



Trip Report - Biong November 2008

written by Kerry Henderson, Sudan Country Director

The long journey to Biong, Sudan began with a team from Nashville, Tennessee – Leigh Ann Cates, Gai Luom, Kevin McKechnie, Meredith MaGuirk, Rachel Knox, Christina Martin, Mason Jones and Kim Cox. The team also included Moses Project missionary Maker Mike who arrived early in Uganda to be reunited with his wife and daughter, who he hadn't seen in over two years. Before everyone's arrival, my family and I prepared to host all three teams in our home before everyone dispersed to their destinations in Sudan.

The journey was especially long for our Sudanese host, Gai Luom, as he only got one night's sleep in Kampala before boarding a MAF (Mission Aviation Fellowship) plane to deliver the necessary medicine and team supplies for the work to be done in his home village of Biong. For Gai, sleep deprivation was the last thing on his mind as he longed to see his family again!



Floods plague the Biong area due to months of rain

Excitement and anticipation surely kept Moses Project missionary Maker awake as well. It was his first visit in over twenty years to the village where he was born. Due to a pending U.S. citizenship, Maker was unable to visit Sudan during the first two rotations of the Moses Project. The moment he had been waiting for was finally here!

After the team did their best to recover from jet lag at my home in Uganda, we left Uganda on our chartered AIM Air DC3 plane. After a few hours over the virtually untouched beauty of southern Sudan, we finally reached the landing strip in Padak, a village near our final destination of Biong. During the month of August, devastating floods had ripped through the area destroying crops and homes throughout the region. Upon landing, we could still

see the lasting effects of such a flood and wondered how we would transport our supplies to the compound, trusting God to work it out.



Host Gai Luom with his family members

When we stepped off the plane, we were warmly greeted by a host of Sudanese and one of the boys told Maker that Gai was on the way with a big truck to carry us through the flooded roads to our home base compound. We were overjoyed! As the truck plowed through the flooded roads where at some places the water was waist deep, we could see the devastation and hopelessness that had wreaked havoc on the people of Padak, Tonj and Biong.

A long, adventurous day ended as we reached the wonderful compound in Biong built by Gai Luom's brother and we thanked God for how He had provided for our needs that day. Upon our arrival, we met all Gai Luom's friends and family who awed us with their hospitality. They carried our bags and moved us into mud huts that were completely set-up with mattresses and mosquito nets. Gai's arrival the day before ensured that everything was ready for our arrival. We were able to eat our first meal of rice and beans and get in bed before the mosquitoes came out for their supper!



Kim examines a boy's injury

The next day we arose early to prepare for the medical work to be done in Biong. Under one of the two trees on the school compound, we set-up the clinic area and then situated the pharmacy inside

one of the school huts. Anticipating many people, we decided to hit the ground running and began seeing patients right away. While people waited in line, we were able to tell four of the eight Chronological Bible stories. The eight-story track begins with the Creation of the Spirit World and concludes with the resurrection of Jesus Christ and the hope of eternal life in heaven. The people loved hearing the stories and stirred much discussion. One of the elders thanked us for listening to God and helping the people of Biong. He also said that God loves us all the same, both black and white.



Neighborhood "football" match

After seeing around 50 patients and enjoying a lunch break of Sudanese chicken, the team finished the first day around 6:00 p.m. Ready for some play, Mason and Kevin joined the neighborhood game of soccer and Mason won over his team by scoring a goal! As we prepared for bed that night, we reflected on the wonderful first day loving on the people of Biong.

We began early the next day and quickly set-up our makeshift clinic. When we got there, people were already lined up at the clinic! To see as many as possible, we organized the medical staff into two teams – Kevin and Maker were on one side and Rachel and Meredith were on the other. Leigh Ann, Kim, Mason and I worked in the pharmacy while Christina walked patients from the clinic to the



Sudanese man describes son's symptoms

pharmacy to retrieve their prescribed medicine. Simultaneously, we told the entire eight story track to the people and offered them a chance to come to know Jesus. We prayed that many seeds were planted during this time and that we would see the fruit on mission trips to come. Over the course of the day, we were able to see 120 patients.

By the light of the countless African stars, the day closed with Kim sharing a devotion that encouraged us to wash the feet of the Sudanese by investing in their lives and being passionate about seeing the ones we have invested in come to know Christ.

Battling heat and mosquitoes, we continued our work at the clinic over the next couple of days. In an effort to keep people organized, we assigned numbers to keep track of everyone. Later, we decided this felt impersonal, so we began writing each person's name down instead. It was so rewarding to see their faces light up when a doctor, nurse or volunteer would call them by name. This system reminded us that we were being used by God to help each patient's specific needs and allowed us to get to know each patient more personally. With this system, we were able to see up-to 200 people a day!



