



Three and a half years ago Joyce's husband and father were killed by an unknown gunman. Finding safety in Maridi she set up a stall in the local market. At first she barely made enough to keep her three children alive but after attending a business course run by MSA her profits have doubled. Photo/MSA

Winter Story

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

BY GILLIAN SOUTHEY | CWS COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR.

Much of our focus in recent years has been on the United Nations' Agenda for Sustainable Development. Made up of 17 Sustainable Development Goals, these interlinked goals were agreed in 2015, aiming to "leave no one behind". Christian World Service's partners are working in the heart of their communities. We are proud of the work they do, responding to the complex needs of people in often very difficult situations. Few places are as hard to work in as South Sudan.

Wadalla Peter's face twinkles as he tells the story of the Maridi Service Agency, a local group winning real change for the people of Maridi, a town of close to 100,000 in South Sudan. Behind his smile is a determination that has seen him face hunger, travel long distances on foot and escape conflict. At 14 he fled with his family to the Congo, returning when life was safer. Now he is a tireless worker for peace and prosperity.

Maybe he would have done it anyway, but it was the opportunity for higher education that set him on this path. In 1993 he got a scholarship to attend high school in Uganda. Being able to study while other South Sudanese were struggling to survive was a privilege. Talking to him today, he says he is deeply obligated to the Episcopal Church for this opportunity and wants to give back to his community.

When he and six fellow students came home for their annual holidays they would help local students with their studies. As they realised the deep needs in their community, their plans grew.



Director of MSA, Wadalla takes his turn on Maridi FM which has an important role educating locals about the dangers of HIV and advocating for girl's education. MSA campaigns against early marriage for girls as young as 12 and 13, a symptom of desperate poverty. Photo/MSA

GIVING THEIR COMMUNITY OPTIONS

In 2000 no one in Maridi seemed to think education was important so they formed the Maridi Students Association to promote schools, setting up first a high school and then three, later reduced to two, preschools. Their second priority was the lack of awareness about the rising incidence of HIV infection. People displaced by the bitter fight for independence brought the virus to Maridi. Without medical facilities it spread fast.

In 2005, hope grew when the international community helped broker an agreement that laid the groundwork for independence. However, in 2008, the Lord's Resistance Army including many child soldiers fled



Above: In 2016, Wadalla made the dangerous journey from Maridi to Kampala. Funding from CWS enables MSA to reach some of the county's most vulnerable people and challenge discrimination against girls. Photo: CWS/Rob Wayne.



“Young people in Maridi have grown up without hope. We knew how education restored hope from our own experience,” says Wadalla

Ugandan troops, brutally attacking local people, kidnapping children and stealing food. MSA assisted some of those who had escaped from the LRA's clutches especially young mothers. In 2009, CWS was able to give them start-up funding to launch the only local radio station, Maridi FM.

NO EASY ANSWERS IN SOUTH SUDAN

When in July 2011 South Sudan became the world's newest country, MSA was under no illusion that the road would be easy. The new government had no funds or means to raise taxes until an agreement to share oil proceeds was made with Sudan. When fighting broke out between its leaders in December 2013, any hope of a peace dividend vanished. While a fragile ceasefire is holding the cost has been enormous. An unknown number of South Sudanese have lost their lives, 2.3 million have fled the country and 1.78 million are displaced. The United Nations says nearly 7 million people are facing severe food insecurity this year.

GIVING PEOPLE HOPE

No matter what happens, MSA continues its daily work of peace making. The three schools and vocational training programmes (in computing, driving and mechanics) continue. HIV testing is available at the

Top: These students have received CWS-funded scholarships to attend the high school run by MSA. Credit: MSA

Above: High School graduates encourage each other to give back to their community.

clinic and MSA supports students to run HIV clubs in the high schools. Maridi FM campaigns against practices like child marriage and keeps people informed on political developments. Because of poverty, some families marry their daughters when they are only 12 or 13 in return for a dowry. From 2016-8 with the help of funds from CWS matched by the New Zealand government, MSA assisted 637 newly arrived women displaced by hunger and violence to set up small businesses or establish gardens with training and capital.

“Young people in Maridi had grown up without hope. We knew how education restored hope from our own experience. MSA grew from there,” says Wadalla looking back. In less than 20 years, MSA has grown to be a leading voice in the county recognised for the way it offers opportunities to people who have been damaged by war and poverty.

People who do not have food or have fled violent attacks arrive in Maridi most days. Please support the Winter Appeal, so MSA can give people the help they want and need to build a better future.

Donate now at www.cws.org.nz.

Phone 0800 74 73 72 or post to CWS, PO Box 22652, Christchurch 8140.

