



SOLAR RADIOS FOR ULOA 2 REFUGEE CAMP

How are you still alive?

My question was rhetorical, but after hearing this pastor's description of life as a South Sudanese refugee living in the Ugandan Rhino camp, I really was surprised.

This dedicated man had arrived with 11 other South Sudanese refugee pastors and their focus would be the Life Essentials Study Bible for the next few days. In our meet and greet time, it was normal to hear interesting stories of pastors who have committed their lives to the Lord; often times their stories would reflect difficult and even impoverished lifestyle but amazing opportunities.

But I had never met a collection of men so close to starvation.

I had heard there might be a food challenge for the 1.1 million refugees since the UN had initiated its rationing programming. It would appear the world's leading support agency felt the danger to South Sudan was over, as peace talks have been progressing lately.

But what did that really mean? I heard the reality first hand as they told their stories one by one, speaking with deep pain but quiet dignity!

Pastor A shared how as a younger man, he was with his family in South Sudan when rebels came by the family home, demanding the home's male youth should be "donated" to the cause for freedom...in other words they would be abducted into the rebel fighting force and if they refused, all in the home would be killed. And so, A's two older brothers left with the rebels. They both died soon after in the fighting.

Not long after the rebels left, A heard the South Sudanese military were coming to his village in search of young males to "join" the fight to resist the rebels. Abduction is the same regardless who does it and A recognized his life might soon be over. So, he fled to Uganda where he hid in a refugee camp. Soon afterwards, he found Christ as his Saviour. Over time he was mentored, grew and eventually accepted a role as pastor for a small refugee church.

But A spoke in terms of one who is mourning as he explained he will never go home again. Both the rebels and the opposing military now see him as a traitor; if he does go home, he will die at the hands of one of the groups.

His face suggested he was not quite done...

He went on to say that after 11 years as a refugee, he has responsibility for a church, a wife and 9 children. Until recently the UN were providing food rations to assist their survival. I could tell by his 6'2" very thin frame which barely held up his sagging clothes, that he had not been eating well. So, I asked about that. I almost wished I had not!

He explained that his ration of food was 15 kgs of food (essentially maize flour which is made into a weak porridge) for the 11 people in his family. They would share that over the next 30 days. But when he got home and weighed the allotment for himself, he discovered it was actually 9 kgs. I did the math and choked back my surprise when I realized each one in his family would receive **1 oz of food per day for 30 days!**

CANADIANS-SOUTH SUDANESE AND UGANDANS TOGETHER ...A SUPRACULTURAL EXPERIENCE



That's when I asked "how are you still alive?" He just looked down; I asked the question again. And then Pastor B stepped in "we eat one meal every second day". I felt like I was sitting in a nightmare and asked him "but how...?"

He replied "between meals we eat greens we can find" (grass and weeds).

Another pastor chimed in "my daughter asked me – are you going to starve us to death"?

The emotional shock was almost overwhelming-I looked at our Ugandan team who had been listening. I could see them blinking-holding back tears but also looking away.

HAPPY SHOCKS

As the days unfolded and these pastors immersed themselves in discovering the power of the Life Essentials Study Bible, there was not another word of hunger or suffering or anything negative. Instead, there was a constant flow of praise and gratitude and excitement as each one began to see how he might bring spiritual encouragement and support to those around him in their camp setting.

Their servant hearts beat strong. As they boarded their bus for the long journey north, they were a group of men charged up and ready for ministry in a new and deeper way. Some were not even going home-they were heading to a refugee market where they were setting up for open air evangelism.

Every one carried with them a sense of deep love from their new Ugandan and Canadian family in Christ...and they carried food. As these pastors studied all day, our team quietly went shopping; coming back with as much food as these wonderful pastors could carry.

There was much dancing that night!

PERFECT STORM

As difficult as it was to consider, the news reached us the refugee radio station was off the air. There was no power. I could not conceive that-we built the solar power system with 2 redundancies (back-up systems).

Everything was solar powered, but during rainy days, the country power (household electricity) would come on, but if that was somehow down, then our trusted large generator would switch on. That's the way it's supposed to work.

Sure enough, the clouds came, hiding the sun and our batteries now dead from so much overuse, could not help; country power was off (as it often is here) and the generator was started. The good news is it was working-the bad news was it was not producing any power. In fact, it too had been overused and long periods of operation without maintenance rendered it powerless.

We were truly off the air.

For the next four days, we called for trusted technicians to suspend their commitments and jump on the bus, for the **short** 12-hour ride to Adjumani...and bring your tools! They did and for two days worked long hours...eventually, everyone breathed easier when we were back on the air.

