



# THE VAD FOUNDATION

ANNUAL REPORT 2021



# THE VALENTINO ACHAK DENG FOUNDATION



## *A beacon of hope in a challenging land*

**THE VALENTINO ACHAK DENG (VAD) FOUNDATION** was established by Valentino Achak Deng and Dave Eggers to empower South Sudanese communities. We do this by increasing access to quality primary and secondary education, improving the education of young women, providing vocational training and implementing community development programs to help create the future leaders of a peaceful and thriving South Sudan.

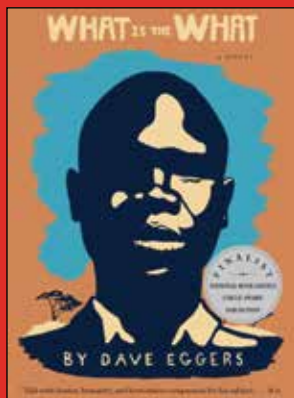
**OUR HOPE** is to empower the children, young people, and women of South Sudan with opportunities to build thriving communities for their families.

**OUR AIM** is to help create peace and long-term sustainability for all citizens through vocational training, farming, and skill-building. While traditional schooling is at the core of our strategy, we believe students and community members must be empowered beyond the classroom.

**OUR GOAL** is to promote economic development through education in order to provide a secure and resilient foundation for the citizens of war-torn South Sudan.



## OUR HISTORY



- 2006** *What Is the What*, a novel by Dave Eggers based on Valentino's early life story as a refugee from Sudan's civil war, is published. The VAD Foundation is established and dedicated to bringing quality and sustainable educational opportunities to the war-torn communities of South Sudan.
- 2007** Valentino returns to Marial Bai, his home village, to consult with community and government leaders in the region and lay the groundwork for construction of a secondary school and educational facilities.
- 2008** Working with a team of local architects and construction workers on a plot of land donated by the community, Valentino begins construction on the secondary school and educational center.
- 2009** The Marial Bai Secondary School (MBSS) opens as one of the first fully-functional high schools in the entire region, providing an opportunity for youth – especially girls – to receive an education past elementary school.
- 2010** New boarding facilities allow young people from across South Sudan to attend MBSS. A library, community center, sports facilities, school farm, and teacher-training facilities are added to the campus. State-of-the-art science equipment is received from the government for a brand-new science lab.
- 2012** Our first senior class graduates from MBSS.
- 2016** The VAD Foundation and *What Is the What* celebrate ten years: Valentino continues to expand the impact of his work within South Sudan.





**2018** The VAD Foundation opens its second campus, Alok Girls' Academy (AGA), with an inaugural enrollment of 144 students.

**2019** Enrollment at AGA soars to 500 girls in grades four through ten.

**2020** The South Sudanese government announces that all schools across the country must close due to the global COVID-19 pandemic.

To support the region's public health response to the pandemic, Valentino assembles a COVID-19 Awareness Task Force to educate communities on the importance of social distancing, mask-wearing, hand-washing, and safe hygiene practices.

**2021** As part of a USAID program to support local media for displaced communities and refugees in South Sudan, the VAD Foundation is awarded a grant from the organization Internews to train over 400 students in media and drama in performance-based education.

The government announces the reopening of all schools. Nearly 800 young women enrolled at our primary and secondary school levels.



# HIGHLIGHTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

## INTERNEWS GRANT

In January 2021, the VAD Foundation was awarded a \$110,00 grant from Internews, a non-governmental organization (NGO) that focuses on supporting local media for displaced communities and refugees, as part of a large USAID program in South Sudan.

The purpose of the grant was to reach and train youth in media and performance to help share news and current events throughout the region. Over five months, we successfully engaged 415 youngsters in thirty school-based programs to develop plays revolving around gender-based violence, trauma healing (awareness), public health issues, substance abuse, conflict resolution, civic responsibility, and engagement in the three project targeted counties of Northern Bahr el Ghazal state, namely, Aweil East, Centre, and West.

