South Sudan's first female ophthalmologist relies on MAF to give sight to the blind

PHOTOS: JENNY DAVIES

Dr Aja Paul, a mother of five and former refugee, was the first woman to qualify in ophthalmology in South Sudan in 2020. Having persevered through many personal challenges, she is determined to treat the most rural South Sudanese communities that have no access to affordable healthcare. Many of the people there have faced years of war, hunger and extreme poverty.

According to the National Library of Medicine, South Sudan has the highest prevalence of active trachoma anywhere in central Africa, a disease which causes blindness but is preventable with the use of simple antibiotics. What's more, 80% of children under 9 catch early-onset trachoma in South Sudan and end up losing their sight as adults.

Dr Aja spent many years travelling to isolated communities by road; encountering cobras, lions and risking her life to treat rural patients. Now a regular MAF passenger, she can fly in a fraction of the time from the capital Juba, arriving safely in locations unreachable by road such as Yuai and Kapoeta.

MAF facilitates monthly mobile eye clinics across South Sudan, where as many as 1,000 patients can be treated at each location by Dr Aja and her team. Dr Aja recalls many parents who've been able to see their children for the first time thanks to simple surgeries to treat trachoma and cataracts.

She said, 'It makes a lot of difference to go and serve your community and bring a smile to their faces. MAF is organised and so professional, it is a great partnership. I have never experienced this kind of service from any other airline.'

Pause for prayer

Give thanks for Dr Aja's determination to help and treat her people, many of whom live in the remotest parts of South Sudan. With unrest and hunger still affecting thousands of people in the region, please pray for the ongoing conflict in neighbouring Sudan and for MAF's increased ability to respond.

Next generation pilots

MAF's latest podcast celebrates James Gullett, who, at the age of 21, has recently qualified to become MAF's youngest pilot. He joined MAF via the Future Pilot Programme, a scheme launched to help people become MAF pilots. Listen to the podcast by visiting **www.maf-uk.org/podcast** and spread the word about the programme to inspiring the next generation of budding MAF pilots.

Her future. Her family

Rural women bear the brunt of climate change, risk violence, and remain cut off from necessities such as medical care. MAF aircraft help thousands of women, and we are proud to be facilitating change by empowering women like Dr Aja. Please get involved in our latest campaign *Her future. Her family* by visiting **www.maf-uk.org/her**

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