

**'IF: the only non-native word whispered in Borjagai, Afghanistan'<sup>1</sup>**

*Sarah Kelly, Project Manager, Afghanistan*

Kawa Mobaligh visited the Borjagai schools for a monitoring visit on behalf of Indigo Foundation in July. Kawa fled Afghanistan 14 years ago as a refugee and now lives in Sydney with his wife and three children. Members may recall that Kawa and Salman Jan co-founded a small Hazara community organisation in Sydney, which IF supported several years ago. Salman Jan made the first monitoring visit to the Borjagai schools in 2004 and Kawa has now followed in his footsteps.



*Australian IF representative, Kawa Mobaligh, stands in front of the newly constructed girls high school.*

Whilst Kawa and IF reviewed the security situation carefully - in accordance with the IF security policy - before we made the final decision to go, Kabul turned out to be unexpectedly dangerous. Five bombs went off on one day he was there, marking the end of several relatively peaceful years in Kabul since the end of the Taliban regime. On a more positive note, the security situation in Nawor province, where Borjagai is located, is relatively good and there is no Taliban presence in

Hazarajat generally. This means that the schools in Borjagai do not face the threats of damage, which have happened to many schools in the south of the country.<sup>2</sup>

As our members know, currently IF provides \$5,000 per year for teachers salaries to the local co-educational school (which is a network of four primary schools, two middle schools and one high school). Also, thanks to the generosity of an IF donor, we have contributed one third of the cost of building a new girls high school (\$17,000) as well as ongoing administration costs for the school of \$3,500 per year.

Kawa spent three weeks away and a week of this living in Borjagai. He met with tribal elders, students and other community members, and traveled to many sub villages to observe the schools in action. Kawa verified the positive written and verbal reports we had received since Salman's visit. He also observed the many difficulties faced by the villagers, including a prolonged drought, and discussed other needs identified by the community which IF may be able to assist with.



*The girls high school was built with stone and cement brought in from a nearby province. It can withstand the severe weather conditions much better than local mud brick buildings.*

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<sup>1</sup> A reflection by Kawa in his trip report

<sup>2</sup> Refer article by Paul McGeough, Kabul July 12, 2006  
<http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2006/07/11/1152383741860.html>

Kawa confirmed the completion of the girls' high school and has returned with photos of the new building and the new students. The strong sense of community ownership of the girls' high school project was apparent immediately. The balance of funds was donated by local businessmen, a number of villagers contributed their labour on a volunteer basis, and the Financial Trustee for the project (a respected businessman from the village who lives in Kabul) travelled many times to Borjegai to personally supervise the construction and to keep strict control over the use of IF funds.

The community explained that now that the girls' high school is built and running, it is easier to obtain Government funds for teachers' salaries, text books and other materials. The community elders reiterated their appreciation for IF's support. In such a remote area of Afghanistan, and given their experience as a people who still suffer discrimination from the Pashtun ethnic majority, the community is clearly touched and surprised by the fact that another community, in far distant Australia, would reach out in this way.



*Makeshift tents continue to be used on a permanent basis for class rooms for many primary school students.*

Kawa's trip evaluation provides the basis for entering into a further 3-year commitment agreement with the Borjegai schools to provide \$5,000 annually (the current commitment agreement expires in 2007). We would also like to continue contributing to the running costs of the girls' high school (the commitment agreement for which expires in 2008) but this decision would be made closer to that time.

When asked about their other needs, the tribal elders identified two possible projects IF could provide assistance for. One project is to contribute to another school building, to replace the tents that many primary school children learn in now. The school year for these students is reduced by two months because they are more vulnerable to the weather conditions in the tents.

The other project is to contribute to the building of a health clinic. The community is confident that it would be able to support the necessary health workers and attract Government medical services, which are currently provided in other regional cities, if it had an appropriate building. Indigo will be looking at these proposals carefully and, given our own limited resources, will also explore what links we might be able to create between Borjegai and a larger Australian (or non-Australian) non government organisation. All ideas from IF members are very welcome!

