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In South Sudan, boys are more likely to go to school, stay longer and sit their exams. Children line up at the nursery school for their lunch of maize porridge, cooked by their mothers. Photo: MSA

## Summer Story

# PUT A SMILE ON HER FACE

BY GILLIAN SOUTHEY | CWS COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR.

**N**ot everybody is excited about exams, but in South Sudan Suzan is counting down the days. After two years of waiting and a few marriage proposals, she will finally get the chance to sit South Sudan's High School exams with the promise of a better life.

School closures because of the pandemic will put global education back 20 years according to United Nations' reports. Many children have not returned to school. Girls who have less access to education are more likely to be affected. Literacy rates are falling. Children have missed out on food programmes or been forced to work.

### Excitement as schools reopen

For four of the last six years, Suzan has received a scholarship to keep studying at one of Maridi's high schools. She is now 20 years old. Waiting nearly two years to sit her final High School exams has been challenging. Our partner the Mission for Sustainable Advancement (MSA) reports Suzan could not hide her excitement when she heard the news that schools would reopen across the country.

### Suzan tells her story:

"That date when I got the news, tears of joy rolled from my eyes and I went down on my knees and thanked God for once again restoring my hope!

My hope was almost gone. I was growing old, and faced a lot of pressure to get married. My grandmother is demanding a grandchild from me before she dies. I felt the scholarship I had from MSA would be cancelled



"I am so grateful for all the support and services I get from MSA which are shaping my future," says Suzan who will sit her final High School exams in March. Photo: MSA

because the schools were closed. The reopening of schools has ignited my hope and desire to complete my secondary education.

The challenges of staying at home [during the school lockdown] were enormous. I missed a lot of the career guidance and support from our teachers and faced too much pressure from male friends who demanded sexual relationships. There was a high temptation to get married since I was redundant at home and faced a lot of domestic work. The worst was three of my closest friends at school got pregnant. I actually lost hope as every person around me was expecting me to be the next one to get pregnant.

Being part of MSA's scholarship programme helped me to stand strong. The staff kept organising meetings for us to talk about our lives. I am so grateful for all the support and services I get from MSA which are shaping my future. If it was not for the support and the scholarship that I got from MSA, my education would





Above: Young women are grateful to receive sanitary pads that mean they won't have to miss school when they have a period. Top right: MSA runs HIV and AIDS clubs at local High Schools to protect their community. It operates the only testing clinic in Maridi. Right: Teenage girls participate in a sex education class and mentorship programme run by MSA. Photos: MSA



have ended at [Year] 8 at primary school because my mother could not afford to pay the costs of secondary education. I am grateful that in March 2022 I will sit for my South Sudan Secondary Certificate Examinations.”



**Covid-19 has pushed back global education by 20 years. At its peak 1.6 billion students were out of school – more than 31 million remain affected according to the**

**United Nations. Before the pandemic 130 million girls were already missing out on school.**

South Sudan has one of the lowest rates of education in the world. Girls can expect 3.5 years of schooling compared with 5.9 for boys.

Education is central to the Mission for Sustainable Advancement (formerly Maridi Service Agency). Funded by your donations over the last 15 years, it runs two nursery schools and one high school as well as providing scholarships, primarily for girls' secondary education, sex education and sanitary pads. It promotes girls' education under the banner: **Put a smile on her face! Support her Education!**

### TONGA EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Thank you so much for supporting the Tonga Emergency Appeal. Our local partner, Tonga Community Development Trust, will help families repair rainwater harvesting systems, replant gardens and offer psycho-social support to the most vulnerable through Ama Takiloa, its village based women's network. Members will make sure people who need help will get it and coordinate with others, including the Town Officer.

### CWS Partner for Life

Have you thought about making an easy monthly payment for CWS?

By becoming a Partner for *Life* you will support highly-skilled local partners like MSA work with people so they have water – fundamental for survival, food – the basic requirement for life, and justice – the right to dignity, freedom and a say in their future.

Please consider becoming a CWS Partner for *Life* today.

Find out more or sign up at [cws.org.nz](https://cws.org.nz)

### Please support the Summer Appeal for gender justice today:

- \$58** will pay for ten High-school aged girls to attend monthly sex education classes, and receive mentoring and free sanitary pads.
- \$120** will pay for a full High School scholarship for one term.
- \$300** will pay for the HIV and AIDS programme for a month, through school-based clubs, in the community and on MaridiFM.

**Donate now at [www.cws.org.nz](https://www.cws.org.nz).**

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

