

SIFAT Journal



Sharing God's Love in Practical Ways

October 2008

Dr. John Brown Okwii Visits SIFAT

By Sarah Corson
SIFAT Cofounder

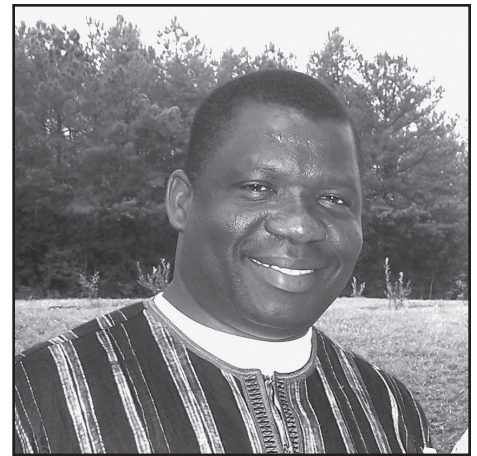
Dr. John Brown Okwii, SIFAT's African coordinator, recently visited Galilee Campus and remained to teach the first week of the fall Practicum. Having done his doctoral studies in conflict resolution, he was a most welcomed teacher because many of the students have been through intense conflict in their own countries.

Dr. John Brown met with the African students to orient them into the SIFAT Africa Family. Under his leadership, SIFAT's graduates work together to help each other extend their ministries to the needy in their different countries

and often cross national boundaries to help each other with Bible studies and appropriate technology seminars.

As president of the largest Protestant seminary in West Africa, Dr. John Brown has incorporated all of SIFAT's 10-week Practicum classes into his seminary as required classes for graduation. Each year more than 700 students graduate, taking SIFAT's teachings with them into their ministries to help their parishioners with their basic human needs. Also, these young ministers have developed elementary and high school classes from SIFAT's curriculum and regularly take classes

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Dr. John Brown Okwii, SIFAT's African coordinator, visited the United States recently and spent a few weeks on SIFAT's campus. While here, he taught about conflict resolution in our fall Practicum.



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2009 SIFAT Calendars

Order your 2009 SIFAT calendars now! Our 12-month calendar features inspiring quotes and verses with colorful photos from overseas SIFAT projects.

We suggest using the 9"x12" calendar as a fund-raising tool for your missions program. Your group sells the calendar for a suggested retail price of \$10. You keep \$4, give SIFAT \$4 and the other \$2 covers printing costs.

Selling SIFAT calendars is a great way for your mission team, Learn & Serve group and church to raise money for SIFAT and for your trips or missions fund. Call or e-mail Marie, lanierm@sifat.org, for more information or to order calendars. Individual orders can also be placed through the SIFAT Village Store by calling Marie or Peggy at the SIFAT office, (256) 396-2015.

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Making Chocolate in Bolivia

By Rachel Parsons
Ixiamas, Bolivia Director

The end of the second trimester of school is quickly coming to a close. The students are busy with end of the trimester projects and studying for their exams. We have really become a large family here at the internado (boarding home) with many brothers and sisters in one house.

It is exciting to see the fruit of efforts with the cacao project – we now have chocolate! The girls are learning to make the chocolate from the cacao beans, and we have been eating and drinking it here in the internado. To make chocolate, you must follow a very interesting process. First, you have to pick the cacao pods, cut them open and rip out the beans inside. Then, you let the beans ferment in their own juice for several days. Finally, you lay out the beans and let them dry in the sun. Once dried, they store well.

When you are ready to make some chocolate, take the dried beans and roast them. Then, you shell the beans and grind up the soft bean inside. Once ground, the paste has a texture similar to peanut butter, but with an incredible aroma of chocolate! When the girls are grinding up the chocolate, I want to take it and gobble it all up—the only thing stopping me is that it has no sugar and is very bitter! Once ground we form it into balls and store them in airtight containers.

We have been experimenting with how to process the chocolate once the paste is made. We have made some spreads that are very good on bread. We have also been drinking lots of hot chocolate and café mocha.

Thanks to the efforts of the short-term mission groups that came, our construction project is coming along well. We are hoping to have the new girls' dorm ready for the beginning of next year. We are now in the roofing phase and will soon move on to the finishing touches on the bottom floor.

With the combined efforts of two groups, we have also come a long way on the rabbit house. One of the parents worked on thatching the roof to pay off his monthly fees. The boys also helped him and are now experts on thatching roofs! We will be building the cages this month and will have everything ready to bring in some rabbits for raising next year.

Please remember to keep us all in your prayers here in Ixiamas, Bolivia. There has been some violence and strikes within the country, but we have seen nothing here, only the lack of supplies because trucks are not coming in. Pray for Ixiamas—that the violence does not arrive here and also for the entire country that they can find some solution for peace. This country is very dear to my heart and to many more people who have been here. We have confidence that God has great plans for this country and its people.



Left: To pay boarding home fees, parents sometimes get creative. One parent taught the boys how to thatch roofs, an important skill in these jungle communities.