Forty-five students from this group received additional training in camerawork, video editing, scriptwriting, and other media skills to locally produce films that educate through telling stories to their communities. Over 2,500 community members have been helped with psycho-social support services through our dramas and storytelling. Another eighteen youth leaders received training in thought leadership, as well as project planning and management, in order to work with Foundation staff to establish a community resource center where training in art, development, peace, and civic duties will be offered.

## SCHOOLS REOPEN

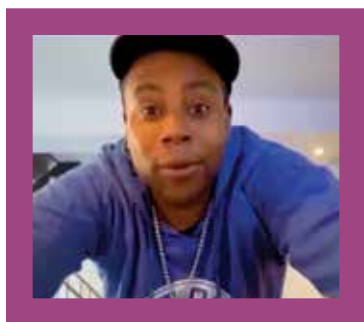
When all schools reopened in May, 584 girls enrolled in the primary section and 189 girls in the secondary section at Alok Girls' Academy (AGA). We continue to practice safe hygiene to help minimize the spread of COVID-19 and other illnesses.

## HEALTH

As a member of the COVID-19 Taskforce at the State Level, the Foundation has been playing a leading role in sensitizing communities against the spread of COVID-19 through a social mobilization process. In conjunction with the Internews grant and enhancing media throughout the region, our network of Youth Volunteers has impacted over 5,000 community members with COVID-19 key messages during the drama festival and outreach activities. Additionally, other cross-cutting issues concerning health, such as HIV AIDS, malnutrition in children, WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene), alcoholism, and malaria were integrated in all activities. Communities are encouraged to protect themselves and to embrace good health-seeking behaviors through these messages.







Kenan Thompson at the VAD Variety Show



## ALL-STAR STUDENTS

In July, we received the exciting news that AGA had the highest test scores of any school in Northern Bahr el Ghazal state on the 2020 Cumulative National Eighth Grade Examination, South Sudan's national exams for students graduating from primary school (tests were conducted in February 2020, before government-mandated lockdowns). Nine of the top ten highest scores on the exam were from AGA. We are so proud of the hard work and dedication of our students and look forward to AGA's all-stars continuing to thrive in secondary school -- and beyond!

## VIRTUAL FUNDRAISERS

We hosted our first-ever virtual fundraising event in May --"School Days: The VAD Variety Show", with talented storytellers, Broadway stars, musicians, a comedian, and a magician providing an evening of virtual entertainment. There was also a special guest appearance by *Saturday Night Live's* Kenan Thompson! The event raised an incredible \$16,500 to support our schools and programs. Huge thanks to the show's great performers and our wonderful supporters! Then in September, the Foundation benefited from a Virtual Trivia Night hosted by The Big Quiz Thing, a premier trivia entertainment company. Quizmaster Rory Scholl tested our mettle and led us through a fun-filled evening. All of the proceeds went to our schools and programs.

## VALENTINO APPOINTED STATE MINISTER OF EDUCATION

In February 2021, Valentino was sworn in as the State Minister of Education for Northern Bahr el Ghazal, one of South Sudan's ten states. His appointment lasted for eight months and in that time, he was responsible for overseeing more than 100,000 students and 1,000 schools, and for engaging with the many NGOs, donors, and other education partners operating in the region. We are so excited that Valentino took on this challenging new opportunity to support young people, enhance the local education system, and be a leading voice for education in South Sudan. While he continued providing oversight and visionary leadership for the VAD Foundation's work, we expanded our field staff to ensure that the Foundation had all the support we needed on the ground. Congratulations, Valentino!

## CORNERSTONE VISION ACADEMY (CVA)

In January 2021, Valentino also helped a group of investors and partners create a new private secondary school in the growing town of Aweil. Cornerstone Vision Academy (CVA), separate from AGA and MBSS and not affiliated with the VAD Foundation, is an innovative private school model responding to local demand for a higher level of quality education in the region. Designed as a self-sustaining school for South Sudanese families who can afford the small tuition fees, CVA offers top-notch international education for students. AGA and MBSS students, by contrast, only pay a small administrative fee or are on scholarship, and admissions are geared to students from poor families and other vulnerable or at-risk groups. CVA opened in May 2021, with an enrollment of 1,254 students.