Kawa is in the process of writing up the formal report of his trip, as required by IF's procedures. Please email us on [indigo.foundation@bigpond.com](mailto:indigo.foundation@bigpond.com) if you would like a copy. As with all our volunteers, Kawa has visited the project in his own time, making the effort to connect at a real and human level with the community we support. We would like to acknowledge his generosity and that of his family in freeing him to visit.

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## **A NEW IF project - Supporting Education for Dalit children in Tamil Nadu, India**

***Sally Stevenson, Management Committee***

*There are approximately 167 million Dalits in India, representing 16.8% of the population. According to the social and religious system, Dalits are considered unclean and polluting and are known outside the caste system as 'untouchables'. Until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, they were not allowed to own land or any other assets, not allowed to be educated and forced into labour and other ritually unclean occupations like manual scavenging. Whilst it is no longer legal, many social and religious customs continue to exclude, exploit and discriminate them. At the more extreme end, Dalits face atrocities such as lynching, rape and beatings. This is targeted violence, which contributes to the perpetuation of the caste system.*

In June, IF agreed to support an education program, primarily for Dalit children, in Tamil Nadu, southern India. We are very happy at the opportunity to be involved with this project, which has a strong community dynamic, targets a clearly marginalised community, and reflects one of IF's key community development sector – education.

## Why education?

In the context of growing competition and privatised education, government run schools in rural and urban India have increasingly become centres where only the poorest and marginalised send their children. Students consist largely of children from discriminated class communities and are primarily Dalit. Private education has been mushrooming — even in the rural areas, people who can invest money in education enrol their children in the private schools. Consequently, the quality of education, accountability and teachers commitment to fulfill their responsibilities continue to fall in government schools.

Dalit children who already socially segregated and excluded face further discrimination and humiliation in the education system – whilst almost 98% of the children are enrolled in Grade 1, more than 70% drop out by grade VIII. Less than 3% go on to higher education. Whilst there are more girls in government schools than boys, the proportion of girls who discontinue their education is much higher than boys. Most Dalit children in public schools are first generation learners and their parents or community have difficulty providing financial support and informed guidance to them. Dalits face limited opportunities in land ownership, self-employment and access to credit. Alongside the duress placed on them to continue to perform caste related tasks education is one of the few liberating forces.

Dalit movements and organisations tend to address immediate concerns such as atrocities, caste violence and 'untouchable' practices in society. 25,000 cases of violence against Dalits are reported each year. However, this is considered to reflect substantial underreporting, as violence against Dalits is considered a social norm. The process of accessing justice is also fraught with discriminatory practices and prejudices. As important as this focus is, there has been insufficient attention placed on accessing development programs such as education.

## IF's connection

Recent Management Committee member, Pat Duggan provides the personal link to this project. Her colleague Annie Namala has been working with the Dalit community, through the *National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights* and the *Indian Institute of Dalit Studies* for over 20 years, exposing their situation and advocating for an improvement in their human rights. She has examined, for example, the extreme discrimination faced by Dalits during the 2005 Tsunami. Annie has a strong and long-

term connection to the Sumaithangi<sup>3</sup> Trust - the NGO we will be supporting.

The Sumaithangi Trust 'feel that education is the most important tool for the development and mainstream participation of Dalit community and (we) want to focus our attention on initiating a process of supporting the children in the government schools to complete their schooling and access higher education.' This approach is based on the experience and conviction of many of the Trusts' volunteers who have themselves been able to break out of the caste boundaries and lead more independent lives, owing to their education.

## The Project

The Sumaithangi Trust supports enhanced opportunities for learning, growth and cooperation for children of marginalised communities in Madhurantakam Taluk of Kancheepuram District. The project aims to support 1,500 students of 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup> grades from 12 government schools to complete the school finals successfully and gain access to higher education. Being non-fee paying schools, the large majority of the children in these schools (around 75%) come from the Dalit communities and the remaining from other lower castes..

