

# LORETO RUMBEEK



Annual Report  
2020.

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## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our first annual report from Loreto Rumbek. It is an opportunity to let you know what has been happening here over the last year and to share some of our hopes for 2021.

2020 started well for us, as we officially opened the Mary Ward Primary Health Care Clinic. Our Secondary School re-opened at the end of January and the Primary opened the following week. The new academic year was quickly followed by the arrival of one hundred new girls to the Secondary School and two hundred boys and girls to the Primary. They were with us for a three weeks before the Government announced national closures due to the pandemic. Despite the many challenges we have faced in South Sudan over the years, this was the first time we had to send the students home and it was a sad day for everyone.

With their departure, the Clinic team adapted to outreach to the local community to tackle the issue of Covid-19. They were assisted by the return of nine of our graduates who are on university scholarships. This was a beautiful experience for us all as the graduates and Clinic team went out to the surrounding villages for health education and mobile clinics. They have remained open for the past six months and alongside medical assistance, also offered food support to our many vulnerable local families.

Thankfully in our community we have not seen any obvious signs of Coronavirus. While the local hospital has received a few positive cases, the numbers have been low. The spread has been considerably curtailed by the seasonal floods and poor roads. Consequently, there has been little movement in or out of Rumbek over the past few months.

In September, the Government announced the reopening of schools for the examination classes. We were delighted to welcome back our students and teachers. On their return we ran an intensive programme around social distancing, hand washing, and the use of masks. We offered separate accommodation to incoming staff and students, while they observed a period of quarantine.

We have also worked to strengthen our compliance in best practice around health and safety, child safeguarding, general data protection regulation (GDPR), and monitoring and evaluation.

Tackling the issue of early and forced marriage continues to be one of our key goals. We have been grateful to continue our work during the pandemic. The students, staff, and local community thank you, our donors, who have made all this possible. So many lives have been touched and changed by your support.

Sr Orla and all the staff and students in Loreto Rumbek

December 2020

## LORETO GIRLS SECONDARY SCHOOL

Loreto Girls Secondary School opened her doors to the Senior 2 to Senior 4 students in January 2020. The students were in high spirits to begin the new year another opportunity to stay safe and better their lives through education. The students and the teachers resumed their daily routine of academic and co-curriculum activities.



*Left: Students reporting to school in January 2020*



*Right: students studying in the library*

Since the inception of the Loreto Secondary School in 2008 the student body in the secondary school has grown to 300 students according to 2019 enrolment records. In 2020 the total enrolment is 340 students from Transition class to Senior 4.

Loreto Girls Secondary School (LGSS) is headed by the Headmaster who reports to the Director. There are 13 teachers (South Sudanese, Ugandans and Kenyans) who teach different subjects and also act as heads of departments (based on subjects) and members of different committees within the school.



*Above: Loreto Girls secondary School Teaching Staff*

The LGSS comprises the Transition class and Senior 1- Senior 4 levels. Transition class provides the girls with an opportunity to continue with their education and eventually graduate to secondary school. In 2020 the LGSS was in session from end of January- mid March and had to be closed for approximately 5 months until October 2020 following a government directive due to the spread of COVID-19. Following this the students' learning process was disrupted. By Early October, 2020 only the Senior 4 students were able to return to school for their final year. 48 Senior 4 students had been registered in January 2020, however this number reduced to 41 by September. 7 students transferred to other schools.



*Above: Senior 4 students reporting to school in September 2020*



*Above: Senior 4 class of 2020/2021*

In addition to academics the students were engaged in sports and clubs such as Environmental club, Cultural club, Peace club, Entertainment club, and Journalism among others. The students were engaged in leadership through the prefect body system headed by a Head girl in Senior four, Assistant Head girl in Senior three and 34 prefects from various classes. The student body participated in weekly meetings and presented the students' needs to the school management.



*Above: School Prefects- Senior 4*



*Above: Students participating in sports*



*Above: Students and community members in a discussion on peace and conflict Resolution*

Students engaged in mentorship through student ‘families’ and big sister/small sister listening circles engagement with the primary school students. The mentorship program creates a conducive space for the girls to share their experiences with peers, to assist each other and to watch over each other especially in cases of forced marriages. The school families comprise of a group of girls (10-15) from Transition class to Senior four that forms a family unit (grandmother, mother, daughters) whose aim is to provide holistic support. The LGSS girls spent a weekend with the girls in Primary 8 in the Loreto Primary school (LPS). They discussed pertinent issues that face girls generally in South Sudan and Rumbek in particular. They ate together, played, prayed and worked together, they watched a film for entertainment and the primary school girls got an opportunity to spend the night in the LGSS dormitory as a precursor to future experience of life in a boarding school. The weekend experience is also meant to create a desire for the primary school girls to continue into secondary education.



*Above: Big sister/Little sister Listening Circle*

Due to the good reputation that Loreto enjoys in Rumbek, on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2020, the American Ambassador to South Sudan, Mr. Thomas Hushek paid a visit to Loreto-Rumbek compound. The Ambassador got an opportunity to visit different departments within the Loreto compound including; the Health Center, the primary school, and the Nutritional Feeding Program.

In the secondary school, he was welcomed with cultural dances and he gave words of encouragement to all students. He advised students to continue working hard for a brighter future and uphold peace. He was presented with a copy of Loreto first school magazine and a copy of South Sudan culture story book written by Loreto students.



*Above: American Ambassador to South Sudan visiting Loreto-Rumbek*

This year, LGSS registered the highest number of candidates applying for the Loreto intake. It is a great milestone for Loreto Rumbek in the pursuit to promote girl-child education. From the three registration centers; Rumbek, Juba and Wau, 440 candidates from various parts of the country sat the entry exam. From the three stages, one hundred students were selected to join first year and transition year of study. Transition year is a foundation class which helps the students prepare for secondary education.

*Below: Candidates waiting to sit for the assessment test*



The 2019 national exam results were released in early March 2020. Loreto-Rumbek community was so proud of the 56 students of Secondary School for registering a 100% pass, with six of them emerging among the best ten in the Western Lakes State (now Lakes State). This was so encouraging to the younger students who look up to them as role models.



*Above: Senior 4 class of 2019*

## PRIMARY SCHOOL

Loreto Primary school opened the doors in 2010 and has continued to grow every year. In 2020 the school registered 1,236 (669 male, 567female) students from kindergarten to primary 8. The school opened in January 2020 for the 2020 school year, unfortunately the school had to close towards the end of March 2020 due to the on-set of COVID-19 pandemic. The students managed to participate in learning and co-curriculum activities until the early closing of the school.



*Above: Loreto lower primary students during the weekly assembly*

In September, the council of ministers announced the reopening of schools in South Sudan for exam classes. Loreto Rumbek welcomed back their teachers and the students after six months in early October. Primary 8 students who all live in the local community were able to return within the first week. 73 (55 male, 18 female) students resumed their learning and they will be sitting for the national exam in the first quarter of 2021. The class is divided into Morning and Evening schools in order to ensure that all the students have an opportunity to attend the required classes. As a measure towards COVID-19 the boys and the girls are learning in different rooms to ensure social distancing is attained in the classrooms.



*Above: Primary 8 students in class*



*Above: Loreto Primary school Class of 2020/2021*

## PRIMARY SCHOOL FEEDING PROGRAM

On the basis of patterns of conflict in South Sudan and past trends acute food insecurity continued to be experienced in 2020. This was exacerbated by the measures (especially the closing of international borders and a reduction in internal travel) put in place due to the on-set of COVID-19. Most families are usually in dire need of food on a regular basis. One way to provide food to the children is through school feeding programs. Loreto primary school provides the students with a midday meal 5 days a week; such students are not only able to learn but they are also able to get a daily meal. In addition, their families are relieved from the stress of feeding them. During various interactions with the students and the parents/guardians it is apparent that most households depend on school feeding for daily nourishment.



