



Providing humanitarian aid
to the people of Akon, Sudan



JumpStart Sudan was founded by one of the Lost Boys of Sudan

A mother sends her son to safety

More than two decades ago, a mother in Akon, Sudan kissed her son goodbye and begged his uncles to see him safely out of their country. Many southern Sudanese were being slaughtered by the government militia intent on persecuting Christians and animists of the south.

Massacre

The two uncles and the boy joined a huge exodus of between 30 and 40 thousand persons fleeing Sudan. At the edge of a river which flowed between them and the safety of Ethiopia, the Sudanese militia caught up with them. With machine guns and hand grenades, they massacred all but about 500 persons.

Escape to Ethiopia

One of the uncles was killed there. The boy and the other uncle lay as if dead until the militia dispersed. Still shaking with terror, the uncle and the nephew clung to each other as they scrambled across the river on the bloody bodies of the dead where they had fallen into the water like stepping stones. Fearing for their lives, they traveled by night and slept by day. After days of nothing to eat but tree leaves, the boy began to cry and told his uncle he could not go on.

An uncle's prayer

The uncle knew they must keep going because he had promised the boy's mother that he would see her son to safety. The uncle prayed to God to take his life but spare his nephew's. The next day he was killed in an ambush. The boy went on alone and eventually spent eleven years in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya before being selected to come to the United States in 1995.

This "Lost Boy of Sudan," Akot Lual Arc, would later write:

"I believe that God saved me that day and kept me going all those years in order to return and help the people in my homeland, including my sister who was abducted for five years and the family of my brother who died suddenly of some mysterious disease because there was no medical facility to help him."

Founding JumpStart Sudan

Akot earned his GED at Johnson County Community College before becoming a U.S. citizen in August of 2002, but he never quit thinking about his people back in Sudan and their desperate needs. Here in the United States, Akot felt safe; he had employment, a home and access to education. But he suffered conflicted feelings because he knew it was quite the opposite for those who remained in Sudan. As he began to tell American friends about his experience escaping Sudan and what was still happening in his country, more and more of them encouraged him to form a nonprofit organization to help those in his homeland and to keep telling his story so people in the United States would understand what was at stake.



Akot with his mother and sister



Akot Arc, Executive Director of JumpStart Sudan, with his wife, Mary Kuel, who serves on the board, and their daughter Alual

Mission trips

In 2002, Akot worked with Dale Edwards to form JumpStart Sudan and led his first mission trip to Akon, Sudan bringing medicine, blankets, 600 school uniforms, books and some clothing purchased from donations totaling over \$17,000 by Kansas City area churches and concerned residents. This mission was not only special because it was the first outside effort to bring relief aid to Akon, but because it had been many years since he had seen his mother and brothers and sisters. He enjoyed a reunion with many family members including his brother Arc.

The following year, Akot and his team delivered over \$60,000 worth of supplies to Akon, and now the list included mosquito nets and blankets.

Before the 2004 trip, Akot received the sad news that his brother Arc had died, and part of that visit included a funeral service so Akot could pay his respects.

The United States and Sudan: the difference between life & death

For the 2005 trip, children from Morningside Elementary collected travel sizes of soaps and shampoos to be carried to Sudan. A couple of weeks before the trip, JumpStart Sudan board members and other volunteers gathered to pack boxes and duffle bags with medicine, medical supplies and the toiletries which Akot and Dennis would hand-carry onto the plane for the journey to Akon.

Jane A. Ashcraft, a board member at that time, recalled:

"I remember the joy we all felt at being able to pack up so many necessary items to send to Sudan. You would look at each bottle of medicine and imagine what relief it might bring to someone who needed it. We finished packing the bags and boxes which, by then, were very heavy. We asked God's blessing on the mission as a whole, on the people of Akon and for Akot and Dennis' health and safety as they made the long journey.

A few days later, I received a message from Mary, Akot's wife, that Akot had just had surgery. I rushed to the hospital wondering what had transpired. When Akot awoke, he told me he had been experiencing excruciating stomach pains, headache and fever for the last two days. He'd gone to work and driven all over the metropolitan area doing his job, all the while feeling horrible. Finally, he began to experience extreme nausea and vomiting—so bad he had to pull over to the side of the road to be sick. By the end of the second day, he decided he needed to see a doctor and went to the hospital where a quick examination determined that he was suffering from acute appendicitis, and emergency surgery was necessary. At first, Akot refused to have the surgery. He told the doctors he was going to Akon on a mission in two weeks for about a month, and he would have the surgery when he returned. The doctors had to convince him that, without **immediate** surgery, he would die. Even so, before Akot consented, they had to promise him that he would be able to make the trip.



JumpStart Sudan board members and volunteers pose with the bags and boxes packed with medicine, medical supplies and toiletries to be taken to Akon, Sudan



Akot and Arc

I sat with Mary as Akot slept and contemplated what would have happened to Akot if the appendicitis had occurred when he and Dennis were in Sudan far, far from adequate medical intervention. But it had happened here in an area where there were more than a dozen hospitals and hundreds of physicians who could attend to his particular illness. Akot was in the United States, and he was **alive**. If he'd been in Sudan, he'd be dead—it was as simple as that and then a devastating realization pierced me to the core. Akot awoke and voiced the very thought that had just occurred to me. "I think this is what killed my brother—he suffered stomach pain and fever for two days and then died suddenly." It was then that I glimpsed the hopelessness that the people of Sudan must face every day when even the most basic health care is not available. If Arc had been in the U.S. or if his own country could offer health care, he would most likely still be alive.

Samuel Brownback Primary Health Care Unit

Akot and Dennis returned from the 2005 mission trip to report that the leaders of Akon still ranked health care as the community's most urgent need. They desperately wanted JumpStart Sudan to help them build a clinic. 2006 was spent raising funds, finding people to do the work, poring over blueprints, and getting updates on the number of bricks being made by workers in Akon. 2007 saw the construction of the Samuel Brownback Primary Health Care Unit which opened in the fall and has been serving patients ever since.

While it is not equipped with the resources to handle every medical need, the very presence of the clinic and its workers has become a source of **hope**.



The Samuel Brownback Clinic serves the community of Akon, Sudan

Working for the people of Sudan

Late in 2005, Akot returned to Sudan to serve as Personal Secretary to Salva Kiir Mayardit, President of Southern Sudan and 1st Vice President of Sudan. While laboring to help shape a new government for his people, Akot is now able to work from within Sudan to support JumpStart Sudan's increased efforts to bring health and wellbeing to the people of Akon.

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