We just had to push them...it was critical that we do not have dead air. There are 1.1 million refugees who see our station as their lifeline-their encouragement, especially at this time when some are making the choices between starving in Uganda or facing violence in South Sudan.

But we do face a major problem. Our generator has done so much extra time keeping the station operating that it has weakened. Our batteries have finally died and they must be replaced. During cloudy days when sun is hidden from the solar panels, power stops instantly. But new batteries can carry the load until the clouds move and the sun takes over.

As we make plans to strengthen our tired generator, our pressing need is for 20 solar batteries...a cost of \$7,000 USD. A good friend has already sent us \$2,000 and the station staff are rushing to offer airtime for donations to NGO's who wish to support refugees...they have pledged about \$2,000 USD. That's a good thing!

But we still need \$3,000 USD for this immediate need. Please pray about this one.

BIG PROBLEM-BIG OPPORTUNITY

Camp commander Titus is a large, benevolent Ugandan with a broad smile and engaging personality; we have always appreciated him for hosting our station in his secure compound. But his biggest and most obvious asset is his compassionate heart for the vulnerable. He is perfectly suited for his leadership in managing the 1.1 million refugees under his care.

In all the time I have known him, I had never seen him so concerned. Trying to stay positive (no doubt trying to avoid upsetting his friends) Titus smiled much. But between smiles, the pain sneaked out.

He revealed what we met head on with the refugee pastors. The UN was dramatically reducing its food rations for refugees. I still remember the first reduction-news of people starving in fields reached us here in Canada. That was such painful news. And now it will worsen.

Titus explained he had visited the large fields previously set aside for growing food for the refugees near the Majji camp. He stopped smiling when he said the weather was so hot, that most of the crop was lost. I could see him scrambling...talking randomly if only he could reach leaders in the World Food program, or his leaders, or some NGO's...if if...

I felt for him. I know what helpless feels like. I experienced that with some of the pastors he was also trying to help.

NOW

I really don't like that word. It always means a "big one" is coming. And it did!

"Now Don, in a few months I will face a problem so big, I am concerned. When food is soon completely cut off, there will be major challenges. I really need your help."

He went on to explain that he is planning to gather all the camp leaders-those who represent all 60 tribal groups that now live here as refugees. And he wants to have them all sit at a large broadcast table with many microphones; together they will speak words of peace and encouragement to the 1.1 million refugees who will all be at their radios or their



1 – LIFE ESSENTIALS FOR REFUGEE PASTORS
2 – COLLABORATIVE STUDY DURING PROJECTS
3 – CELEBRATION BEFORE 4 AM DEPARTURE
4 – RECEIVING 500 CALLS PER MONTH

5 – NEW SOLAR SYSTEM AND OLD BATTERIES AT USALAMA FM
6 – MORE REPAIRS AT USALAMA FM
7 – PASTOR MARTIN EXPLAINS GALCOM RADIO TO BARATUKU CAMP REFUGEES
8 - SURPRISE GIFT

neighbor's radio. These precious refugees need to hear from their leaders that all will be well...somehow!

This will be a critical time when communication is vital to maintain peace and safety; hopefully potential violence will be calmed as it had done many times here in the past through our broadcasts. This would be our biggest challenge yet!

He went on to explain he is even now preparing a building currently being occupied on his compound. In early August it will be ready...FOR US! He knows our current studio is far too small for such a large challenge. Then he smiled, trying to squeak one out of me.

His vision is for a new studio, capable of hosting large groups of leaders who can broadcast together as a group. I had to agree, it would be a major witness to the world when previously fighting groups can gather together for one purpose and in agreement under the banner of Christian broadcasting. Exciting indeed!

BUT I really swallowed hard now. I was still struggling with the battery challenge. Suddenly, I was facing a mountainous need for \$24,000 to build and equip a new and very large broadcast studio. I scoured every inch of that building, staring into windows, dreaming of possibilities and trying to think of ways to reduce costs. But there was just no way around it. We need at least \$24,000 for renovations and equipment that will prepare for the soon coming tribal leaders.

Please pray about this also.

How are our brothers still alive? The answer is in Eph 2:10. *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.* (NASB).

Whether refugee or not, we are all still here for His purpose which He prepared for us. Be encouraged!

Don

9 - ULOA 2 CAMP REFUGEE IN WORSHIP WITH NEW RADIO

10 - BARATUKU CAMP BAPTIST CHURCH RECEIVES SOLAR RADIOS



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