*Above: Primary school students during a meal time*

## TEACHER TRAINING

South Sudan in general and Rumbek County in particular lacks trained teachers. Due to this scarcity Loreto Primary school engages untrained primary school teachers and offers them in-service training and college-based training (subject to availability of funds and the willingness of the beneficiary to use the skills and knowledge teaching in Rumbek and particularly at Loreto Primary school). This ensures that local teachers acquire the necessary teaching skills and knowledge that will contribute to the access equal and quality education.

In 2020, two in-service teacher trainings were carried out. The first one took place for 2 weeks from 24<sup>th</sup> January- 7<sup>th</sup> February with an attendance of 29 (23 male, 6 female) teachers and interns; including 9 teachers from other primary schools. The training was facilitated by Phyllis Horst affiliated with a partner organization and Rita Achieng the primary school coordinator. The teachers learnt the ‘Peaceful Play’ as a teaching methodology, classroom/learner management, child protection, identifying the various learners’ personalities, motivation of learners, scheme of works and lesson plans.

*Below: Participants in the first teacher training*



The second training started 28<sup>th</sup> September 2020 and it is expected to be completed at the end of January 2021 for 17(9 male, 8 female) teachers and interns. The facilitators include Sr Baiada Mary Lyngkhohi (IBVM) and Ritar Achieng. The teachers continue to increase their skills and knowledge in methodology and content in teaching.

*Below: Second teacher training*





*Above: Primary school teachers- computer training*



*Above: Primary school faculty and Interns*

Loreto primary school continues to grow, the class of 2019 whose results were received in February 2020 performed extremely well. All the candidates passed and would be eligible to graduate to secondary schools.



*Above: Loreto Primary School class of 2019*

## Mary Ward Primary Health Care Center

Mary Ward PHCC is one of three core programs run by Loreto sisters in Rumbek. The PHCC was first started as a Primary Health Care Unit following requests by the community for Loreto Schools to expand their service portfolio to include much needed health support to children and vulnerable community members. Since its inception, the PHCC has turned out to be a key contributor to the health needs of the community particularly women and children who have free and unrestricted access to the facility. In addition to clinical support, the PHCC runs additional programs including health education, a psychosocial support program as well as Immunization and nutritional support to malnourished children under age 5. The PHCC has a total of qualified nurses who are supported by graduate interns and other support staff working in different programs.



*Photo: Mary Ward PHCC Staff 2020*

## Nutrition Feeding Program

In the year 2020, Mary Ward Primary Health Care Center (PHCC) made over 40,000 clinical consultations with an average of about 5000 monthly consultations between the months of June- November at the height of the malaria season. Children under age 5 comprised about 25% of the total annual medical consultations with a big percentage of them having underlying nutrition related illnesses. Through the nutrition program, Mary Ward PHCC has been providing medical and nutritional support to these vulnerable children through the provision of meals, medicines and health education to their care givers.

Children selected for enrolment into the nutritional feeding program are first assessed by the clinic staff and ascertained to be suffering from malnutrition or nutrition related illnesses. Mid- Upper arm circumference (MUAC) and body weight in relation to the child's age are the main considerations for enrolment into the nutrition program. Children enrolled into the program stay for 3 months during which they are provided with simple but nutritious meals, vaccinated and parents provided with health education. Every three months, children who show remarkable improvement are discharged from the program, put under observation and a new group of beneficiaries enrolled.

This year, over 300 vulnerable children have benefited from this program and this has proven to be an integral part in the recovery of children in the community suffering from the effects of food insecurity. Through the project, children have also been able to access medical care and immunizations which have improved their resilience towards infections which most of the time become fatal. Through this project, Mary Ward PHCC hopes to continue providing meals and medical support to these vulnerable community members.



*Above: A group of caregivers and children enrolled in the nutrition Feeding Program in a health Education session*

### Community outreach/COVID 19

This year, the global COVID- 19 pandemic presented an unprecedented challenge to the provision of healthcare services globally. In reaction to the pandemic, Mary Ward PHCC adjusted its community outreach program to include more education to the community in order to achieve improved knowledge on health matters particularly those relating to COVID-19. Through community meetings and radio shows, a significant population of Rumbek county residents were able to interact with Mary Ward PHCC staff and ask questions, get clarifications on the questions that they had.

These radio shows were hosted by two local radio stations (Radio good news and Radio Rumbek) reached the local population in the local Dinka and Jur Bele dialects. Health talks which were the focus of these shows focused on the topic of COVID-19 (what it is, how it is transmitted, its prevention and treatment) as well as other common ailments that are currently being faced in the community. These included malaria, hepatitis B, tuberculosis and malnutrition. Community members interacted with the radio hosts through phone calls and on social media where they asked questions and were directed on where to obtain more information as well as where to seek medical assistance. In total, about 24 shows were aired between the months of May- July with more shows being aired in December.



*Above: A community health Education Session*

In addition to the radio, shows, community members interacted face to face with Mary Ward PHCC staff in different forums where they were able to get education and support (hand washing stations and soap) for their general hygiene. These community drives were carried out around the local community boreholes where men, women and new mothers were targeted and taught on COVID-19 and the measures that they could put in place to reduce it's spread. In total, Mary Ward PHCC staff visited 40 boreholes around the community where over 800 community members benefited from the health talks and education. In addition to this, targeted meetings for women, men and new mothers were carried out at the Loreto compound during the pandemic to improve the knowledge and understanding of the community on the global pandemic as well as the other prevalent illnesses in the community.

## Support to vulnerable community members



As a consequent of the long-standing civil conflict that has rocked South Sudan, most of the population who participated or were victims of the conflict live with resultant wounds and scars. These have mostly caused physical deformities, loss of limbs, eyes etc which have rendered them unable to work and provide for their families. The local communal context makes it almost impossible for these people with disabilities to participate in any meaningful income earning activities as these mostly require intensive physical input to get to the place of work or to actually do the work which in most cases is manual labor. Such vulnerable members of the community are continually identified by Mary Ward PHCC and benefit from medical and food support in order to keep them going. Most of them are elderly and also face neglect from their families and therefore need more than just food and medical support but also psychological support which they get from the PHCC.

This year about 20 families received assistance due to their vulnerability. These were families with blind members, lepers, disabled people, intellectually challenged persons, widows and widowers.

*Left: Yom a beneficiary of the program stands next to her new house built through the support of Mary Ward PHCC*

## Twins program

The traditional systems of the local community have meant that cultural norms shape a big part of the communal beliefs and practices. Most of these cultures still remain retrogressive and promote male dominance much to the disadvantage and suffering of women and children. One of the long-held cultures is the neglect of twin children. In the local community it is believed to be an abomination giving birth to twin children and that either one or both of the children dies. This has led to a lot of suffrage of families with twins with such children barely making it to age 5. As such, Mary Ward PHCC has made it one of its efforts to reach out to such families, providing support (food and medical) in order to increase the chances of survival of these vulnerable group. In 2020, the PHCC has supported 5 such families with regular supplies and this has improved the situation for this group particularly in this challenging year having gone through the pandemic. This program has ensured that these families receive food and non-food items as well as medical care to give the children an opportunity to grow and thrive.



*Above: mothers with their twin babies at Mary Ward PHCC*

### Counselling

Psychosocial support provided to students and community members was identified as a key component towards wholesome healing for a community that has experienced so much trauma. Students and community members exhibit signs of trauma that continue to manifest in violent behavior as well as other negative coping mechanisms that are detrimental to fellow students or community members. Previously Loreto used to have the counseling services of a professional counselor who used to visit and provide these services regularly to students. In 2020 however, Mary Ward PHCC has had a resident counsellor and Psychiatric nurse who provided continued access to counselling services when needed. This also came with the establishment of a counselling wing at the PHCC which provided a safe and conducive space for counselling.



*Above: Sr. Petra the PHCC's psychotherapist facilitating a group session.*

### **Malaria season**

Malaria<sup>1</sup> was the top cause of illnesses in South Sudan in the year 2020 according the World Health Organization accounting for 63.9% of patient visits to hospitals. This was no different in the community of Maker Kuei where the patient numbers increased significantly with the onset of the rainy season in May.