Specific project activities include:

- Motivating children and presenting role models who have overcome situations similar to them and have made it into higher education and employment or have become leaders of their communities.
- Building strong rapport with the children, identifying problems and difficulties and extending counseling and peer support as well as counseling with families to support the children.
- Ten teachers/volunteers with the necessary expertise and motivation will be recruited to extend additional coaching to the children on Saturdays/Sundays, helping the students of grades X and XII who are gathered together at the central Madhuranthakam school for their studies.
- Mentors/role models will be brought to take sessions during Saturdays/Sundays or in the individual schools as feasible.

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<sup>3</sup> Sumaithangi – the word comes from the Tamil language, meaning 'one who is bearing your load'. It refers to an old system in Indian villages, where labourers can rest their head loads on the platforms built along the roads when they are on long distance travel.

- Additional materials and books will be made available at the schools as well as for Saturdays/Sundays for the students to study/borrow etc.
- Additional information on ways to prepare for the exams, model question papers etc that regularly appear in the newspapers and other sources will be shared with the students and they will be helped with the same.
- Students given career counseling about choices for future studies or vocational courses.

In the absence of any external funding, the project has already begun, demonstrating the Trust and the schools' commitment to the process.

### IF's decision making process

The project strongly aligns with IF's strategic direction of supporting small community-based organizations that cannot attract support from larger donors. We also see future prospects to branch out to primary school students and/or adult education as well as intersectoral links.

IF will provide core funding to enable to organisation to continue with its activities. We are currently negotiating a one-year Commitment Agreement. Funding in the second and third years will be subject to a positive visit by the Project Manager, Pat Duggan in the first year. There appear to be opportunities to provide capacity building in the form of planning and monitoring and evaluation and Annie Namala has agreed to undertake a support, communication, liaison and monitoring and evaluation role, including initial visits to refine the planning process.

The financial arrangement, where there is a separate Trust to manage the funds, is similar to the arrangement IF has in Afghanistan. This project will allow IF to further test this set-up as a possible financial model for future project support.

Finally, there is a local, national and internationally recognised need for support to Dalit communities. The organisation and people involved are committed, having been working in the area themselves for years and having already started on the project activities.

We hope to learn a great deal from this project and the people involved about the issues of marginalisation in the India context.

*Zoë Mander-Jones is the Management Committee Representative and Pat Duggan, the Project Manager for this project.*

### IF and the Congo: a likely new project!

IF is excited to report we are undertaking an assessment trip to the Democratic Republic of Congo in December, with the view to supporting a health and environment project in Kokolopori. Kokolopori is located in the Congo River Basin, south of the Congo River, where the last of the Bonobo – the most endangered of all great apes are found.



Since independence from Belgium<sup>4</sup> in 1960, Congo, like many countries in Africa has struggled to overcome poverty, years of conflict and extremely limited health and education infrastructure. With the first democratic elections having just taken place (30 July), there is optimism that key services will start being provided. However, as with most post conflict, or transitional countries it can take decades to recover from such a devastating history. The current infant mortality rate in Congo is estimated between 113/103 per 1,000 live births for males and females respectively. In rural areas this figure is always substantially higher, and in Kokolopori the rate has reached 127 per 1,000 live births. Only 3.7% of the population has access to generic medicines in the district and 46.7% access to clean and potable water.

A characteristic of the most recent conflict (beginning in 1996 and officially ending in 2002, although conflict has continued in many areas) was that many women in Kokolopori were subject to various forms of sexual violence, abuse and torture. Soldiers used rape as a strategy to humiliate the population. As a consequence, there is a marked increase in the rate of sexually transmitted diseases, prostitution of girls and a rise in the number of children born with no declared paternity. These girl-mothers suffer stigmatisation by their peers and youth

<sup>4</sup> For an fascinating expose on Belgium's role in the Congo, read *King Leopold's Ghost*

of the villages and are often unable to feed, dress and raise their children.

As noted, child mortality is high and this is not just due to the lack of health care and chronic poverty; the forest marshes around Kokolopori, for example, are a refuge for malaria transmitting mosquitoes. Of the one million or more deaths from malaria that occur worldwide each year, around 90% occur in Africa, mostly in young children. In the Congo almost 26% of deaths in children under five are caused by malaria, which can easily be reduced through the use of insecticide treated mosquito nets. Trials of such nets demonstrate that they can reduce deaths in young children by an average of 20%. Unfortunately, these nets can be expensive for families at risk of malaria, who are among the poorest in the world.