## A LETTER FROM OUR FOUNDER

*The days are long, but the years are short.*

Dear Friends,

That old saying seems more relevant with every passing year. It's hard to believe fifteen years have passed since we established the VAD Foundation. Looking back on what we have accomplished together is proof to me that obstacles and challenges will not deter us from our mission.

We are a small but mighty organization that has truly made an impact on the lives of thousands of vulnerable young people, women, and community members in South Sudan over the years. And it would not have been possible without the help, support, funding, and kindness from you -- our incredible community of supporters. Words cannot aptly express the many thanks that our entire Foundation have for you all. It is your sincere support that makes our work possible.

Our schools have provided children with an education. Our developmental programs have provided community members with valuable skills and trades to help create sustainable professions and entrepreneurial endeavors. This is truly paving the road to a brighter and more peaceful South Sudan.

As 2021 comes to a close, we are still in the midst of a global pandemic. No one could have predicted the past two years, but we continue to do the best we can. While the health effects of COVID-19 have not been as damaging as initially feared in South Sudan, the economic costs continue to be a very real challenge. While currently at peace, the effects of a long civil war are still being felt across the country. That, coupled with the pandemic and the remnants of conflict have created many individual difficulties: food scarcity, early marriage for young girls, and pregnancies. The dowry or "bride price" is a common cultural practice that creates significant financial expense (or income) for poor families. Some young women who had been enrolled before the pandemic became pregnant or were forced to marry to help provide for their families.

Although 2021 did present challenges, we are thankful for the work we have accomplished. Looking ahead, I am eager and excited for the new year, new challenges, and new accomplishments. Providing quality and sustainable education remains a top priority for the VAD Foundation, with the goal of reaching and teaching as many youth as possible.

Thank you to our community of supporters. I wish you all a wonderful holiday season filled with happiness and health!

Cordially,

*Valentino*

Co-Founder



## STARRING OUR STUDENTS

### *My name is Awien Deng Rehan*

I am sixteen years old and in eleventh grade at Alok Girls' Academy. I am the youngest of five children. My elder sister got married at a very young age before finishing school because there was no one to pay her tuition after my father died.

My favorite subject is science, and my dream is to become a doctor so that I can help my family and my community. The quality education AGA offers includes practical teaching that has enabled me to learn essential skills, such as making body lotion, hair shampoo, liquid soap, beads, tableclothes, and bed linens, which provide me and my family with a small amount of money. I've also written several books, although I have only published one titled *Beautification of Life* that I hope can change many young people's negative thoughts and ideas.

My school, AGA, was awarded the best school in academic performance of 2020 for Grade Eight results in the Northern Bahr el Ghazal state. With continued support from the VAD Foundation and its donors, I will complete my studies and fulfill my dream of becoming a doctor. I thank the VAD Foundation and its donors for the opportunity they have offered me and for helping other orphan girls and those from poor families whose parents could not afford to send them to school.



### *My name is Angelina Ajok Bak Yep*

I am nineteen years old and am a proud eleventh grade student at AGA. Before enrolling in 2019, I faced a lot of challenges after my father abandoned us with our illiterate mother. He is a soldier and did not want me and my siblings to go to school because our culture does not value education for girls.

I want to become a doctor so I can treat sick people and because there are not enough doctors in my country. In South Sudan, many people die every year from chronic and treatable diseases due to lack of qualified and trained doctors. According to the Ministry of Health, there are only 189 physicians in South Sudan. That means only one doctor for every 39,088 patients. Through hard work, self-discipline, and determination, my dreams will come true.

For fun, I enjoy playing volleyball. I like making lotions and linens and learning how to run a small business. I want to earn income to support my mother and my siblings when I am out of school. I could not have made it this far academically without the support of the VAD Foundation and its donors, who are committed to supporting me and other underprivileged girls in working towards a bright future. Thank you for our education.