*Above: Temperature screening of a student patient prior to medical consultation*

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.afro.who.int/sites/default/files/2020-11/South%20Sudan%20IDSR%20Bulletin%20Week%2046%20of%202020%20November%2009-%20November%2015%20.pdf>

Due to the strain on health facilities caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic, Mary Ward PHCC recorded higher than normal numbers of patients seeking medical care with an average of 200 patients being served at the facility each day. Of these, over 60% tested positive for malaria and received malaria medication while the rest presented other illnesses. Due to the high numbers of patients during this period, preference was given to children and women, most of whom had travelled long distances to access the facility. As the rainy season comes to an end and floods subside, the months of October and November recorded a slight reduction in the patient numbers and it is hoped that as the dry season sets in, the numbers will dip even further.

### Community realities/external realities.

The local community of maker Kuei where Loreto- Rumbek is located is a largely rural pastoralist community which practices animal husbandry as well as small-scale subsistence crop farming. The residents of Maker Kuei community comprise of the Dinka Agar and Dinka Bor sub clans who mostly practice traditional forms of community administration and cultural norms.

On February 22 2020, the much-awaited South Sudan peace treaty between the main political factions was ratified<sup>2</sup> with the hope of bringing a lasting solution to the long-standing political instability in the country. One of the key compromises by the treaty was the dissolution of the 32 states<sup>3</sup> in South Sudan and reversal to the former 10 states in addition to three administrative areas. While the signing of the treaty has had a huge calming effect at the national level, the political and economic effects of the implementation of the treaty at the local and community levels remain to be seen.

At the local level, the effects of the long-standing political instability continue to be manifested by high levels of poverty among the local population which in effect has led to other social challenges. These challenges include sporadic violence between communities and/ or clans, high levels of illiteracy and joblessness as well as constrained access to basic public services and amenities.

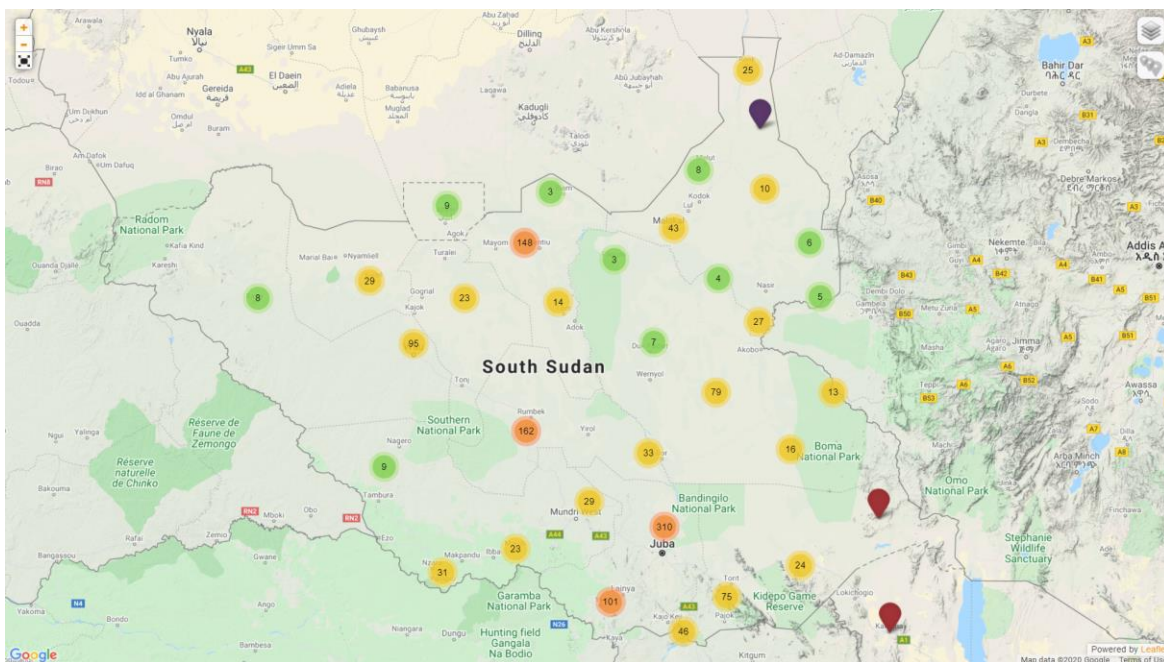
### Insecurity

In the year 2020, Lakes state and in Particular Rumbek Center continued to record the highest number of violence related incidences in South Sudan outside the capital city of Juba. These incidences included criminal activities such as violent thefts, roadside ambushes and targeted killings. As shown in the illustration below, the occurrence of violent crime in South Sudan was worst in the three hotspots of Juba, Rumbek and Bentiu which collectively recorded more than 600 cases of violence since the start of the year 2020.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2019/country-chapters/south-sudan>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.gurtong.net/Governance/Governments/GovernmentofSouthSudanStates/tabid/259/Default.aspx>



Source: Cepo\_ South Sudan<sup>4</sup> (Dec. 2020)

While the local community was not heavily affected by the national conflict, the proliferation of small arms among the population has propelled the occurrence of intercommunal violence which is still rampant. These conflicts which are triggered by long standing family feuds, revenge or cattle raids within the community normally have a long spiralling effect of violence and resultant revenge attacks. Cattle raids and counter raids by communities in Rumbek East and Rumbek North<sup>5</sup> were particularly extreme this year leading to hundreds of deaths, displacement of people as well as loss of property and livelihoods.

In total, it is estimated that more than 300 people lost their lives in the violence while more than 200 families were displaced in the affected communities in the two areas of Rumbek East and Rumbek North in 2020. Families lost their houses, animals, farm produce and property in the violence which also led to massive disruption of social order and stress on medical facilities in Rumbek.

### Early and forced marriages

With over 50% of girls in South Sudan getting married by the time they celebrate their 18th birthday<sup>6</sup>, most of these marriages happen without the consent of the bride. Early marriage and the polygamous nature of families is culturally accepted and embraced in Maker Kuei community and Lakes State as a whole and beyond; Polygamy is rampant in almost all communities of South Sudan. This has had a tremendous effect on education whereby the social acceptance of polygamy encourages the practice of early marriage. Often, these new brides are young women of school going age whose educational ambitions are cut short at the earliest chance that a suitor, especially one with great wealth appears at their home.

Students studying at Loreto Primary School and Loreto Girls Secondary School have not been spared from this threat. Mostly being targeted during the school breaks when they are at home, parents and other family

<sup>4</sup> <http://cepo-southsudan.org/mapping-conflict-violence-in-south-sudan>

<sup>5</sup> <https://reliefweb.int/report/south-sudan/south-sudan-intercommunal-violence-dg-echo-icrc-unmiss-media-echo-daily-flash-10>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/south-sudan/>

members organize for the marriage of their girls without their knowledge. These girls often end up being trapped and forced to marry the selected suitor because by the time they get to know about it, all the marriage arrangements and dowry exchange have been done.

This year, the global pandemic has meant that students have been away from school for an unprecedented length of time of time since schools were closed in late March to curb the spread of COVID-19. Fortunately, the government announced the resumption to studies for graduate classes (senior 4 and Primary 8 classes) in October which provided some reprieve for students in these classes. From the student's turnout following this re-opening, it was worthwhile to note that none of the primary school girls had dropped out of school. While the secondary school did not report 100% readmission, the students who failed to report back had opted to join other schools and had requested for school transfers to their new schools.

In the Loreto compound, three girls have been under protection from the school's administration because of the threat that they face of forced marriage. These students, in various levels of their study have been staying in the school compound due to the risk of being forcefully taken by their families or relatives to be married off which is against their wish. As schools closed due to the pandemic, this group of girls remained in the Loreto compound and were provided with their basic needs and supplies.