The war also disturbed the population dynamics, provoking displacement of people already living under severe stress and consequently increasing their vulnerability to preventable diseases and health problems such as respiratory infections and diarrhea. Again, in the Congo, 11% of child deaths under five are caused by diarrhea – which can be easily treated with simple ORS (oral rehydration solution), basically, a mix of salt and sugar.

As the government can not afford to provide health services, and the international community has withdrawn from the area, largely due to the war, IF wishes to support the operation of a health clinic in Kokolopori, with a specific focus on maternal and child health and malaria prevention.

IF's link to the community is through the Bonobo Community Initiative (BCI), an international NGO initially established to protect the Bonobo. Through their work, they have recognised one of the key components of such protection is the livelihood and well being of the local community, not least because alternative income generating activities must be found to the lucrative bush meat industry, which threatens the Bonobo. Philip Strickland, our Project Manager, learnt about BCI through a work colleague who was a former BCI principal. This has provided the basis for Philip's personal connection to the current BCI principals.



BCI considers that improved access to health care as the most urgent need of the local population. The nearest professional health care available is in Djolu, which is a full day's journey by a vehicle from Kokolopori. As such it has been working with its local partner, Vie Sauvage to build

and equip a dispensary and a basic medical clinic, known as the "Bonobo Health Clinic" in Kokolopori.

Kokolopori villagers have already donated significant time and labour to begin constructing five buildings to house the clinic. Yet, further support is required for capacity building and supplies. The clinic will target 25,000 people - 59% of whom are women, 70% of reproductive age. This effectively means the project can potentially offer to about 10,000 women.

Mark Harradine is the Management Committee Representative, and as mentioned, Philip Strickland the Project Manager. Philip will be travelling to the Congo to make a first hand assessment of the project. He will look at the feasibility of IF funding the training local health practitioners, especially trainee nurses; and the purchase and distribution of anti-malarial mosquito nets. This will include an education component as cost is not the only barrier to the effective use of mosquito nets. Often people who are unfamiliar with the nets, or who are not in the habit of using them, need to be convinced of their usefulness and persuaded to re-treat the nets with insecticide on a regular basis.

Philip will raise other IF questions about the structure of delivering assistance, accountability, capacity and quality of systems and the role IF can play beyond providing financial assistance.

In addition, Philip will look at an environmental component of the project, IF may assist. This entails supporting the provision of wages and equipment for local trackers, which not only helps to directly deter and expel bush meat hunters in the Kokolopori forests, it but also creates a tangible nexus between bonobo conservation and the Kokolopori community welfare.

Those from the Kokolopori village who work on bonobo patrols or as trackers hold positions of esteem in a community where there is little or no employment. The salaries they take home to their families have a flow-on effect through the village in that the Bonobo's survival and the community's economic wellbeing are interdependent.

An overall added benefit of this two-pronged project is that it is in an area of very significant bio-diversity value, and which is home to a rare and important great ape.

On first appearances, the Congo is an unlikely choice for Indigo Foundation, since it is far from our 'normal' geographical area. However, we made an in principle three year commitment to this project (depending on the outcome of the assessment) because it meets most IF criteria. To start with, we like to support and build projects where we have personal connections. Using

relationships for the basis of our support is critical to strong and trust based development. Second, there appears to be a strong need for assistance, the community is marginalised, there is demonstrated community commitment and IF's contribution has the potential to make a significant impact. Finally, there may be some synergies with IF UK (see separate article) who will be focusing mostly on Africa.

Given that the Congo is more expensive to travel to than many of IF's project locations, it is worth noting that Philip is donating the funds to cover the cost of the assessment visit and has been very active in raising funds for the project and IF. We look forward to updating you on his visit, and the progress of this new, and exciting project.

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### **A Sister Organisation for IF!**

*Zoë Mander-Jones, Management Committee*

IF is excited to announce that we are currently in discussion with a small community of friends in the UK who have approached us with a proposal to create a sister organisation called **IF UK**.