Kim tells story as Maker translates

After one long day at the clinic, we were given a

special treat – cow's milk! We relaxed at our compound on one of the only night that the mosquitoes left us alone and talked about how it would make excellent homemade ice cream and laughed until we headed into our mud huts, basking in the fulfillment of each day in Biong.

Saturday (day five in Sudan) was a very special day as cared specifically for the family members of the gracious Sudanese people who took care of us on the compound. After all they did for the team, it was awesome to be able to return the favor. During the Bible story portion of our ministry, Leigh Ann noticed two ladies who were really transfixed on the stories and prayed that God would draw them to Himself. At the conclusion of the time, they spoke with Maker and thanked him for the Americans who had come to share these stories of God.



Meredith treats scorpion bite

The day also brought a medical emergency as Meredith and I made a house call to treat Gai's father for a scorpion bite. At the end of the day, the community threw a party to express their gratitude. We were awed that the entire community contributed money to purchase a cow. This cost for a cow is approximately \$300! During the celebration, we were entertained by the children's



Maker preaches at church on Sunday

Sunday school classes from the local church. They sang, danced and played the drums, while we all had a great time with the whole community and the chiefs of the village!

When Sunday arrived, we were all grateful for a day of rest, walked to church and worshipped with the Biong community. Asked to speak by his people, Maker preached that morning and shared the story of the paralyzed man being let down through the roof by his friends. While it was a great story of faith, it was also a

very real story to the people of Biong as earlier in the week a woman had been brought to the clinic in a blanket tied to a stick carried by two men. She was 6 months pregnant, had a high fever and was ill with a severe kidney infection. Able to be treated, we were told later in the week that she was doing much better. For the people of Biong, it became a real life example of faith and we prayed that it would be a reminder to them of the great healing power of Jesus.



Team visits cattle camp

After the service, we paid a special visit to the cattle camp. Very entertaining and educational for the team, we got to see how life is for the boys who live in the camp and that takes care of everyone's cows! We were even able to watch them do some wrestling practice for a tournament against another village on November 22. We returned to our compound in time for lunch and spent the rest of the day watching a soccer game while Kevin and Mason once again joined in the game.

Rejuvenated and refreshed, we continued our work at the clinic Monday and Tuesday. As the people knew our time in Biong was coming to a close, we were even busier than



Traditional wrestling match

the previous week. It was obvious the need for medical care in Biong was great. In the morning and afternoon, we shared the Bible stories and presented the gospel each time. In just two days, we saw 564 people!

At the close of the day, we were definitely exhausted but also very encouraged! We couldn't stop talking about how we loved being able to minister to the Sudanese, to invest in their lives and to show them the love of Jesus.

Our entertainment that night came from a local woman who played on an instrument made out of a plastic jug, two sticks and three strings. While she played, the ladies on the compound sang and blessed us with an evening filled with music.

The final day of clinic was bittersweet. While we wanted to meet every need, we knew it was impossible to see everyone. The needs in Sudan are great and the workers are so few. After the day finished, we counted our total patients seen during our time in Biong

and marveled that it was over 1300 people! While we can't fathom how those numbers were reached, we marvel at the high quality of care we were allowed to give each person.

God allowed us to invest in these people's lives. Kevin, Meredith, Leigh Ann, Rachel, Christina, Kim, Mason, Maker, Gai and I took time to pray with those who needed prayer, listened to those who needed a compassionate ear and cried with those who had situations that were too great for us. It was a life changing experience for all of us. We love the Sudanese people of Biong and continue to pray that God would be real to them and for continued peace and health! For all we did for them, we feel they did so much more for us.



Team dragged to the airstrip by boat

The next day, we awoke to rain and no transport to get to the airstrip for our flight back to Kampala. We were facing a two-mile walk to the areas that were flooded and then a two-mile hike through waist high water. We began our trek, but to our great relief and surprise, Gai Luom waited with four Sudanese boats to carry us and our luggage the entire way through the water to the airstrip. We were humbled as a group of Sudanese carried all our luggage on their backs and heads and then pushed,

pulled and dragged the boats for 2 hours in order to get us to the airstrip in time.

When we arrived at the strip, we found that God had performed yet another miracle as the landing strip was completely dry even though all the land around it was flooded by the water. As we said an emotional goodbye, we thanked God for new friends and looked forward to coming back to Biong.

The rest of the trip was thankfully less eventful and we made it safely back to Aid Sudan's home base in Kampala. Met with food, the Biong tem reunited with the other mission teams. The night was highlighted by the adventures of each team over the past ten days. God's hand is definitely at work!

I speak for the whole team in thanking Gai Luom, our host, and all his family and friends who made our stay in Biong a remarkable experience. I also thank all the people of Biong who loved us, took care of us and blessed us more than we could ever bless them! Finally, I thank all the pilots and crews with AIM and MAF Uganda who made all this happen by getting us into these hard to reach places.

Thanks be to God who continues to teach us to be faithful!!