### Flooding

South Sudan's geographic location forms part of the sub-Saharan belt and experiences weather extremes through the year. The country experiences two annual weather seasons, the rainy season from April/May to August/ September and the dry season for the remaining months. In the rainy season, torrential rains often lead to flooding in parts of South Sudan and Lakes state thereby disrupting human settlements, economic activities as well as transportation particularly by road. According to the World Food Program, more than 700,000 people across South Sudan were affected by heavy flooding this year between the months of June-October losing their households, property and field crops. These rains in essence led to more communal challenges as they reached 'Catastrophic' levels leading to hunger and leaving hundreds of thousands homeless<sup>7</sup> across South Sudan.

In addition to the disruption of livelihoods, the flooding had tremendous effect on road transportation as sections of roads linking major secondary towns were washed off rendering these regions inaccessible. This in effect meant that food and commodity prices in the market increased considerably. This worsened the situation in the market prices which had undergone an influx caused by closure of borders and cessation of movement due to COVID-19. The overall effect on the population has therefore been dire with the rural poor having to rely on aid to meet their basic needs particularly food.

### COVID-19

By late November, almost 60 million cases of COVID-19 infections had been reported globally<sup>8</sup> in 216 countries around the world with over 1.39M resultant deaths. To this global picture, South Sudan contributes to over 3000 confirmed cases of infection and about 60 deaths<sup>9</sup>. COVID-19 is a respiratory infection which is transmitted via airborne droplets, which an infected person releases through coughing or sneezing. South Sudan recorded its first case of COVID-19 infection in early April, about one month after the WHO had declared the disease a global pandemic. Upon this, a High-Level Taskforce (HLTF) chaired

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<sup>7</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/09/1074152>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/resources/idx-4a11d568-2716-41cf-a15e-7d15079548bc>

by the first vice president of South Sudan was formed with the mandate of managing the outbreak in the country as well as to provide daily updates on the pandemic. A raft of measures were put in place shortly thereafter by the national government to slow the spread of the disease including a nationwide lockdown, a 7Pm- 6Am nationwide curfew, a national ban on social gatherings, closure of businesses selling non essentials and closure of learning institutions.

In a bold move, the government of South Sudan in early May 2020 eased some lockdown restrictions, including easing constraints on travel within states even as fears of community transmission continued to increase. Regional flights and road transport were allowed to resume, stores allowed to open and taxis (vehicle and motorcycle) permitted to carry passengers provided the drivers and passengers wear masks.

COVID- 19 was taken up with a lot of apprehension and disregard by the local community in Rumbek. Most of the community members disregarded the precautionary measures that were being suggested by the ministry of Health and WHO for self-protection. The local population is mostly rural with traditional cultural practices. Social distancing and personal protection are mostly not adhered to by the local population. The largely traditional community which highly regards handshaking and sharing of personal items and spaces as a common way of life and culture. These presented a fertile ground for quick community transmission of coronavirus.

While there were no obvious signs of pronounced COVID-19 infections In the community, Loreto- Rumbek took extreme measures to protect students (when schools resumed) and staff who were working within the institution during this period of the pandemic. Mary Ward Primary Health Care Centre also played a key role in community outreach and education, informing members of the community through community meetings and ratio talks on the health challenges as well as the ways the community members could prevent themselves from contracting the coronavirus as well as other illnesses prevalent in the community.



*Above: Loreto PHCC staff donning Personal Protective Equipment at the height of the pandemic in 2020*

## INTERNSHIP

There are no statistics available on how many girls in South Sudan are accepted and succeed at the university level, there are, simply put, too few to count. At Loreto, over 65% of the girls will continue their educations after they attain their high school diploma. This statistic is extremely high compared to other schools in the region and nation, and hold true because of the preparation and support that they receive through Loreto.

While some girls come from families of means and have the critical support of their families, many girls do not, close to 30% of the graduating class requires time to apply for jobs and continuing education opportunities from a protective environment and without the threat of potential forced marriage. Seeing this need, the Loreto School has started this program to address these critical needs within the school population. Rather than taking a year off of school and work, the Loreto Administration provides placements within the school for these students. Students can decide to work with 1 of the 3 core programs at Loreto in different capacities in order to finesse skills and fill out their curriculum vitae. The school has programs in management, administration, finance, primary school trainee teacher, and nursing assistant.

Each program has its own duties and supervisory structure, but allows these vulnerable girls to remain in a supportive environment while they search for formal employment or continuing education opportunities. These tracks can be sub-divide into 2 different forms, professional internship and apprenticeship. The professional internships include the management, administration, and finance and this allows the girls to actively seek out continuing education or employment opportunities within the area. The apprenticeships are slightly different in the sense that the girls that choose to be trainee teachers or nursing assistants are asked to work for 2 years at the school before receiving school sponsored support at either the Teacher Training College in Yei, or the Nurses Training School in Wau, South Sudan.

While these girls work and provide a critical resource in their capacity as employees, the school allocates additional resources to protect them from potential forced marriages. This means that the girls must be boarded at the school, fed 3 times a day, and are paid a sum to pay for personal expenses.

Not only do the vulnerable girls participating in this program receive the protection and advocacy of the school and its reputation, but they are also able to continue with some basic in-service training for computer literacy, and capacity building initiatives.

In 2020, the Internship program became extremely vital in the implementation of the various activities in Loreto-Rumbek. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic a number of college/university students who had previously been in the internship program came back to assist at the Loreto-Rumbek upon the closure of learning institutions in South Sudan and in the neighboring countries. A total number of 30 (including 3 male) interns- those who came back plus those that were ongoing in the internship program- provided the much-needed support at the Mary Ward Primary Health Care Centre (MWPHCC) and at the secondary school.



*Above: Interns assisting in the registration of Senior 4 students upon the reopening of secondary school in October 2020*



*Above: An Intern demonstrates to a community member the process of correct handwashing while maintaining social distance*



*Above Racheal, an Intern talks to a group of community members during a community health education exercise*



*Above: A group photo of interns 2020*

## GRADUATES AND SCHOLARSHIPS

The first class of 8 students graduated from Loreto Secondary school in 2011. Since then 253 students have graduated. 65% of this number have been assisted by Loreto-Rumbek with an opportunity to pursue post-secondary education through the provision of scholarships provided by various partners. In order to qualify for a scholarship the beneficiary must have participated in the internship program for a period not exceeding 2 years and must be committed and motivated to serve the community. The students study in public and private colleges/universities in South Sudan, Kenya and Uganda. This gives them an opportunity to access quality education. Many students have completed and are gainfully engaged in various sectors while others are continuing with their studies. The program gives priority to female students (Loreto secondary school graduates). Currently 26 female students in colleges/universities in Kenya, Uganda and South Sudan pursuing various degrees and diplomas. The students so supported are very committed to their studies and are always performing well. The students also get an opportunity to interact with people from different cultures thereby widening their worldview.



*Figure 1:A group of female college students in Nairobi, Kenya*

In addition to the female beneficiaries, the program has taken on 9 male beneficiaries. Like the female beneficiaries they too much engage with Loreto-Rumbek for the same period of time before a consideration can be made. The male beneficiaries are pursuing studies in Kenya and South Sudan mostly in teaching and

medical sectors. Previously they were working at the Loreto Primary school and at Mary Ward Primary health care center. The graduate scholarship is also extended to the teaching staff, there are currently 4 teachers in the program.



*Figure 2: Male supported students*

## Building program

As the Loreto- Rumbek programs continue to grow and develop, there has been commensurate investment in the supporting physical infrastructure to facilitate the programs. This infrastructural development has provided safe, comfortable and sustainable conditions for beneficiaries of different programs to participate in activities without the worry of interference by the prevailing external conditions. The infrastructural development also provided an opportunity to improve the capacity of the local community by enhancing their skillsets in masonry, bricklaying and plastering. Over the years, Loreto Rumbek has been working to empower the local community through various programs initiated to improve the personal capacity of individuals in order to improve their income earning and consequently help break the cycle of poverty. This year, the infrastructure projects provided a wonderful opportunity for trainee masons to practice their skills and gain additional skills and experience working alongside trained and experienced masons. The use of locally trained and sourced labor also helped to remove any profit-making aspects of the construction

projects. This method of self-implementation has been more broadly used than originally anticipated greatly increasing the efficacy of each dollar committed to the different projects.