The UK-based group of people were so impressed with IF's objectives, principles and procedures that they want to model their organisation on us. Like us, IF UK wishes to work in marginalised communities with local non-government organisations to sponsor community-based and community-directed development projects. They also, like us, believe in putting their own money forward. IF UK are creating a management board that is personally committed both in terms of time and money. They are asking for at least a five-year commitment from board members, an annual personal donation of £500, plus a commitment to secure a minimum additional £500 in annual membership fees.

The UK group are successful professionals, with varied backgrounds including law, project management, organisational development, leadership coaching and business management. Several of them have capacity building experience working in Africa, predominantly in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. They heard about IF through a former founding IF Management Committee member, Paula Gleeson.

We are currently negotiating a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with IF UK's board. This MoU will see us provide advice and assistance to IF UK during their establishment phase and will also include some safe guards to protect the IF name and reputation. Our initial advice has included sharing some of our resources with

them such as IF's comprehensive policy and procedural manual.

We are flattered and excited by the opportunity this affiliation presents. We believe the relationship between our two organisations will be mutually beneficial with us both sharing lessons and thus learning from each other's experiences. This supports our approach to focus on continual learning. With a new IF project set to be soon established in the Congo, we are particularly interested in tapping into their experience in working in Africa.

Watch our website for further updates!

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### **The Lords Resistance Army – From Uganda to South Sudan**

*Sally Stevenson, Management Committee*

#### **Background**

South Sudan has had a long and troubled history. It only officially emerged from the most recent civil conflict, which lasted 20 years, in 2005. The conflict was predominantly with the North Sudan Government, based in Khartoum. The North, since independence from the British in 1956, has sought to maintain economic and cultural control over the south, due, primarily to the huge reservoirs of oil located there. However, internal (inter and intra tribal) conflict has also long been an integral part of South Sudan's makeup and history.

The Northern Government is renowned for its skilled and ruthless use of proxy forces to wage war, creating massive destabilisation and humanitarian emergencies in the regions where it seeks control. This can be clearly seen in Darfour (western Sudan) where the Janjaweed, an Arabic militia have been funded and guided by the North to terrorise, and subjugate local communities seeking political independence. In the South, during the civil war, the North was able to sustain a nine year internal conflict by supporting the Nuer (living in the north east of South Sudan) against the Dinka (predominantly in the north west), which destroyed the unity of the South, effectively distracting it from the primary goal of political and economic autonomy. The war in Sudan had and has numerous complex and far reaching regional implications. One of key significance was the alliance made between Uganda and the South Sudanese Liberation Movement (SPLM, the Government of South Sudan since 29 September 2005) and the counter alliance between the Northern Government and the Lords Resistance Army.

## The Lords Resistance Army

The Lords Resistance Army (LRA) formed in 1987, is a rebel paramilitary group operating mainly in northern Uganda. The group is engaged in an armed rebellion against the Ugandan Government in what is now one of Africa's longest-running – and most silent - conflicts. It is led by Joseph Kony, who proclaims himself a spirit medium, and apparently wishes to establish a state based on his unique interpretation of Biblical millenarianism. The LRA have been responsible for widespread human rights violations, including the abduction of civilians, the use of child soldiers and a number of massacres. It is estimated that the group has kidnapped around 30,000 children since 1987 for use as soldiers and sex slaves. A unique consequence of this part of the LRA's terror campaign, is that each night, children between the ages of 3 and 17, referred to as 'Night Commuters', walk up to 20kms from Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps (created *because* of the destabilisation caused by the conflict) to larger towns, especially Gulu, in search of safety from the LRA.

In September, the International Criminal Court indicted Kony and five of his deputies for crimes against humanity. The LRA are deadly, and have no regard for the dignity of life.

Until mid 2005, the LRA also operated across the border in South Sudan, but confined itself to a defined area, east of the Nile, and south of the capital of South Sudan, Juba. It received logistic, military and financial support from the Northern government, which held Juba, a garrison town. Despite the peace agreement between the north and south, and the subsequent undertaking by the Northern government to cease its patronage, the LRA continued to receive some support from elements within the (Northern) Sudan Armed Forces. The LRA persecuted the local population in this area, but did not attack international workers. By July 2005, however, both the area and people under threat by the LRA changed.