## *My name is Alek Urach Adhumo*

I am thirteen years old and in Grade Six at Alok Girls' Academy. I have three brothers and two sisters. In my free time, I like to play soccer, volleyball and enjoy drama club.

When I grow up, I want to be the President of South Sudan so that I can bring about positive change and development to my country. South Sudan is in need of important infrastructure, such as the construction of hospitals, roads, and schools, and I hope to be a part of that change.

In 2019, my academic performance was poor because of a lack of quality education and teachers at my former school. All of that has changed now. As a student at AGA, I am now an excellent student and one of the best in my class. Thanks to AGA's dedicated teachers, our school was ranked number one in Northern Bahr el Ghazal State Grade Eight academic performance of 2020.

I would like to thank the VAD Foundation for supporting me and other vulnerable girls and helping us to realize our potential. May God bless VAD and our wonderful donors!





## LOOKING AHEAD

# 2022



### **ALOK GIRLS' ACADEMY**

We plan to secure land to build an eight-classroom permanent structure for the Primary Section in Aweil Center. The facility hosting the AGA since 2018 cannot accommodate more than the five hundred pupils we already have.

### **REOPEN MARIAL BAI SECONDARY SCHOOL**

With plans to re-open in January, the VAD team, including community members in our carpentry and masonry vocational training programs, began renovations in November to upgrade and reinforce the campus's windows and doors, teacher living quarters, desks, and other furniture.



### **EXPAND VOCATIONAL TRAINING**

Responding to community needs, we continue to grow and expand our vocational training and existing programs in sustainable farming, animal husbandry, apiculture (beekeeping), and fish farming.

### **TECHNICAL EDUCATION PROGRAM**

Plans to develop a technical education program were slowed during the pandemic. In 2022, we will develop programs to help our students prepare for more advanced occupations and skilled professions so they can become productive, successful citizens and support their families.



## YEAR-END FUNDRAISING GOAL

# \$250,000



### STUDENT SPONSORSHIP

#### **\$300 per student for a year**

Support a student with the basics: books, notebooks, pens/pencils, and general supplies. Contact [amanda@vadfoundation.org](mailto:amanda@vadfoundation.org).

### CLASSROOM MATERIALS

#### **New and Used**

Everything is a necessity from books, laptops, computers, and backpacks, to desks, tables, waste cans, water bottles and more. For more information, contact [amanda@vadfoundation.org](mailto:amanda@vadfoundation.org).

### SOLAR POWER PANELS

#### **\$15,000**

Solar panels are desperately needed to provide cheaper and more sustainable power electricity for our schools and classrooms.

### IT CONNECTIVITY

#### **\$9,500 for 50 Workstations**

COVID-19 has made internet connectivity a requirement for modern educators and students, but it is logistically challenging in rural South Sudan. We need computers, laptops, and IT equipment for students' use in and out of the classroom.

### SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION

#### **\$170,000**

In 2018, the government donated classroom facilities for our operations. But as the region's education system continues to grow, we will begin the process of fundraising for the construction of a new campus for AGA.







## How You Can Make a Difference

**DONATE** – Every penny counts and your generous support and donations make everything possible. To make a donation, visit [www.vadfoundation.org](http://www.vadfoundation.org).

**CONNECT** – Introduce us to your company, school, church, or organization for speaking events and scholarship sponsorships for our students.

**FUNDRAISE** – Organize a simple house party, happy hour, dinner, event... introduce *What Is the What* by Dave Eggers to your book club.

**SHOP** – Log into [smile.amazon.com](http://smile.amazon.com) with your Amazon log-in and select the VAD Foundation as your charity of choice. *Amazon will donate 5% of all your purchases.*

**CONTRIBUTE** – Donate or contribute an item to our online auction fundraiser. For more information, email [amanda@vadfoundation.org](mailto:amanda@vadfoundation.org).



## Contact us.

**WEBSITE** [www.vadfoundation.org](http://www.vadfoundation.org)

**EMAIL** [info@vadfoundation.org](mailto:info@vadfoundation.org)



**@VADFoundation**



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