### Nutrition Centre

Mary Ward Primary Health Care Center runs a Nutrition Feeding Program whose focus is on children under age 5 who are suffering from under-nourishment and malnutrition due to poor feeding. Due to the local climatic conditions, poverty and low literacy among new mothers, children in the community often suffer from poor nutrition due to limited access to the necessary food groups and sufficient food quantities. Children under the age 5 also represent the most vulnerable members of the community where prolonged conflict and poverty have led to difficulty in access to modern medication, basic education and sufficient nutrition. Lack of basic health education has limited the ability of parents and caregivers to diagnose and manage simple illnesses including malnutrition among their children.

As part of Loreto's efforts to improve the condition of this vulnerable group, the Nutrition feeding program was launched in 2018 with vulnerable children from the local community being enrolled into the program. This program provides health education and nutritional support to these children and their caregivers through the provision of simple but nutritious meals prepared at the Loreto PHCC. In 2019, the program provided a total of about 30,000 meals with an almost similar number expected to be provided by the end of 2020. In 2020, over 300 malnourished children, have benefited from the feeding program. These children formed part of the over 40,000 patients who visited the PHCC for medical consultation over various illnesses.

Previously, meals for children enrolled in the program were prepared in a makeshift kitchen made of wooden poles and iron sheet walls with firewood being the primary source of energy for cooking. While this served the current needs, hygiene standards were difficult to achieve and maintain. The high costs and health risks associated with the use of firewood were also a constant challenge in the operation of the kitchen. Due to the openness of the cooking area, it was difficult to control vermin accessing cooked or stored food and this was identified as a potential health hazard in the current state of the kitchen.

In order to improve the hygiene standards, improve safety as well as save on the costs of fuel, Mary Ward PHCC is in the process of constructing a modern, permanent kitchen that will serve as cooking and dining area for meals prepared for beneficiaries of the nutrition feeding program. The permanent kitchen and feeding area will be fitted with running water and energy saving stoves. These will contribute to the sustainability of Mary Ward PHCC's Nutrition Feeding Program as well as ensure sustained quality and hygiene of the meals provided to the vulnerable caregivers and children of Maker Kuei.



*Above: Structure of the new Nutrition Feeding under construction at Mary Ward PHCC.*

### Counselling centre

The prevailing conflict and post-conflict period in communities in Rumbek has been characterized by social maladjustments especially due to the perpetuation of militancy learned during the conflict period. Most of the students who are and were affected by conflict or other forms of trauma find it difficult to settle down within school set-ups and learn actively. Real psychosocial scars suffered by children during conflict whether as child soldiers/defense units or watching their parents and brothers/ sisters dying in the intercommunal clashes have not been handled effectively to help the children move on and heal from the mental shocks and traumas.

Loreto has been putting increasing efforts in expansion of the counseling and psychosocial healing component at Mary Ward PHCC. Initially, this was done through regular visits from a professional counselor who visited the school regularly to provide both individual and group counselling therapy. However, following years of implementation and feedback from the counselor and students, the need for a resident counselor to provide regular access to counselling services was identified.

With this, there was need for a safe space where the counselor as well as the beneficiaries of the counseling service could feel free and safe enough to participate in the counselling. This safe space was constructed as an annex to the primary Mary Ward PHCC building and forms part of the Mary Ward PHCC.



*Above: Counselling Wing at Mary ward PHCC on the left.*

### Loreto Security Wall

Lakes State and Rumbek in particular continue to experience regular incidents of violence resulting from opportunistic crime, communal fights and revenge attacks. In 2020, Incidences of opportunistic attacks, banditry, cattle raiding, and revenge killing have all contributed to the security related instability of the area. As insecurity increases so do school dropout rates among the youth, and particularly young women owing to their vulnerability.

Initial attempts to provide security in the Loreto compound using traditional fencing reinforced with barbed wire saw periodic episodes of trespassing as well as opportunistic crime and theft within the compound. The fence was easily breached and property stolen or destroyed by trespassers. The construction of a perimeter security wall drastically improved the security situation at Loreto though there continued to be a number of infiltration attempts, several of which were successful and resulted in loss of property and theft.

This year, the completion of the construction of the security wall has greatly improved the current security situation at Loreto- Rumbek. Since the plastering, coping and installation of razor wire around the length of the security wall, there have been no cases or threats of breach or scaling of the wall. Security has therefore significantly improved for students and staff at Loreto- Rumbek with the compound only being accessed through two official gates. As insecurity persists in the surrounding community, Loreto provides an oasis of peace, taking no sides in conflicts while at the same time giving shelter and refuge to those who are affected as a result of the same.

A physical and visual barrier provided by the wall has significantly contributed to the real and perceived safety for students and staff within the compound. Members of staff and students now feel safer from incidences of insecurity and crime that take place in the community more so as conflicts over resources continue to get more intense. This has greatly contributed to the emotional stability and wellbeing particularly that of students and therefore allowed them to concentrate on their schoolwork and academics.

This physically and emotionally secure educational space provided by the fencing of the wall has further complemented the Loreto Rumbek child protection policy and psycho-social support programs. Protection

of children from physical harm or injury from activities or conflicts that take place out of the school compound has been a core area of concern for the school. The wall has therefore contributed to the emotional and psychosocial development of children in a school context with reduced external stresses. This safe space has also contributed to the emotional well-being of children in the school given that some of them have experienced traumatic events resulting from insecurity.

In addition to the overall reduction of costs, the construction of the wall has provided an opportunity to train local youths in plastering, coping and installation of razor wire. This will not only provide a local workforce for future construction projects, but also an ample supply of skilled laborers that are capable of making repairs and maintaining the wall as well as other construction projects at Loreto Rumbek.



*Photos: Different Sections of the complete Plastered, coped Loreto Security Wall with Razor Wire.*

### **Loreto Graduates Housing Block**

Upon graduation, Loreto Girls Secondary School Students are provided with opportunities to enroll into the Professional internship program (PIP) which provides extra education and professional support to the graduates. Despite having completed their secondary education, these young women are still faced with challenges in their community including forced marriages and lack of financial support to further their education. In the Professional Internship program, these young women are protected and provided with an opportunity to pursue their academic and professional interests within the Loreto- Rumbek compound. With the support of the school and donors, most of these young women are able to access higher levels of education including university education.

The PIP was developed in the year 2013 following feedback on the challenges that young women were facing following completion of their secondary school education. These young women needed more protection and support due to their vulnerability and inability to determine the right academic courses to pursue. By going through the one or two-year program, the graduates become more aware of the available career opportunities and available opportunities for their university and tertiary education. These graduates

also get the opportunity to interact with professionals working in different departments who provide them with professional guidance in their specific fields.

PIP has 6 key areas for internships: administrative assistants, finance office assistants, farm management assistants, project assistants, trainee teachers, nursing assistants, and compound managers. The internship program includes an educational element focused on issues of professionalism, computer training, and sector specific skills. In addition, each intern has a primary “mentor” that simultaneously supports and oversees their work. The program offers a stipend which allows these at-risk young women to become contributing members of their families. Furthermore, the girls are boarded at Loreto- Rumbek and this provides additional protection against forced marriage.

By being at Loreto- Rumbek, the graduate students are able to take advantage of the resources available within the Loreto compound particularly use of internet for e-learning. Through this program, graduate students have developed interests, identified their vocations and pursued professional courses. Support offered to the graduate students has facilitated the continuity in their education in a society where a young woman with secondary school education is already considered too educated.

