

Aru January 20<sup>th</sup> 2012

After a windy start to the journey in UK which delayed the flight until the following day, a good night's sleep at Heathrow courtesy of BA, I arrived to the usual warm welcome at IPASC. The heat is considerable as it is the dry season. The locals say it is probably around 35 – 38 degrees! However at 6am when prayers begin it is pleasantly cool. It has been a full couple of weeks here. In the first week IPASC staff visited the family of a staff member to bring condolences after they had lost 5 family members in the same number of weeks. We then visited an official of the local government who had lost his daughter aged 34 years. It brought into sharp relief the fragility of life here compared with UK.

We have established a programme for English improvement at IPASC and the Diocese. Their progress since I first came here is most encouraging.

On Friday the people living with aids club met for the first time in the New Year. A democratic vote was held to elect the Chairman, Secretary, Treasurer and Committee for the coming year.

IPASC presented the group with six bicycles to assist people to travel to Arua in Uganda for their treatment.



Six have also been given to two other groups in different locations.

Members of the group known as CARM also make jewellery and they are beginning to make necklaces for the UK market. These will be sold in the Youth project shop near my home Church. (If you want to buy one let me know!)



Saturday I was invited to the wedding of one of the Youth Workers (also my English student!). It took place in the Cathedral and the joy during the ceremony was palpable. The service lasted 3 hours and the reception another 3. After the wedding gifts are brought by the guests including money, pots and pans, water carriers and many things. The last gift is always a mattress to the sound of great hilarity.

The Bride and groom leave and change their clothes and then arrive at the reception with their many attendants of all ages.



The cake is cut and then the bride and bridesmaid give each guest a small piece. Finally everyone is fed with typical Congolese food.



The ladies of Neston Methodist Church knitted one hundred vests and these were given to the Safe Motherhood programme for distribution to the poorest mothers of premature babies.

A visit to Buta Health Centre was a great joy.

Having seen the development since the donation given by the Mayor of Wirral (Phil Gilchrist), the laying of the foundation stone and all in between, finally it is up and running. People said how grateful they are because previously they had to walk many kilometres to Aru Town and some pregnant women didn't make it so had to deliver their babies en route. The by-product of this venture is that two communities of different Christian faiths have come together in unity for the first time and are working together to progress the site. IPASC has also built a safe water source close to the Health Centre for the use of both communities.



*Clinic entrance*



*Local Chief with IPASC staff member and good latrines in the background*



*Treatment room*



*Pharmacy with H C staff*



*Laboratory*

*Committee members prepare new bricks for building a small waiting room. They hope also to build a small dwelling for the nurse to stay overnight*



Finally a visit to the school for the deaf and disabled and the new disability clinic which attracts people from as far away as 300 km. There is now a service for producing ear moulds and recharge-able batteries have been donated. Sadly most people cannot afford the necessary treatment/surgery needed for serious disability.



*Hearing aid batteries recharging*

*Child with club foot*



Once again, thanks to everyone who supports the work in D R Congo in so many ways and for the interest in my activities in a supportive role here in Aru. On Monday I fly in a small MAF plane to Bunia to see the IPASC University Campus and visit with the Church of Boga Diocese.

I also look forward to meeting with my good friend Elias Assia.

Please continue to pray for the work of IPASC which provides such good training for students in Community Health and for its operational programmes which improve the health and welfare of the poorest people in the local communities in N E Congo.

Greetings from everyone here

Gill