

***The ISIS Foundation* by Alex Barclay** **Bermuda Sun - August 27, 1999**

After a year in operation, *The ISIS Foundation* has successfully secured \$400,000 in aid to work on primary health care systems in underdeveloped, rural areas of Uganda and Nepal.

Dr. Charles Swart, who has been working in the field for most of the year, said he is pleased with the progress to date by the Bermuda-based charity.

He returned just last week from Luwero, Uganda and is now making preparations to go to Humla, Nepal.

ISIS is the creation of three friends – Dr. Swart, businesswoman Audette Exel and finance lawyer Sharon Beesley. The trio wanted to make a difference in the lives of children in underprivileged countries.

The challenge then was to fund a charity but without making the organisation completely reliant on donations. The solution was a unique joint venture: They decided to start up a business which would cover all of the administrative costs, ensuring that 100 per cent of donors' funds would be applied to the projects.

ISIS Limited was created and it is currently run by Ms. Exel, a former Managing director of Bermuda Commercial Bank. The new company works as a niche finance and insurance consultant, focusing on the structuring and sourcing finance related insurance products for the Bermuda insurance and reinsurance markets.

Goddess of Motherhood

ISIS – the goddess of motherhood – is an acronym for Initiating Sustainable Integrated Solutions and International Solutions & Investment Strategies, the foundation and the business respectively.

Speaking to the Bermuda Sun this week, Dr. Swart and Ms. Beesley said the local community has been particularly generous to their cause.

According to Dr. Swart, one of the most important donations *ISIS* has received thus far is a four-by-four utility vehicle which was donated by Partner Re. The vehicle is used as a mobile clinic in Uganda and has facilitated an outreach programme in the Luwero area.

Medical workers are able to drive to the surrounding villages and treat people who would otherwise not receive any medical attention.

“They do immunizations, education and, obviously, the people who really need hospitalisation are brought back to the hospital,” Dr. Swart said.

But he added that he hopes to be able to increase the number of mobile clinics in the area to three or four in the future.

A New Hall

ISIS also built the Kiwoko CBHC (Community Based Health Care) Hall. This provides the charity and other health workers in the area with a base for regular health meetings, training sessions, literacy classes and traditional birth attendance meetings. According to Dr. Swart before the hall was constructed people would meet outdoors, under a tree depending on the weather.

Respected Support

In a ceremony which was also attended by Ms. Exel and Ms. Beesley, the hall was officially opened this summer. In a rare appearance, Uganda’s first lady Janet Museveni arrived as guest honour at the event. Mrs. Museveni is also a patron of *The ISIS Foundation*.

Ms. Beesley commented: “It is a huge lift to have someone like that support *ISIS*. She came all the way from Kampala for [the event]. It was quite an event because they (the residents of Luwero) had not had a presidential visit for quite some time. She is highly regarded and very interested in community health.”

In Luwero *ISIS* presently has six people on the payroll and that number should increase to seven early next year as a programme manager has been hired for the area.

In the near future *ISIS* will be providing the local hospital – which treats about 25,000 people a year – with a paediatric, high-and intensive-care unit. The unit is being sponsored by Bermudian Brian Hall. Presently premature babies are kept warm by being surrounded in blankets.

Dr. Swart is also hoping to secure funding to improve the AIDS care programme.

“That is something we really would like to pursue,” he said: “It is one of the biggest problems in Uganda.”

The Foundation has a policy of continuously monitoring the areas they are working in, so they can document the progress and efficiency of the operations. They initially carry out a baseline study in the area and follow up with yearly monitoring and evaluation.

Activities in Nepal

In the mountainous region of Humla, Nepal, *ISIS* has also committed to a community-based health care programme as well as the job of rebuilding the local school.

Some 50,000 people live in the region and according to Dr. Swart they primarily live on a diet of rice and lentils. Malnutrition is high he said.

“The focus for us, clinically, will be difficult in such a remote area. There is no transport and you have to walk from village to village.”

And, at an altitude of 12,000 feet, the region is isolated. The only way to reach Humla is by plane, which takes just 45 minutes, but the service is unreliable. The only other alternative is a three-week walk up the mountains.

Focus on preventative Care

Because the remote region is completely cut off from communication, Dr. Swart said he was very thankful for the donation of a satellite telephone, which will enable workers in Humla to communicate with the outside world.

“I will be spending the next three months working with the government and other people in the area on how best *The ISIS Foundation* can set up a system to train village health workers to do anti-natal clinics, family planning, immunizations and basic preventative care,” he said.

Dr. Swart pointed out that, traditionally, people will only make the journey to the doctor when they are sick, so the foundation’s focus is on preventative medicine.

He believes that the only way to implement a lasting programme of health care is for *ISIS* to sponsor the training of individuals from Humla as village health workers and then employ these people to service the outreach system.

ISIS has also been in talks with other helping organisations in the region. “WUSC (a Canadian aid organisation) has been working in the area for more than 20 years. We slot in perfectly in the sense that they focus on everything but primary health care.

“They do a lot of water sanitation, solar power, hydro-electricity, micro-finance, et cetera. They deal with a huge cross sectional approach to the area but they do not do any health care and *The ISIS Foundation* will become that link.”

ISIS is also in negotiations with a nurse, who has previously worked in the area, to take over as the Humla project manager.

“Our objective is to have few expatriates in the area and more local Nepali people,” added Dr. Swart.