Over the years, the number of graduates enrolled into the program has increased to a total of 22 graduates in 2020. This number of graduates is accommodated within the Loreto Compound and therefore there was the demand for additional accommodation in order to ensure that they are able to be comfortable and safe at all times. The additional housing block consisted of six units which have been fitted with water, power and internet access to ensure that the graduates are able to carry on with their work or studies in the evenings or in their free time while in their rooms.



### **Sustainable water supply**

Climatic and geographical conditions in South Sudan are harsh and as such the presence of water in the community is a lifeline to humans, animals and even plant life. Prolonged periods of drought make access to clean water in South Sudan a continuous problem. Access to clean potable water for drinking, cooking, sanitation, hygiene, and even agriculture remains desperately low in most communities. Boreholes have been used in the community as sources of potable water but over time some of these boreholes have become unusable due to contamination or disrepair.

Over the years, Loreto has invested in underground water to meet the water needs of students, staff and even for the operations of Mary Ward Primary Health Care Center. The underground water is pumped and transmitted by use of plastic water systems which lack long term reliability and can be damaged by excessive heat or surface breakages.

Current water tanks have 10,000 litres capacity but have a life-span of only 3-5 years. The Loreto school lacked any long-term water systems and the lower capacity systems require regular support from a generator to ensure continuous water access by the staff and students. This is the primary reason that Loreto Embarked on upgrading the water system as well as improving the water reserve quantity in the school system. This is aimed at tackling the problem of un sustained access to clean water and the sustainability of that access. This involved drilling two additional bore holes, constructing two water towers and installing a solar pump. This system is projected to cushion Loreto secondary school from water shortages due to breakdowns by providing at least a two-day reserve supply in the case of emergencies.

At completion, this project will provide additional water capacity of 48,000 litres so that there is an emergency supply of at least 3 days in case of crisis – a likely reality in South Sudan. The project will also allow the school to pump and store sufficient water to completely remove the secondary school from its reliance on generator power to pump, a 15% increase in sustainability, giving the school a 100% solar driven water system. The additional water will also be used for the irrigation of the school gardens where Loreto grows vegetables for the school community. The additional water will enable the implementation of drip irrigation systems at the school's green house to ensure enhanced productivity.



*Above: Left Water tank installed at the school farm (Green house at the background), Right, water tower construction in progress awaiting installation of tank.*

## VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Lack of capacity is endemic in South Sudan and vocational programs work to build capacity within community members. This work increases employment opportunities and potential earnings for both men and women.

Loreto-Rumbek has been training community members who are trained by qualified Ugandan trainers under the oversight of an Engineer who ensures the integrity of their work – outputs are utilized in school infrastructure that increase security, sanitation, hygiene, and food security.

The training program was approached in a culturally sensitive manner that encouraged the enrolment of trainees from different family groups. All of the trainees were selected from the immediate community and were identified as school dropouts (2-3 years prior) or as youth who has never attended school. Additionally, due to cultural beliefs about appropriate roles for women, no female participants enrolled in the full trainee program. However, following the success of the pioneering secondary school girls that participated in the exposure program, Loreto-Rumbek was able to expand the program to further incorporate female participants as brick makers to support thereby successfully training community women in basic brick making and giving them skills that will increase their earning potential and employment opportunities. Loreto-Rumbek also introduced tailoring training as a way of expanding the vocational training program. The women learnt basic tailoring skills and will eventually be able to make complete uniforms for the students and other types of clothing.



*Above: A tailoring class in session*



**Top left:** Initial preparation of materials for brick making

**Top right:** trainings digging the trenches for wall building practice

**Bottom right:** preparation of the mortar for wall building practice

**Bottom left:** Laying of the bricks

## Environment

Loreto- Rumbek takes serious concern towards the utilization of natural resources and conservation of the environment both within the Loreto compound and in the community. Loreto- Rumbek in all its programs factors in aspects of environmental conservation and sustainability particularly in projects that involve the use of natural resources. As such, students and community members are regularly encouraged to participate in activities and learn strategies of conservation that they can apply in their daily lives and at their homes. These strategies mostly revolve around the use of renewable and clean energy, recycling and re-use of wastes as well as (re)forestation. This year Loreto implemented a number of environmental conservation related projects both within the Loreto compound and in the community. These included:

### Tree planting

In efforts to promote afforestation and re-forestation in the community, Loreto- Rumbek regularly provides seedlings to community members to plant within their homes. These tree seedlings are mostly fruit trees which are also meant to provide dietary supplementation to the community members once they attain maturity. Over the years, the tree cover in the community has shrunk to pave way for human settlements, pave way for agriculture as well as a source of livelihood (wood used for construction of houses or fuel for cooking)

Loreto, through the environmental club strives annually to develop tree seedlings which they grow in the compound. This year, the seedlings produced were planted around the Loreto compound in an effort to increase the tree cover as well as availability of fruits in the community. 149 trees in total were planted with 87 trees being planted on the outside of the compound and 62 trees within the compound. The tree species that were planted this year included Mango, Guava and Clustered Apple.



*Above: Students participating in tree Planting within and outside the Loreto compound*

## Production and use of briquettes



On a daily basis (when schools are fully operational) more than 2,000 wet meals are prepared in the Loreto-compound (at the Loreto Primary school, Loreto Girls secondary school, and Loreto Primary Health Care Center). The main source of fuel for preparing these meals has been charcoal and firewood. As many as two sacks of charcoal and firewood are consumed on a daily basis in the three kitchens in the Loreto Compound. These are sourced from the local community and much as they provide a source of revenue for the local community members the environmental effects cannot be overlooked. In its efforts to reduce its overreliance on these unsustainable and environmentally unfriendly energy sources, Loreto Rumbek has recently embarked on a raft of measures that have significantly reduced the use and consumption of charcoal as well as firewood in the kitchens. These measures have particularly involved the use of modern energy saving cooking stoves and now the adoption of briquettes as an alternative to charcoal and firewood. These measures are expected to go a long way towards environmental conservation as well as improvement of health and hygiene within the kitchens and among the kitchen staff members.

Since the purchase and installation of the briquette machine, students have been able to learn and participate in the process of briquette making. Following the nationwide closure of schools in South Sudan due to COVID-19, some Loreto students from the local community took to learn how to mix raw materials and produce briquettes using locally available materials. These materials mainly consisted of twigs, dry leaves, dry grass, groundnut husks and clay soil or cow dung used as the binding agent. The use of cow dung as a binding agent has specifically helped in improving the quality of the briquettes produced as it binds the components better as well as burns better hence producing more energy. The briquettes produced have so far lived up to expectations. They burn better than charcoal or firewood, produce more intense heat with less smoke and also burn for comparatively longer. These have contributed towards the reduced costs of Loreto Rumbek's school feeding program



*Photo: Dried briquettes ready for use*

### **New Farm Borehole**

A new borehole was installed in the Loreto compound specifically for agricultural use. Over the years, Loreto has not been able to practice effective irrigation as the water available in the compound has not been sufficient to meet the schools demand in addition to agricultural use. Due to the high temperatures experienced in the area, the surface temperatures are normally high during the daytime reaching temperatures of 45-50 degrees Celsius. This makes it difficult to practice some forms of irrigation such as sprinkling or even drip irrigation in the open as the water easily evaporates before serving the intended purpose.

The new borehole will ensure that there will be increased water available for the school farm and this will primarily enable two forms of irrigation.

- 1) Drip irrigation inside the school greenhouse. This will enable better efficiency with reduced manpower working in the greenhouse. With this there will be expected yields of crops planted in the greenhouse as there will be reduced contamination and crop disturbance as well as exposure to pests and diseases
- 2) Flood irrigation in the open field. Due to increased water availability, surface flooding as a means of irrigation for specific crops will be possible and this will enable all year production of crops. This will eliminate the reliance on rain-fed agriculture and therefore serve to increase the annual farm production at Loreto for supplementing the student's daily diet.