## MSF in South Sudan

For the past year I have been based in Kenya, working in South Sudan for Medecins sans Frontieres (MSF). MSF has two key projects – a hospital in Bahr el Ghazal and another in Kajo Keji, Equatoria. Kajo Keji is located on the Ugandan border, 10km west of the Nile. Predictably, in South Sudan we faced many challenges in addition to the regular management of the program. These included a nutrition crisis, and cholera and meningitis outbreaks. However, as Head of Mission, my most concerning task

was ensuring the security and safety of our teams on the ground.

In August, the LRA expanded their operations across the south of South Sudan. They crossed the Nile for the first time, extending their presence beyond Uganda, into the Democratic Republic of Congo and onto the Central African Republic. Not only did they expand geographically, but their modus operandi changed – they executed international humanitarian workers working in South Sudan (October and November), and targeted international compounds, including an armed, simultaneous attack on three compounds, one of which was the well fortified compound of UNICEF.



*From BBC World, boy mutilated by LRA*

## What did that mean in Kajo Keji? one example

Traditionally, the LRA would move in groups of five or six. One Friday afternoon in January, about 4.30pm, we received an urgent telex message from the Field Coordinator in Kajo Keji that he had a confidential and credible report that 50 LRA had crossed the Nile 20 km north of the hospital. Without being melodramatic, this meant for our team the very real possibility of death, rape, kidnapping or mutilation (the LRA as part of their terror campaign regularly cut off peoples lips, noses and ears). At the same time, the presence of the South Sudanese army in Kajo Keji was minimal. It could not be relied upon as a protective factor.

The team of seven requested an immediate evacuation, and I fully agreed. We needed to react quickly, but also wanted to protect the identity of our contact.

Nonetheless, we immediately began phoning airline companies to see if they could undertake an emergency evacuation. The team, led by a calm, thoughtful and methodical Field Coordinator, Kim Nguyen Minh Hoang, started implementing a broad reaching, and recently refined evacuation plan. This included, for example, transfer of key responsibilities to local staff and removal of critical files. As you can imagine, the next hour in Nairobi was a flurry of calls made by me to Geneva, to the head of United Nations Security in South Sudan, and to our NGO partners on the ground, confirming, cross checking,

informing and planning. Our logistician and administrator worked furiously with the airline companies; looking at all options open to us this late in the day.

Whilst Kajo Keji is only a 45 minute flight to the nearest airstrip in Lokkichoggio (you may recall the name, as it featured in the movie, *The Constant Gardner*), there was flight ban after 6.00pm, due to lack of lighting equipment. Two companies were in the air in the vicinity of Kajo Keji, and worked hard to manage their timing, fuel availability and access to reach the team. Unfortunately, this was not possible. An alternative evacuation route was by road to Moyo, the Ugandan town 45 minutes drive away. However this was a flawed option, as we did not know in which direction the LRA was moving (and subsequently heard they moved both north and south). Furthermore, there are a number of risks associated with car evacuation including: anxious drivers; unknown roads; mines on side of roads; cars being easy targets (lights and noise, especially at night); and importantly the fact that cars do not provide protection from bullets. So, the team needed to stay put overnight, and we arranged for a flight at first light the next day. Fortunately by this time, we had our information publicly confirmed by the local authorities, and could continue with our evacuation transparently.

The question now, was whether they should stay in the living compound, which had computers, cash and food inside and two guards, who were not armed (according to MSF policy) - or move to the hospital compound overnight. We chose the latter, given protection came from being with more people, and away from an obvious resource target. We moved a car in there that had radio communication, we kept radio operators in Lokkichoggio on 24 hour watch, and we in Nairobi slept with our mobile phones virtually stitched to our ears that night.

It was a long night for the team, made eerie by the fact that Kajo Keji, a usually vibrant border town was placed under light and noise curfew once it got dark - it was not only us that were nervous, the whole town was. The police and what was left of the army undertook hourly patrols, including and especially around the hospital. It was, I must say, a nice sight to see the team get off the plane in Nairobi the next morning, and have the luxury of debriefing them over a fine lunch at a wonderful Italian restaurant.

