

The Sudan Project is a mission outreach of the Mt. Juliet Church of Christ in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee.



THE SUDAN PROJECT

Churches of Christ at work in Sudan

Help Getting Up to the Bottom Rung!

The South Sudanese people are generally hardworking and generous, but the overwhelming poverty and lack of infrastructure and economy within their new country makes it difficult for them to rise above a level of subsistence. As is the case with many in such extreme poverty, they are willing and capable to try to “climb the ladder,” but they need help getting up to the bottom rung!

On a recent trip to our South Sudan preaching school campus, an organized group of local preachers and community leaders approached us seeking funding to help start some small group business projects. The projects they proposed were making bricks for building construction purposes, building hives for beekeeping to provide honey to sell, and buying a pair of oxen they would all share to help prepare their farms for planting.

Their goal was a worthy one — to become more self-sufficient financially so they could begin to support their own families, their local churches, and those in need around them. Specifically, they had an ongoing need for school fees for their children and for many orphan children in the village.

We visited with them at length about the need for accountability for any funds that we might be able to provide, both for them as the recipients and to the churches and individuals who provide the money. From these discussions came the idea to provide smaller amounts of money (“micro-loans”) to individuals, as opposed to a larger sum provided to a group of people. This was accepted by these men as a good idea; and after a generous initial monetary gift from the church of Christ in Decatur, Texas, what they are calling the Magwi County New Testament Churches of Christ Lending Program was born in October, 2014.



John Ochan, our elementary school Bible teacher at the Ayele primary school, is pictured holding one of the brick forms that he uses in his work.



Sisto Mwaka Okumu with one of his stacks of bricks. Sisto is the minister for Pajok church of Christ on our campus.

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The first round of loans was made in November 2014 to the six men who created the original proposal, and it was determined that the first business project would be to make bricks. A great deal of new construction is occurring in the village of Pajok and surrounding areas, including our own plans for a new maternity ward at the health clinic; so brickmaking is a needed service and a good project for the men to work on during the dry season.

The men use the funds to buy materials for the brick forms, to pay for men to help them with the work, and sometimes for transportation to relocate the bricks when they are completed. Their goal is to make 10,000 to 15,000 bricks during the 4-5 month dry season. They mix dirt and water and sometimes straw together — just like the ancient Israelites — and use forms to make the bricks, allowing them to sun-dry. The dried bricks are then stacked in towers and covered in mud to create a large kiln. A series of fires is built under the stacks and allowed to burn all night long, which hardens the bricks and makes them last longer.

During their visit in March 2015, Curriculum Director Jeremy Thompson and his son, Noah, met with the recipients of the first round of loans and were able to see evidence of the work they had been doing with the loan money. Many of the men were donating and/or selling bricks at a reduced cost for the construction of our new maternity clinic. As the local church leaders who originally proposed this program, these men have agreed to locally oversee the implementation of the micro-lending program.

John Ochan and Andrew Ochieng will take primary responsibility for maintaining the paperwork, administering the micro-loans to local applicants, and maintaining communication with Jeremy in regard to the ongoing program. The group is now seeking out good candidates for future loans, with a particular focus on local widows in the church who might be able to start a bread-making, sewing or other business in the local market that would help them support themselves and their children.

The plan is for these loans to be paid back within one to two years so that those funds can then be used to help another loan recipient. We are very hopeful that this program will help many of our new Christian brothers and sisters to support themselves financially and to ultimately be able to help support their local church and neighbors in need as well.

Donor "Seal of Approval"

"I want to add my thanks to (the others) for letting us know that our contribution arrived and how you envision using it. Sometimes it is hard to find things where we can use the money God has put in our hands so that He is glorified. We think the evangelism work in the South Sudanese refugee camps is bringing many souls to God and thereby glorifying Him in the eyes of many people — both in the region and far away."



Andrew Ochieng with one of his stacks of bricks. Andrew is the preacher at the church of Christ in Magwi, and is also preparing to be the vocational agriculture teacher at the South Sudan Bible School.



Magwi County church leaders with local oversight of the new micro-lending program — picture left to right include Isaya Jackson, Peter Okeny, James Okomol, Jeremy Thompson, Andrew Ocheng, Aldo Langoya, and John Ochan.

*"Therefore encourage one another
and build up one another,
just as you also are doing."
1 Thessalonians 5:11*