

## Aru April 2012

Dear Friends

The first month back in Aru has flown by. Firstly, thank you to everyone who has supported me in so many ways for this 'unexpected' return so quickly after the last visit. At a staff meeting of the Diocesan Staff yesterday the leader said they are happy for me to return to UK for a 'small promenade' but then I must return to my real home in Aru!! This is extremely humbling to say the least.

The journey back to Aru was quite remarkable – I had just over one hour in Doha to make the connection to Entebbe. The plane from Manchester was delayed by one hour! Praise God the connecting plane waited for 5 of us. The connection in Entebbe was subsequently very tight, but again I just made it. The really impressive part was that my baggage also arrived at the final destination!

The next few days were taken up by Easter. I attended the Diocesan staff retreat on Easter Saturday and was delighted to meet people from Bunia and Mahagi who will be assisting in the Rooted in Jesus Course in August and most importantly the guy who will make all the MAF bookings for the Bishop's party. God's timing and provision was a great blessing as ever. Bishop Ande gave four very challenging talks on 'Freedom through truth for eternity'. He challenged people to think about how issues like culture and tribalism hinder the work of the Holy Spirit. It wasn't difficult to relate this to our own hindrances in UK.

After Easter my programme of work was established. I have 5 English teaching sessions, 3 with IPASC and 2 with the Diocese. I also have a morning for assisting Diocese staff with the intricacies of working with computers. I manage to keep one step ahead most of the time!

I am helping IPASC to develop data collection. They are good at collecting information but struggle with how to use it. We have begun with the Safe Water programme as there was no data collection for this in the past. I attended a teaching day for members of communities where proposed Safe Water outlets are to be installed.

The Friends of IPASC Trust is introducing a student sponsorship scheme and I have been busy collecting information for this. Some students come from very poor backgrounds and some of their stories are heart-breaking. Families have been wiped out by various uprisings and yet these young people have the desire to improve the health of the people in their local communities. Without sponsorship many would have to leave the courses because of the lack of finance. Information about this will be on the web site [www.ipasc.net](http://www.ipasc.net) when the internet allows me to send the necessary details. (Internet access continues to be the most frustrating aspect of living here).

I must tell you about CARM. (Club d'Aide et Réconfort Mutuel), Club for Mutual Assistance and Comfort run by People Living with AIDS volunteers. This is a very strong group which has set up micro finance groups, drama groups for educating the people about how to avoid contracting the virus, small enterprise activities such as jewellery making and now they are building a safe house for PLWA who come from afar for counselling and treatment but have no family in Aru. At present a member of IPASC HIV Department is providing two small traditional houses. The new house will provide 3 rooms for PLWA. IPASC donated the rocks for the foundations but everything else is provided by the good will offerings of the CARM members. Many of the PLWA also have other diseases such as TB which also needs treatment. Some make the trip to Arua and receive inpatient care but



Bishop Ande with Aru and Bunia delegates



Amedeo explains the importance of drinking clean water



One of the traditional houses



Man L W A who also has TB



Staff member of HIV Dept. and President of CARM delivering medication and offering comfort

after discharge they are too sick to make other journeys. The HIV department collects their medication and delivers it to them in the safe house. All these safe houses are close to the IPASC site. Some of these patients make a remarkable recovery but many they come too late for treatment.



The new safe house will be completed in the next couple of months

This month 50 women had their fistulae successfully repaired at Adi Hospital. Adi is North East close to the border with Sudan and IPASC is currently negotiating with the Surgeon and a hospital on the outskirts of Aru to extend this service for women who live in villages in the westerly direction.



Some of the women leaving the IPASC site on the trip to Adi

On Thursday 26 April IPASC remembered the death of founder Pat Nickson. The morning was a retreat for students who were challenged about their Christian values in their daily lives. Members of the Community at large came to the afternoon session when people remembered all that Pat had done in her life. The Pat Nickson Foundation 'OBUSINGE' was introduced and people were invited to become members. OBUSINGE will research needs in the wider community and seek ways to provide health needs in areas as yet unreached by IPASC. This will be a further demonstration of the legacy left by Pat in Congo.



Gill speaks about Pat's life and her book Diamonds in the Darkness



Looking at Pat's book Diamonds in the Darkness



Sharing a meal together

An eventful four weeks? Yes, it is good to share some of it with you. Finally it wouldn't be British to ignore reference to the weather! I have resorted to a fleece on the colder days – when the temperature drops to 22degrees. We have had some spectacular thunder storms but no tornadoes to match the UK. The climate is actually very pleasant for a European.

Thanks for taking the time to read about my life here. The Congolese want me to convey their warmest greetings to all of you. They hope they are in your prayers as you are in theirs.

Until next time,

Gill