*Photo: The school farm water tower system showing the solar powered water pump*

### Agriculture Program.

Lakes state, where Loreto is located faces natural obstacles towards profitable agriculture as climatic conditions do not favor the cultivation of most of the food crops consumed by the local community. With a population that lives predominantly in rural areas, self-sustainable food production through family gardens are crucial to community health and food security. Lakes state's principal grain is sorghum, but many other vegetables are popular in the state including maize and Sukuma Wiki (a variety of kale, as well as tomatoes). Other crops are present but not common.

While farming is the predominant means of survival in South Sudan, many lack the means for even the most basic contemporary practices. Less than 1% of the farming households in South Sudan utilize pesticides, making the yield heavily reliant upon external forces. Sustainability becomes increasingly less attainable through any areas that experience any kind of environmental shock (floods, droughts, etc.) or in conflict areas. In fact, due to the high incidence of displacement, both internal and external, many people have failed to plant crops, or have been forced to leave them behind due to safety concerns. And it is in reaction to this food deficit that international and domestic NGO's and the UN, through the WFP, have implemented programs to provide food to at least 2.8 million people.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> UNMISS: UN Mission in South Sudan. "South Sudan Statistics." 2019.



As Loreto pushes towards sustainability, agricultural development is one of the fronts from which this will be achieved in the long term. Local food production has the potential to reduce the school feeding costs by up to 30% in terms of production of consumable non-processed food items. Over the years, Loreto-Rumbek has invested heavily in the success of the school farm employing different strategies to ensure successful crop

production and farm yields. Loreto has cleared and implemented agricultural activities in almost 25% of its 100 acres total land space as well as committing parts of the compound for use as pastures and housing for livestock. Rain water harvesting and recycling for agricultural use are implemented in order to increase water available for irrigation during the driest seasons of the year. Not only does Loreto operate the farm, but has also committed significant resources to providing enough water for watering and planting on the farm. This has allowed the school to provide a year's supply of ground nuts for Loreto's kitchen, as well as providing kudra for 4 meals a week throughout the year.

This year, Loreto moved a step further in implementing the agriculture program by hiring a professional farm manager who is now responsible for overseeing the activities in the farm as well as managing and advising on the best strategies to increase production. The manager, who also happens to be a former Loreto Girls Secondary School Student has university qualifications in agricultural production and there is already visible improvement in the yields and production produce from the farm.

A major factor that has contributed to increased agricultural production has been the use of mechanized labor in ploughing using a tractor. This has increased the land size that is under agriculture as well as the ease of tilling. This is further complemented by the completion of Loreto's perimeter wall which has led to controlled access into the cultivated areas. The fencing has enabled Loreto to properly seal the area in which animals are kept, both preventing the animals from escaping and damaging the crops and keeping predators out.



*Above: Left Pigs roaming in their sty, right; irrigation at the school farm*

### Planting and harvesting

This year, the planting season at Loreto Rumbek was heavily favored by the heavy rains which provided sufficient nourishment for the groundnuts and maize planted in the school farm. Due to the closure of schools due to COVID-19, students did not participate in the planting and harvesting. This however was done community members working as casual workers. This year, a total of 133 bags of groundnuts were harvested and these will go a long way in supporting the school feeding program.



*Above: Harvesting of groundnuts at the school farm*

### Employment of community members

There are four key staff required for the success of the farm; these are the operations manager, who oversees all operations of the farm including mechanical and technical repairs, and purchasing. The farm manager, who is responsible for day-to-day assignments of the gardeners and responsible to make sure they complete the tasks required of them. The gardeners themselves are equally important as they ensure the success of the farm. They are also an important example of Loreto's outreach into the community of Maker Kuei as the school hires the gardeners from the local population. The final staff member contributing to ensure this program's success is teaching staff for the school's agriculture classes, both academic and practical. This

is key because the students act as a conduit for their local communities, returning with the knowledge they have attained at the school.

The agriculture program provides an immense opportunity for community members to participate in the activities at Loreto Rumbek as well as earn an income for themselves and their households. This provides the community members with the opportunity to learn, observe and practice modern and more advanced methods of agriculture which they are able to apply and implement at their homes to increase their food production. The selection of these participants to help with the farm activities is based on the vulnerability of the community members whereby women and the less capable are given first priority. This serves to uplift the lowly members of the community to obtain an income as well as support their families and participate in the development of their community. This year, over 200 members of the community participated in the farm activities which included clearing, tilling, planting, weeding and harvesting.

### School Feeding program

Since the introduction of the school feeding program at Loreto Primary school, there has been tremendous improvement in students' school attendance and active participation in school activities. Over the last three years, Loreto primary school has recorded an annual dropout of less than 3% and less than 1% daily absenteeism. Before the introduction of the primary school feeding program in 2015, the annual primary school dropout was higher than 10% with an equally higher daily absenteeism at about 5% which could go to as high as 7% during the lean periods of the year (May- August). Nationally, over 20% of students enrolled drop out from the education system in South Sudan for various reasons including lack of adequate food and poor nutrition. School meals provided have therefore contributed towards improving the physical and psychological health of students as they are able to get constant nutritional refreshment without the worry of where the next meal will come from. It cannot be downplayed that for most of the children who are of school going age in this community, school is the only place where they are assured of daily meals through the year during school days.

Secondary school students also benefit from the school feeding program. Being a boarding school, students are accommodated in the school compound for periods of about 12 weeks every school term. These young women are provided with three daily meals comprising of different food groups that aid in their physical development. This year the school feeding program was disrupted by the closure of schools at the end of the first term due to COVID-19. By this time, over 200,000 meals had been given to students and staff members in the primary school, secondary school as well as children enrolled in the emergency feeding program.



*Above: Preparation of meals in the Loreto School kitchens*



*Above: Secondary School students (left) and primary School students (right) partake their school meals*

Following the nationwide closure of schools in South Sudan in late March due to COVID -19, Loreto Rumbek suspended the school feeding program as students stopped attending school. Feedback from the community and community assessments in the two months following the closures indicated that the situation was dire following the closure as most of the children (as well as community members who work at Loreto-Rumbek) were going without meals.

As a way of supporting the community, the Loreto School feeding program was adjusted to enable the community cope with this reality. Casual workers were allowed back and assigned various responsibilities in the school compound and school farm as a way of enabling them obtain an income. Priority for this work was given to parents with young children, those with children of school going age and those that are extremely poor. By opening this avenue, the school feeding program continued to run as these workers (who are parents as well) were provided with food rations for their families as part of their pay. Providing food rations has cushioned the community members from the harsh market realities where the prices of food items keep fluctuating and therefore reducing the actual value of the local currency. Following the partial re-opening of schools in October, the normal school feeding has resumed for the students who have

reported back to school even though the community support is still ongoing for the vulnerable community members. This is expected to continue into next year as the community recovers from the harsh economic effects caused by COVID-19 as well as other community challenges.



*Photo: beneficiaries of the food for work program with maize meal which is part of their food benefits.*

### Community Feeding program

This year, the local food security situation was worsened during the lean season due to the travel restrictions that were brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. These transportation and logistical challenges in moving goods across countries led to an increase in the turnaround time that traders incur in the importation of items (including food items). Due to conflict and climatic conditions, most of the food consumed in South Sudan is imported from the neighboring countries of Sudan, Uganda, Kenya and Ethiopia. The price of food in these countries has experienced an increase following unexpected floods in parts of East Africa in late 2019 which was followed by large swarms of locust invasions that swept the region in early 2020 leaving behind a trail of destruction in farmlands in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda. Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, truck drivers transporting produce across these countries are subjected to mandatory health checks as they move within the countries or while crossing international borders, a process that takes 2-4 days to obtain clearance.

The resultant challenge in accessing food by the local community necessitated Loreto- Rumbek to provide food to community members in a food for work arrangement which enabled vulnerable members of the community to obtain food despite the ongoing challenges. In this program, community members (who are also parents to students studying at Loreto Schools) obtained rations comprising of maize flour and beans every two weeks. This was in addition to the one meal daily that they received while at work.



