



Who wants to go to the Sudan?

One day Chad, the director of our eMi East African office, just said, “Who wants to go to the Sudan?”

There were some international relief workers from the Samaritan’s Purse (SP) who wanted some advice on a few current building projects in Yei, Sudan.

Some of you may have heard of “Operation Christmas Child” which is a branch of SP, and collects toys and clothes in shoe boxes for kids all over the world who otherwise wouldn’t be getting anything for Christmas.

Before I knew it, I was scanning copies of my passport to apply for a visa and packing my bags.

Josh (eMi staff, specializing in Construction Management) and I left on Tuesday, Feb. 14th and planned to come home just a few days later on Thursday. It was only an hour and a half flight, but it would give me the chance to visit another African country.



Looking around the country side

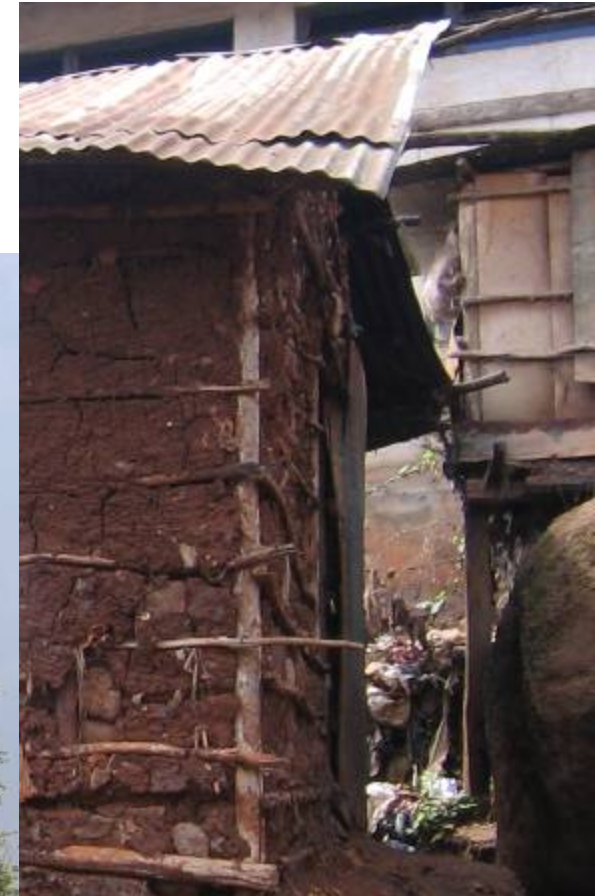
Once we arrived, we had the chance to look around for a bit. We saw a clay brick house with the roof blown off during a storm...



...and lots of dusty roads and simple mud / straw houses.



During our visit, we stayed with some other NGO's in these one-room huts with straw roofs (see below). This type of building seemed pretty common here, for those who can afford to plaster the walls, which is probably the most expensive construction material. They look pretty nice on the outside...



... but underneath the plaster, they're just made out of sticks and mud, like this house (above) and many others that we saw in Yei.

A lot of houses in East Africa are made with clay bricks that are made locally and fired in kilns made by stacking the bricks and starting a fire underneath (see below).



Sometimes houses will use concrete columns to make a clay brick building stronger (see right).