Over the next few days, there was no movement within Kajo Keji County by the local population. Nobody, for example came to our out-patient department. Slowly, once the threat had dissipated, people started returning to the hospital, and this was one of the indicators for us also to return. Altogether the team was out for about a week,

when our nurse/midwife, our Field Coordinator and I returned to assess the situation.

One of the key management issues for me is that Kajo Keji was and still remains a relatively safe area (even with this number of LRA in close proximity). This implies the risks of attack are not high – BUT should anything go wrong the impact would be devastating. We therefore needed to stay proactive and vigilant, without being obsessed and creating fear and anxiety in the team. We needed to constantly gather and analyse information at a local, national and regional level, and we needed to be sure appropriate security measures were in place, and respected by the team. I used to smile sometimes, since I believe, it was a place and situation where the statement 'be alert but not alarmed' was far more appropriate than in Australia.

This was not a once off situation - we later had a partial evacuation for a similar threat. The insecurity is now chronic in the area, with the movement, purpose, and benefactors of the LRA unknown and unpredictable. Certainly, over the next month or two, it become apparent that a strip of land approximately 50 km wide, 20 km to the north of Kajo Keji had become another logistic base for the LRA, a corridor for ongoing movement west to Congo, and a set of villages to raid for resources. They are going to be there for some time to come.

### **The local population**

Which brings me to the impact on the local population. Very quickly upon our return we learnt that approximately 1,000 people, mainly women and children had made temporary shelters in a village called Mondilokok, about 15km north of the hospital – fleeing their villages for safety.



*People camped at Mondilokok.*

MSF is an emergency humanitarian, medical organisation, with a mandate to assist exactly these kinds of people.

With the UN less than helpful, over the next two days we provided buckets, soap and blankets, supported the construction of latrines, undertook a medical assessment, and provided support to the local health centre. We also lobbied with local authorities to provide a safer place as temporary shelter.

We interviewed a number of the so-called 'internal displaced people' or IDPs. Most of the people we spoke to saw killings, either with guns or machetes and all reported their homes and food stores being burnt and looted of food.

***Interviews with LRA displaced people, Kajo Keji  
Text and photos by Sheila Stam***

This woman was grinding when she first heard the attack. There were many people attacking and she tried to find her children. However, her children were taken. The attackers forced them to carry food. She searched for the group, found them and joined her children. The attack started at approx 5pm, she walked through the night (in a southerly direction) and the next morning when the LRA began to attack another community, she escaped with her children into the bush. During the night she was beaten, but not severely and after her escape she spent two nights in the bush. She returned back to Kilimu where she found her husband who was looking for her.



*Mother of 4 children between the ages of 2 and 5, pregnant, 25 years old:* She arrived with all of her children on Feb 23rd, after her village was attacked. She was in her home, with her children, when the LRA attacked. Her home, along with surrounding homes, was burnt and five of her neighbours were killed. They abducted an unknown number of youth, but other than being slapped, she was uninjured. Since arriving on Feb 23, her family had received two cups of sorghum and had otherwise been surviving on mangos. They were all healthy.

To date, these people have not been able to return to their homes. MSF, along with the local health post (run by a Sudanese NGO) continues to monitor their situation and ensure medical assistance is available.

**Who supports the LRA, and why?**

There has always been a local political, social and financial economy based around LRA operations. However, over the last twelve months the LRA have used two forms of

assault, indicating new forces at work. The traditional method of looting and raiding for survival (perpetrated on the local Sudanese community), and the new method of well organised, well supplied, strategic attack. This new form has seen them move and attack in larger numbers (50-200), target compounds and operate across Equatoria. The LRA could not undertake this extended and more sophisticated style of attack, especially against international organisations, without external support. It also has serious consequences for peace in South Sudan.