Above, Community members being documented while receiving their food rations. Below community members sharing the rations received.



## Community outreach

Loreto- Rumbek works closely with its host community who form an integral part in the successful establishment and implementation of programs. In its establishment, the community provided the land where the mission was established and continues to play an active role in the development of programs as well as providing support and advice where need be.

As part of its responsibility to the community, Loreto Rumbek initiates and participates in various projects in the community in order to empower the community to uplift its status and wellbeing. These projects are many and varied but generally empower the community in areas of healthcare, Education and promotion of self-reliance.

This year, Loreto initiated two major projects in the community in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These projects aimed at improving the community's capacity to counter the pandemic in both the long and short terms. These were essentially projects aimed at improving availability of potable water as a means of improving hygiene and also to provide a resource for improving capacities for food production within households.

## Community boreholes



This initiative actualized the drilling of three community boreholes serving a population of approximately 3300 persons in 2020. These boreholes have helped improve access to clean potable water for women, children and other vulnerable groups in these villages who previously had to endure long distances to access the precious commodity. All the three boreholes were installed with manually operated water pumps.

These community boreholes also served as points where community health education was carried out. The health education drives proved to be timely interventions for the community particularly this year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This health education which was rolled out by Loreto PHCC had the objective of teaching the local community on ways of preventing and reducing the community spread of COVID-19. Water and soap are two ingredients that are necessary for maintaining hygiene and the ease of availability of water encouraged community members to take up this practice. About 50 health education workshops were carried in the months of April-

June which reached about 1000 members of the community who also benefitted from health checks as well as soap that was distributed.

The establishment of the three community boreholes in the sub- communities of Aber, Mathiang and Adol fitted with manually operated pumps helped the community access additional water points. This has helped in reducing the travel time taken by households in accessing a potable water source, reduced the competition for existing water points which consequently has led to reduced communal conflicts. The community is also now more water secure having a total of nine water points which is an increase from the previous six.



*Community members participate in farming around the community boreholes.*

The community has shown great initiative in developing micro gardens around water points in the community since their establishment. As the area suffers from weather extremes, ease of water availability has been positively embraced by the community to develop irrigated agriculture. The close availability of water in the community has led to improved interest by the community to practice irrigation agriculture which in the short and long term will serve to improve the community's food security. This will improve

the food options available particularly for children under the age of 5 who are always under the constant threat of nutrition related illnesses.

### Health care and awareness

Through the Loreto Primary Health Centre, weekly health education sessions were conducted with community members across different villages. The health education which mostly targeted women and children at the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic were carried out around the water points and focused on teaching the community members the concepts of reducing community transmission particularly by maintaining social distance, wearing masks and handwashing. In total, about 50 health education sessions were conducted in 10 different locations reaching over 1000 beneficiaries. The availability of water in the community enabled learning and demonstration to be conducted and sustainability given that water is now more easily available in the community.

During these health education drives; mobile clinics were also actualized. In these mobile clinics, community members had the opportunity to get checked by health professionals and where necessary drugs were administered. In particular, children benefited from these health checks and for children who were yet to receive immunization, this was administered. These children were then encouraged to enroll in the immunization program where they are facilitated to receive all the recommended vaccines against the common illnesses in South Sudan for free. These drives encouraged community members who rarely seek medical attention even when sick because of the distance and costs associated with visiting health facilities to come out and obtain professional health care.



*Community members undergo temperature screening during a community health awareness drive*

### Development office –

Established in 2017, the Loreto development office works to ensure that donor projects are implemented and monitored per the donor specification and timelines. Due to the economic, social and political crisis in South Sudan, almost all the programs at Loreto Rumbek are supported by donors and well-wishers. The development office, working together with the finance office and administration work to ensure that the donors are always kept up to date on the implementation of projects and that narrative as well as financial reports are submitted on time. The office has 5 staff members comprising of two project officers supported by three interns.

The development office also produces and publishes monthly newsletters which are shared with our partners to enable them keep up to date with the activities at Loreto Rumbek as well as the community happenings.



*Above: Development office Interns 2020.*

In 2020, the global COVID-19 disrupted the normal working at the development office too. The closure of international borders and consequent travel restrictions meant that the development office started working virtually. The two project officers worked remotely from their home countries to ensure that normal activities on the ground continued and that donor expectations were met. As the two officers worked online, activities on the ground were coordinated by the development office interns who did exemplary work to ensure that data was collected, photos taken and statistics gathered on time in coordination with the administration and finance office.

For more information about our programs, to support the work at Loreto- Rumbek and/or for partnerships, please contact: [director@loretorumbek.ie](mailto:director@loretorumbek.ie) or – visit the Loreto Rumbek Website on [www.loretorumbek.ie](http://www.loretorumbek.ie)

For donations, kindly use the bank details below:

€ - Euro Account

**Name of Bank:** Bank of Ireland (BOI)  
**Address of Bank:** College Green, Dublin 2, Ireland  
**Account Name:** Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary- Irish Province- Loreto Rumbek  
**Account Number:** 60775342  
**BIC/SWIFT CODE:** BOFIE2D  
**IBAN:** IE76BOFI90001760775342  
**Currency:** € Euro

\$ US Dollar Account

**Name of Bank:** AIB  
**Address of Bank:** Currency Account Services, Payments Operations, 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor, 1 Adelaide Road, Dublin 2, Ireland  
**Account Name:** Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary  
**Account No:** 25162304  
**Sort Code:** 930067  
**BIC:** AIBKIE2D  
**IBAN:** IE66AIBK93006725162304  
**Currency:** US Dollar \$

## Year Ahead

Looking ahead to 2021, we have many hopes. 2020 has taught us that even with great planning we also need to be creative and flexible, with all that in mind here are some of our goals:

### 1. **Education** – Reaching out to 2,000 learners

- Providing quality education to 340 secondary school girls within the compound.
- Welcoming 1,300 boys and girls in the Primary School in the morning and afternoon programmes.
- Ongoing teacher training for our Trainee Primary School teachers.
- Develop the internship programme, ensuring 50 women and men are training and expanding their professional development in different areas of the compound
- Pilot a new English language programme for students and staff
- Explore a mentoring programme for forty graduates who are supported in the university scholarship programme

### 2. **Feeding Programme** - our goal is to prepare 800,000 meals in 2021

- Ensuring all our students have access to at least one meal a day while in school.
- Supporting fifteen vulnerable families in the community. These are families headed by parents with disabilities who are unable to work.
- Providing food rations for 180 families who support our work in the compound
- Food support for 150 young children in our nutrition programme.
- Ongoing food support for 8 sets of twins in the local community

### 3. **Health Care** -

- To offer an average of 3,000 consultations per month in the Clinic
- Vaccinate over 1,000 people against Hepatitis B which is widespread in the locality.
- Regular mobile clinics to the surrounding community.
- Ongoing vaccination programme for new infants.
- Weekly medical support to the students in De La Salle.
- Health education for 2,000 people both inside and outside the compound.
- Health talks on local radio to reach 20,000 listeners.
- Three programmes to be offered in the nutrition Clinic, welcoming 60 children in each intake
- Support the infants and mothers in Mother Teresa's Home.

#### **4. Agriculture & Environment**

- Develop a model farm for the local community to learn new crops and new methods for farming.
- Plant 300 trees within the compound.
- Cultivating enough vegetables and ground nuts for consumption within the compound.
- Clear an additional 10 acres of land for cultivation.
- Complete new water system for compound use.
- Pioneer more efficient techniques of modern irrigation.
- Improve the animal husbandry programme.

#### **5. Spiritual Development and Ongoing Formation**

- Develop a faith formation programme for students from Primary 1 to Senior 4.
- Weekly liturgies for school community.
- Retreat days to be offered to staff and students.
- Catechesis for the community.
- Strengthen student's capacity in leadership.
- Peace building programmes for students.
- Mental health support for the vulnerable.