

Please feel free to phrase things in your own way.

SCIAF Lent talk 2021

Hi it's Marion O'Hara and I'm here to thank you on behalf of SCIAF for your ongoing support and to tell you about this year's WEE BOX Lent Appeal.

We are truly thankful to each and every one of you for your continued generosity and your prayers over the past year.

Coronavirus has disrupted every aspect of our lives, yet you have shown love and compassion and we could not have helped our vulnerable sisters and brothers in need without you.

Through the WEE BOX and collection donations, gifts in wills and direct debits, you have enabled SCIAF to continue to help the world's poorest people. I am delighted to let you know that thanks to you, last year's WEE BOX appeal is supporting 4000 women and girls who suffered unimaginable violence in the DR Congo to recover and rebuild their lives.

Hopefully, you will have heard about SCIAF's 2021 WEE BOX appeal by now, or have read about the appeal online.

This Lent we are bringing you stories of how a generation of children with disabilities are locked out of education and trapped in a cycle of poverty in South Sudan. These children were already the most vulnerable, and the coronavirus pandemic is deepening existing levels of poverty, putting them at greater risk.

South Sudan remains in a serious crisis due to the effects of years of conflict and violence, which has left behind a legacy of fear and despair and has destroyed vital services.

Many children with disabilities in South Sudan are not able to go to school or, later to work and earn a living. Many have no access to support services or hospitals for treatment and face stigma and discrimination.

We believe that every child, no matter where they are in the world deserves a chance to live a full life and we can help children living in some of the world's most difficult places to build bright futures.

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I'd like to share the story of Angelina and her daughter Vaida with you today, and how we, the Catholic community in Scotland, can help children with disabilities in South Sudan to access the education and support they need.

When the soldiers came to Angelina's village in South Sudan, she picked up her disabled daughter Vaida and lifted her onto her back. She took her other children's hands in hers. And then, gathered her other children and ran. Angelina had already lost three children to poverty and disease and was determined that her other six children would survive, even if that meant carrying her disabled daughter through a war zone.

Vaida was just 14 years old when she started to experience a numb feeling in her legs.

"It started with a headache one day. My limbs started to go numb. There was no proper medication available. I was paralysed. I couldn't walk. I could only sit in one spot until someone moved me."

There were no services for children with disabilities in the village where Vaida lived. After years of war, South Sudan has little infrastructure to provide emergency medical treatment for children with disabilities, or the long-term care required for a child like Vaida to live a healthy, happy life

However, with your help this Lent, children like Vaida can get the help they need.

Your support today will help to adapt six schools so that pupils with disabilities can access mainstream education. Teachers will be trained to better understand the needs of disabled children and how to effectively include them in their classes. Children will be given aids such as wheelchairs, ramps, hearing aids and canes, as well as medical support to help them live more independently and actively participate in school life.

As well as practical equipment and healthcare, your support can help tackle the stigma, which causes pain and misery to children with disabilities and excludes them from living a fulfilled life.

Today there is hope. Thanks to supporters like you, Vaida can now walk on crutches and she has a tricycle to get to school. Vaida thought she would never walk again, but now she takes a few steps unaided. She says: *“Now life is better. Before it was really difficult.”*

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We are delighted to tell you that all donations to the WEE BOX BIG CHANGE appeal received before 11 May will be doubled by the UK government as part of UK Aid Match – making twice the difference to the lives of children like Vaida.

Please support the WEE BOX appeal during this holy season and in the special collection (if your parish is able to hold one) or online at www.sciaf.org.uk.

You may also wish to take part in a 24 Hour Lenten fast for SCIAF. Your gifts will help SCIAF's life changing work around the world, while match funding from the UK government will help children with disabilities like Vaida to access the education and support they need to build a bright future.

Everything you can give will make a big difference.

- £29 could buy a cane for children with visual impairment to allow them to attend school.
- £40 a month could buy a wheelchair to transform a child's life

This Lent, please give children living in the world's poorest places the chance to live a full life. Please remember families in South Sudan in your prayers, in particular children who are still suffering the effects of the conflict, and have experienced first-hand what it means to have a disability, but are too poor to access proper healthcare.

Thank you once again for reaching out with love and compassion to our sisters and brothers in need around the world.

Please do ask me more about the WEE BOX appeal or go to SCIAF's website where you can read more.

Thank you and God bless.