First and foremost, the broader geopolitical context indicates the increased (or returned) presence of Khartoum in LRA activities. Alternatively (or more likely, additionally) it is possible, disaffected SPLA (now South Sudan army) are implicated, as they have not been paid, and some are being de-mobilised. Northern officers in Juba, with much to lose financially once Juba is controlled by the South (it is currently jointly managed by the north and south) benefit from disrupting new supply lines to Uganda, rather than from Khartoum. Local tribes can use the LRA (or a pretence of it) to attack traditional enemies. Even the President of Uganda, Museveni, has a vested interest in insecurity continuing, if not in the South Sudan, then certainly in northern Uganda. It keeps his opposition constituency in IDP camps, it allows the movement of illegal natural resources from Congo (such as gold) through Uganda for export, and it allows him to continue receiving foreign financial assistance for his military – ostensibly to keep the threat under control. It can therefore be assumed there are multiple players who have an interest in maintaining and increasing insecurity in South Sudan, and the LRA (either in reality or as a front) is a convenient tool to do this.

The picture is extremely murky; the identities, links and alliances of and between various parties is unclear. What we do know is that the partial transition of the LRA into a mercenary force has created a new political and security landscape, which needs to be closely watched and must be considered to be chronic.

Silent conflict and suffering in South Sudan continues, and this snapshot of the LRA role is simply one part in a very fragile and tenuous peace. It would be foolish to underestimate the political skill and tenacity of the North to hold onto the south, or the will of the South Sudanese to be free of Northern control.

*If you would like any further information on South Sudan, please contact Sally Stevenson on [indigo.foundation@bigpond.com](mailto:indigo.foundation@bigpond.com)*

## Management Committee Update

It's been a little while since our last report, so there is a lot of news from us. First, you might remember from our last newsletter that Indigo Foundation was required to change our rules in order to meet some of the requirements from the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) for Deductible Gift Recipient status (note: this was the second part of the approval process, having first been approved by AusAID). The Special General Meeting held on 21 May approved the rule changes and they were submitted to the ATO along with the other information required. We received a positive response from the ATO and are hoping that our DGR status will be approved by the Minister and gazetted in the not too distant future.

Regarding the Management Committee itself, there have been a number of changes and moves. Megan Gilmour resigned as Treasurer and from the IF Committee due to personal commitments and while Megan will be sadly missed we welcome Mark Harradine on to the Committee and as our new Treasurer. Mark is a CPA and has worked in development for a number of years. He is also (dare I say it) our first man on the Management Committee! Mark also recently had addition number four to his family – congratulations Mark on the birth of Catherine Mary. Sally Stevenson has returned from Kenya after her year's posting with Medicins Sans Frontiers and we look forward to her taking on a more active role again. Katrina Gamble is going on a period of maternity leave from the Committee. We look forward to hearing the good news from Katrina.

Sarah Kelly has just handed over her role as IF coordinator to a new volunteer, Theresa Huxtable. Welcome Theresa, we all look forward to working with you. Sarah has made a fantastic contribution over the past twelve months, so thank you!! Sarah is staying on board as the IF Project Manager for Afghanistan. We welcome a new volunteer, Fay Mander-Jones, who will manage the IF membership and donation database. Database management is one of the more administrative tasks that we have to do but clearly central to our survival, so thanks Fay for taking on this role.

Zoë Mander-Jones has taken on a number of new responsibilities, including the development of IF UK and as Management Committee representative for the new project in India as well as continuing as the representative for the Solomon Islands project. Zoë is also taking an active interest in developing a project in Vanuatu along with Mark Harradine. The other new project we are working on is in the Congo, which has been initiated by the new project manager, Philip Strickland S.C. The Congo project is quite a new step for us and there is an outline of the directions for the project included in this newsletter.

Philip also heads the list for recent fundraising efforts; he was able to convince the NSW Bar Association to include Indigo Foundation as one of three organisations that new senior counsels donate to. This is a Bar tradition but entirely voluntary so thank you for the generous donations.



indigofoundation

Supporting Community Development

PO Box 694 Dickson ACT 2602 Australia

[indigo.foundation@bigpond.com](mailto:indigo.foundation@bigpond.com)

[www.indigofoundation.org](http://www.indigofoundation.org)

ABN 81 765 707 413