news for you about our girls school in South Sudan!

The school celebrated International Women's Day last month, with marches and singing – also with a debate against a neighbouring school about early marriage. Our school girls won the debate, arguing of course against early marriage.



On the banners it says:

Delay marriage for economic development

Delay marriage for good mother and child health

Delay marriage for a successful, peaceful and better life

30 girls from year 8 took the national end of school graduation exams in November, and all passed! We are thrilled about this, it is such an encouragement not only for the girls themselves and their families, but it is an inspiration for the younger girls and the community.

We continue to sponsor girls going from our school on to local secondary schools for a further 4 academic years. We have received the figures for the numbers of our girls, there are currently 88 of our girls in secondary schools. We are delighted that so many want to take this further educational step, on the way we hope to careers – just the result that we have been aiming at with the creation of our school.

The school is still attracting girls at the bottom end of the age range. There are 510 girls who have registered to come to school for 2024, aged 6-15. Not all will turn up in practice – perhaps a good thing because otherwise there would be 107 girls in year 1!

This is the fifteenth year of the school's operations. In his report, Mr Elias Bak, the headmaster, gave the trustees a number of insights into the way the school is running. As well as the standard academic curriculum we have always tried to help the school teach extra subjects that will be useful to the girls in later life:

- We pay for an IT teacher: in 2023 he was teaching 30 girls to get computer literate, in two periods a week in the afternoons (as well as teaching the academic timetable in the mornings).
- We pay for a sewing teacher: as well as making the free uniforms the school gives the girls, she was teaching 6 girls last year in dress making and repair.
- The sports teacher has been building four teams to play football, volleyball, basketball and athletics.
- 30 girls were learning horticulture, growing vegetables, and planting 5 mango trees, 3 lemon trees as well as bananas, pawpaws, pumpkins, aubergines and tomatoes, a healthy and useful addition to the school diet!
- The cooks who make the daily hot lunches for the girls are planning to form bakery clubs.

Behind the scenes, so to speak, the headmaster, who was Director of Quality in the State Education Department before the school opened, holds training sessions with teachers on the best teaching methods. Also, the lady teachers have one to one talks with older girls about safeguarding, an issue of importance of course not only to the girls and school community, but to us trustees as well.

The school has had to replace its solar system, which was decaying in the very hot climate of South Sudan. Most of it had been installed in 2012. So we can hope that the \$21,000 needed for new panels, batteries and installation will be a good long-term investment for the future.



Prices are continuing to rise due to the poor economic situation of the country. Most items are double the price in South Sudanese Pounds that they were not too long ago, but many things – including chalk, and toner cartridges for printing – are treble the price they were. We trustees are now calculating wages and other costs in dollar terms, to try to ensure that the staff are protected against any further slides in the value of the SSP.

The school, like all in the country, was suddenly closed in March by the Government, because of very hot weather bringing the risk of disease. After 2 weeks the schools were open again, but we hear that in the country meningitis cases have increased, and a number of people local to the school are sick with diarrhoea and stomach pains. We hope that this will soon alleviate.

The closure and the very hot weather came just as our trustee Helen was about to travel out to the school. We really need to make occasional visits, as it is only on the ground that we can get a full feel for the life of the school and how we can best help its future. We keep in touch closely through WhatsApp, receive news, photos, receipts etc. which is vital to communicate with a place with no postal system. But nothing replaces spending time with the school community and reconnecting in person. Sadly, Helen had to cancel the visit because of the risks of illness, also she would not have been able to see the school in operation. She is replanning the visit for the summer. We will let you know what she finds when she and her husband finally get there!

Our trustees commit their time and resources to the charity in a range of ways. Ron Sullam, who has been a trustee for over four years, has sadly just resigned and on your behalf, we thank him for his service. We are lucky that his son Dan has stepped forward to join our board and we look forward to his support for the project. We welcome other offers to join our work.

We are as you know totally dependent on your generosity in funding the school. Thank you so much for your individual donations and for those given by organisations with your encouragement. In the last few months, we have received very generous donations from our devoted group of supporters in Switzerland, as well as from the Paradigm Trust, St Mary's Church Barnes, and others.

Do encourage others of your friends to make a donation to help the future of the girls at our school. Donations, one off or regular, can be made through our website, at no administrative cost to you or us, and of course we can normally recover Gift Aid on top of the donation. <https://www.undertreeschools.org/support-us.html>

Thank you all for enabling our school to continue in strong and fine form.



We send you our best wishes

Geoffrey Barnett, Peter Boyling, Helen Chauncy, Dan Sullam

Trustees of the Under Tree Schools Charity