

S4LA News Update

July 2020

Setbacks, Solutions, Serendipity & Superman



Firstly, Sierra Leone seems to be faring OK in the pandemic so far. Mallam says they feel safe with their precautions, restrictions and curfews; and work has continued in Yiben.

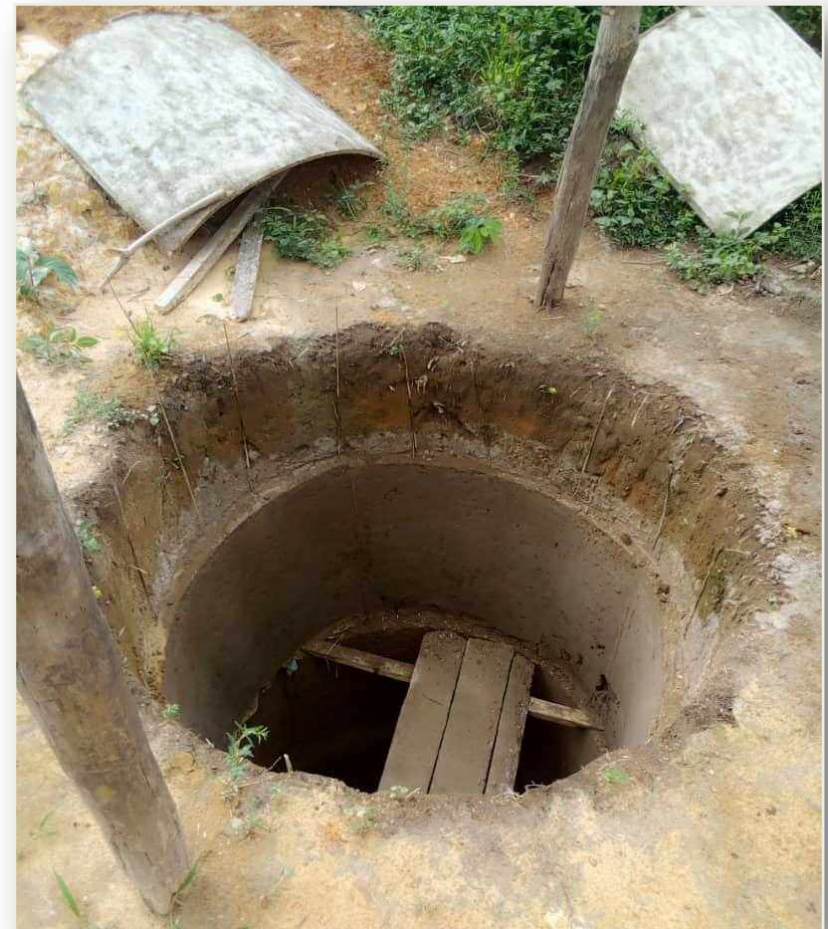
Mallam is, as usual, their main source of news and advice and the nurses are backing him up re social distancing and handwashing.

Here, Covid has impacted our fundraising activities and we have been so grateful for our bank balance, our regular contributors, online jewellery sales and serendipitous donations that have allowed us to keep up with the amazing progress happening in Yiben.

Thank you to all our generous supporters!



In January, construction of the clinic well and nurses' accommodation was progressing slowly, as the community managed their farming priorities and struggled to keep up the sand supply needed for all the concrete.







In February, as plans were made to begin tiling the clinic, a minor disaster struck when a palm tree fell across one end of their school. This devastated the community and added to their construction load.

With the wet season approaching, the school repairs were prioritised. The community cleaned up the site and built a thatch shelter to continue classes.

They made a huge stockpile of sand bringing it in head pans from more than a kilometre away. We bought them three wheelbarrows to help... the first wheels for the village!

Mallam brought in an additional contractor and they all worked together, first on the school and then on the massive job of tiling the clinic while finishing the nurses' accommodation.

A lot of cement and many boxes of tiles were transported by 4WD and motorbike to the closest accessible point, ready to be boated and carried for the remaining 3 km. Some very early storms added urgency.

