

DOWN to EARTH

Emmanuel International UK News
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Going FAR



Mark Simmons is leaving FAR and reflects on the current situation in Sudan and South Sudan. FAR is the Fellowship for African Relief and our partner in Sudan and South Sudan. Mark started with FAR

as Country Director and then took on the role of International Director. He will join Cord in October.

Back in 2007, the world was still talking and thinking about Darfur. The misnamed “comprehensive” peace agreement had been recently signed, and the mood was cautiously optimistic. The Sudanese government wasn’t quite the pariah it had been a decade earlier, thanks to shifting alliances in the “War” on Terror. Institutional donors and their publics were keen to see an end to the immense human suffering and displacement which Sudan had suffered through so many decades of war, mismanagement and drought. I was looking to live in Sudan full-time rather than part-time, and I came across FAR, a “local” NGO in many ways but also a well-known and respected international

development player thanks to the energy of its staff, the strength of its local relationships, and the creativeness and effectiveness of its programmes. And so it was that I found myself at an EI garden party in July 2007, and, the following weekend, settling in to Clive’s – now my – spacious office with its maps and huge meeting table and colonial-era, neem-tree-shaded balcony.

At that time Sudan was still the largest country in Africa, an expanse of desert and scrubland the size of western Europe, punctuated by barren mountain ranges and watered by the mighty Nile. If you look at a night-time map of the world you can see almost no evidence of life in Sudan, so sparse is the electricity supply and, in parts, the population. Except, that is, for the Khartoum conurbation, which spreads into the surrounding desert from the confluence of the Blue and White Niles.





A sandstorm in Khartoum

It transpires with hindsight that Khartoum is not to everyone's taste. The great red clouds that sweep across the desert and engulf the city in sand can leave you feeling gritty for days. There are times of the year when the warm air from a hand dryer would feel pleasantly cool. The whole city, even the tree-lined avenues along the Nile, seems dust-coloured. The traffic is a manic jumble of battered cars and buses – the weather and the traditional flowing clothes make cycling impractical – engaged in cacophonous gridlock, even though people are rarely in a hurry for anything. There's an old joke that when asked by a Spaniard the Arabic for “*mañana*”*, the Sudanese responded, “*Oh, we have nothing to convey that sense of urgency*”.

It's cliché, but I loved my colleagues – the brilliant Cressida, the thoughtful Gizenga, the inimitable Chuck, the gracious Eisa, and so many, many more. I was so thankful for the privilege of making a tangible difference, the opportunity for our children to experience something and somewhere different, the humbling encounters with church leaders who were encouraged by interest from outside however little I had to offer, and with families who were somehow surviving despite grinding poverty and

* *mañana* is Spanish for tomorrow, or some time in the future

deep trauma.

Just a few months ago, in a camp for people displaced by conflict in South Sudan, we met Nyagieth Fathot Ngor, a 41-year-old lady who had just arrived in Akoka with her family of seven. She said: “*Our family lost old men and women who were unable to travel as a result of this war between the Government and the rebels. We had to flee from Baliet County to Rom, travelling through tall trees and forest for 6 days. During these six days we ate nothing except some few wild fruits. Sometimes we spent the whole day without water. The situation was made worse by the wild animals that often attacked us while we walking. Many children died on the way due to lack of food and water. It is definitely God's power that helped me to reach here. Even in this camp the living condition is very bad. But I thank God for his protection for me from the rebels and wild animals.*”

Wow.

There are many reasons for the poverty, conflict and displacement in Sudan and South Sudan, as elsewhere:

- **The lack of capital or capacity to withstand shocks:** One poor harvest or one sick breadwinner can consume all the family's meagre resources at the same time as earnings are lost, and the family cannot recover.
- **Environmental:** Climate change, environmental degradation and growing numbers of people and animals have increased the demand for land while reducing the availability and yield of that land.
- **Limited expectations:** People don't expect to have access to clean water, or to be governed responsibly, or that all their children will survive their fifth birthday, or that their daughters will go

to school and learn to read and write and find work outside the home (and probably remain unmarried even into their twenties), and so they don't fight for their basic human rights.

- **Identities** – religious, ethnic, political, cultural or gender-based – are manipulated and exploited, fuelling violence and inequality.
- **Lust for power and money compounds inequality**, a weak middle class and the powerlessness of the silent poor.
- **People have little reason to hope.**

That's why we believe in holistic ministry. We cannot provide hope without addressing issues such as access to services and opportunities, livelihoods, governance and resilience. And that's what FAR does. FAR's focus on dealing with the impact of displacement enables us to work across different sectors and with a range of projects, which focus on all of these issues. I have been so impressed by the passion and commitment of my colleagues who implement these programmes and of the community members with whom they work. But sadly, other crises around the world have diverted the world's attention and resources, and funding is increasingly tight. Although there are now more deaths and displacements in Darfur

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than in any previous year of the current 11-year conflict, funding is one tenth of previous levels. And when funding is tight, it tends to be concentrated on just the first of the issues I mentioned above, access to services. Interventions become inevitably less holistic, less able to build resilience or reduce poverty or resolve the root causes of conflict.

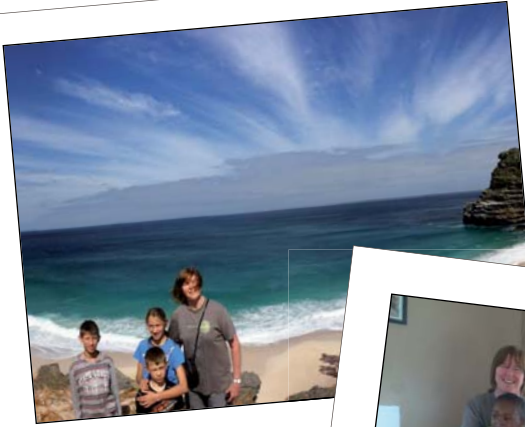
I leave FAR in the highly capable hands of my friend and colleague Reyn Lauer from Canada. FAR Sudan will be led by UK-based Des Clark, and I commend him and his wife Nathalie and their family to you. And I take up the reigns of Cord, a peace-building organisation which works on the same issues we've talked about here, addressing the root causes of conflict through improving resource management and environmental sustainability, making service provision more equitable, and developing local capacities for peace. I thank all EI supporters and especially the EI UK team, Sue, Linda and the board, for their support and dedication. Your prayers have sustained us through some difficult times, and you have rejoiced with us through the happy ones. As the Sudanese would say, *shukran wa mashallah.*



The Simmons children - Rosie, Lydia, Greg and Eleanor

Sue in sunny South Africa!

These are just a few pictures of Sue's visit with the Sayers family in South Africa in the beginning of September. She also spent two weeks in Iringa with the Wingfields and is in Mwanza with the Mongers at the time of writing.



Sue will write an update on her visit soon.

Photos:

Top - Sue with Danielle, Nate and Hudson, enjoying the "sunny weather" in South Africa!

Middle - Nate, Hudson, Danielle and Sue on the beach.

Bottom - Sue and Danielle at one of the Safe Houses, with some of the children.

Dates for your diary
Board Meeting: 21 November 2014
EIUK meeting with AGM:
21 February 2015