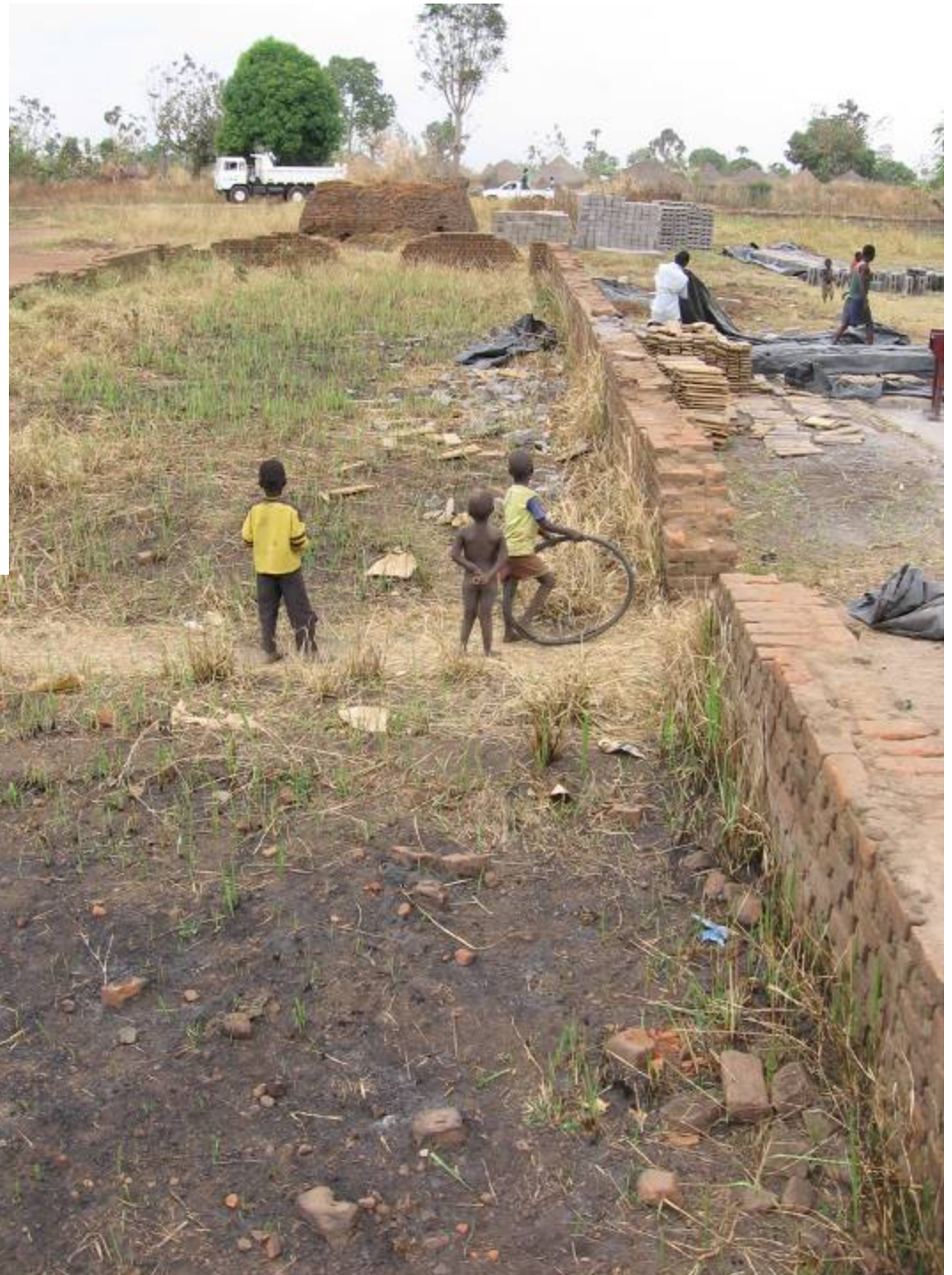


But it doesn't help if your columns look like this one (see above).

We also had a chance to visit the site of proposed local church building. At one time, this church was built up almost to ceiling height with local clay brick.

During the last 25 years of civil war, the site was abandoned because of fighting. When people from the church returned, they found that locals were stealing the bricks right out of the walls to build their own homes - which brought the walls down to the current level.

SP wants to rebuild this church with cement blocks which are stronger and will help this building last longer.





Here at a current construction site, we were able to talk to Dan and Peter from SP about the cement and compressed earth blocks that they are using for their buildings instead of local clay brick.



Overall it was a successful visit, and we were able to encourage the guys at SP, as well as give them lots of great tips on how to design buildings in Africa better than the local standard.

But it was Thursday, and now time to head back to Kampala.

How can we pray for them?

Danger is still an issue for NGO's working in Sudan. Even though we felt safe while we were there, the country is far from stable – and rebel groups still terrorize the nation. We frequently saw both soldiers and civilians carrying guns.

My favorite quote from Dan, was when I asked him how he ended up in the Sudan. He said that God drop kicked him and this is just where he landed. Sometimes living here can be very frustrating. Dealing with workers who may be trying to steal supplies, corrupt govt. officials who want their cut of the building costs, or just basic misunderstandings from the communication differences.

Please pray that they will keep their sense of humor through of the frustrations, and see God's promises fulfilled through their hands.

But soon it was time to leave.



My baby plane leaving Yei, Sudan's "International Airport"

This dusty strip is pretty much all there is to see at the "airport", other than a little mud shack to the left where a man with armed guards looked over my visa, and asked me to sign my name in his very unofficial looking notebook. I was a bit disappointed that no one stamped my passport, proving that I had been there – but I was also just happy to be going home again.