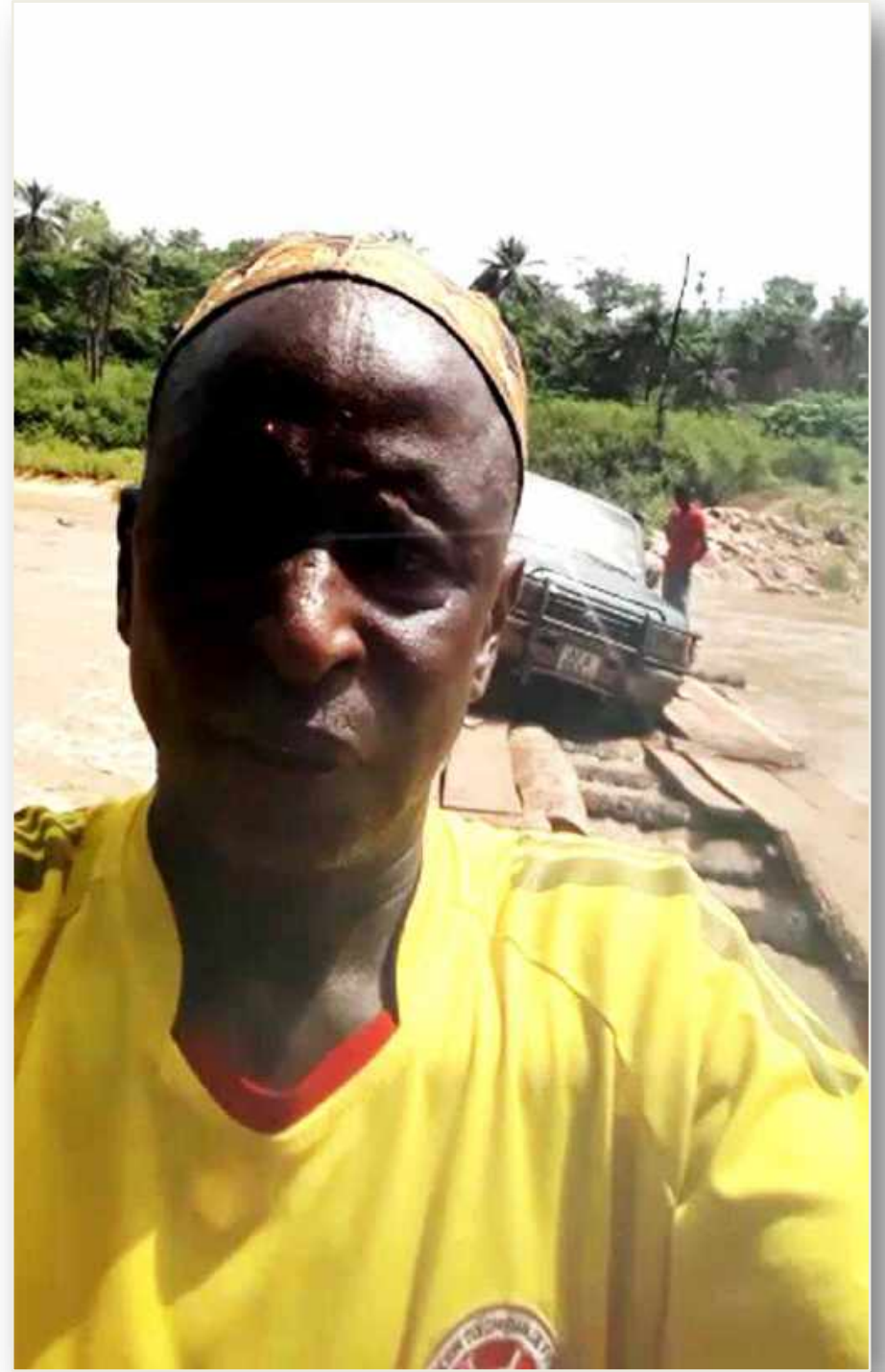




With the materials stockpiling, the strong young men of the community decided that the novelty of carrying 50kg bags had worn thin. (Who in our world would even consider it?)

Instead, they cut timber and laid tracks at a low water spot across the bed of the Seli River, and cleared the approaches so a 4WD could cross and bring everything into the village.





Success!

.....The first of many loads transported directly into Yiben.

The weather miraculously held off and they got all the materials in as needed, stage by stage, beginning with the materials for the school repairs.

Motocross Mallam rode his bike across here too!





With the contractors working 7 days a week, the tiling is now fully completed and the clinic looks great with a fresh lick of paint. Pics are pre-cleanup and re-paint.



The nurses' accommodation nearby is also completed, tiled and painted to match. The nurses have gratefully moved in.





With the Mowoloko River at its lowest, Mallam engaged another contractor to cut dead and fallen timber to allow safer boat access up the river to Fadugu.



It has been an annual job to improve this waterway bit by bit. The water has since come and filled it, and washed away the tracks. The boat is back in service for the next 6 months or so.

In May, Nurse Adama asked for a Baby Doppler.

Such a simple piece of modern technology would have exciting impact for the Yiben Mums and Dads.

We put it out as a special Mothers' Day Appeal and happily were able to send the money for it.



Now for the story of 'the most difficult well'...

Clean water wells for schools and hospitals is a national standard.

We began to fund a well for the school nearly 5 years ago and there have been a series of disappointing setbacks with contractors, seasonal conditions and cracking.... Another attempt to fix it last year, looked very promising; but again it didn't hold water.

A few weeks ago Mallam persuaded some very experienced well builders from an NGO to come in and they were able to reconstruct it. Then another problem arose...

Some outside timber workers had been in the village and stolen essential parts of the dismantled equipment.

Thanks to one small Gympie school who had just held a Free Dress Fundraiser to help Yiben, we were able to replace the equipment immediately.

The well has been successfully finished!

Thank you, Gympie East State School!





Fetching water....
Cleaner, safer, easier!



And what of the clinic well? It has also suffered setbacks.

When work was delayed by sand shortage, the contractor went to another well job in another town where he had a serious accident. Fortunately he is recovering but not able to come back.

When the thieves made off with the school well equipment, they also took the clinic well equipment which was lying on the site.

Even worse, they broke into the Chief's house and stole the community savings box. For them it's been a cruel lesson about security.

Our remaining income was just enough to cover our committed monthly costs, so we felt unable to take advantage of the experts' services before they moved on; until... another timely donation provided the capital to complete it.

Thanks to our Yogi friends in Geneva this time, Mallam now has this job underway, and flowing water is expected very soon!



Working began on the clinic well approx 18 months ago.

Greetings and thank you
from Yiben and neighbouring
communities, Mallam and
the rest of the S4LA Team.



Special thanks to Mallam, the 'Father of Yiben', for everything he does,
and for providing the photos.