Below: The students have had the opportunity to learn to grow and harvest cacao, a major cash crop in Bolivia.. Here, they are shelling the beans.



Help SIFAT continue making a difference in our world:

Become a SHAREholder by pledging to give monthly. Together, we can demonstrate Christ's love to impoverished peoples. Contact Marie Lanier, lanierm@sifat.org, or visit www.sifat.org/share.html.



SIFAT Remembers...

As SIFAT approaches our 30th year of sharing God's love in practical ways, cofounders Ken and Sarah Corson are writing this column to focus on accomplishments, struggles and important moments from past years. We hope you enjoy remembering these years with us!

Being a Christian

Through the years as we attempted to shape the character and essence of SIFAT in the midst of people, events and circumstances, one question constantly stood out in my mind above many others: *What does it mean to be Christian?*

Many traditional religious answers focus on repentance and faith in Christ, followed by baptism and church membership. To some, that is the main content of the meaning of being Christian. To others, it includes a lot of religious activity... seeking other church members, meeting their needs and constructing buildings for program activities. Different methods are used in evangelism, missions and other outreach programs. Much time and energy is spent on church planning trying to keep the institution of the church strong in changing times. Sometimes we forget the basic question, *what does it mean to be Christian?*

SIFAT often participates in evangelism and program

activities. Each of us have our specific call in the Body of Christ. Our basic call focuses on discipling. I am a Christian! So what? What difference does it make? One's sins are forgiven, and he or she has access to God through Jesus Christ. It makes a lot of difference to one's personal self. *What difference does this make to the rest of the world?* If SIFAT were to have a criteria to measure our Christ-likeness, it would be based not only on what difference Christ makes in my life, but would go on to ask what difference Christ makes on others...on the world... using my life.

What does it mean to be Christian? For one thing, it means that my life becomes Good News to every one I meet. The Good News, the Gospel, is lived out in the way I become a channel for the love of God to flow out to a hurting world. Each day I must ask myself, each day I must ask SIFAT, *What does it mean to the world that we are Christian?*



Visit

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of HIV prevention, nutrition, water purification, and microenterprise to the public school children as well.

While here at SIFAT, Dr. John Brown helped us to understand the needs of Africa much better in order to make our classes more relevant for Africans. He is a great prayer warrior and his teaching and praying with us blessed everyone with whom he came in contact—staff, students and visitors alike.

Left: The class poses with Dr. John Brown (center in African print). This year's class is comprised of 16 students from 10 countries.

A Bridge for the Chayanta River

By Tom Corson
Executive Director

For years, the communities on the other side of the Chayanta River from Quesimpuco, Bolivia, have asked for help in building a bridge. Each year, several people die trying to get across the river. Many obstacles made it appear impossible to put a cable pedestrian bridge almost 400 feet long and almost a 100 feet above this dangerous river crossing.

Obstacle: Transportation and Materials. There are no roads for vehicles to bring in supplies. Everything has to be transported on people's backs down a steep, five-hour trail—tons of cement and sand and four 500-ft. long 1-1/4 inch diameter cables. Water in the river is so polluted from waste from upriver mines that it could not be used to mix the cement. A small stream had to be diverted and a pond made to catch it when pumped. Buckets of this water had to be carried to the one cable that crossed the river and taken across on a small gondola hanging on



A team member assists Bolivar Sanga, SIFAT's engineer, with attaching the first cable to the gondola to begin stretching it across the river.

the cable. It was a momentous job to get the materials in place. Hundreds of people in the area volunteered months of their time. One man worked so hard, he had a terrible hernia that almost turned him inside out. Finally, a donkey was found to carry him across the river and up the mountain to our hospital and his life was saved. These people are serious. They want a bridge so that their children and grandchildren can cross and go to school or church or get medical help. They are putting all they have into it—long days of arduous labor. The people transported the materials and solved the first obstacle.

Obstacle: Cost. A U.S. bridge company estimated it would cost \$200,000. Auburn United Methodist Church agreed to raise the money and resolved this barrier.

Obstacle: Lack of an appropriate design that would hold up in the harsh terrain of the Andes. God led us to Bridges for Prosperity, a nonprofit that specializes in building low cost bridges. They furnished a plan with a design based on appropriate technology that would hold up to the extremes of weather. Their design cut the price considerably from the original estimate.

Obstacle: Lack of an engineer to direct the volunteer labor and build the bridge. The engineer had to speak the Quechuan language and be willing to live at the bridge site. He would have to be willing to live in the cold climate in a tent and eat the food the natives eat. The nearest store was days



Zoe, of Bridges to Prosperity, works with Bolivar Sanga, SIFAT engineer and Chris Canon, of Auburn UMC and Scott Bridge Company, at the bridge site.

away. Where could such an engineer be found?

Bolivar Sanga, the first indigenous person to graduate as an engineer in Ecuador, was of the same tribe. He could speak their language. He knew how to survive through harsh times. He was dedicated to take the integrated Gospel SIFAT taught to the world. He left his family and home in Ecuador, went to Honduras to learn the specifics of this type bridge construction, and then on to Quesimpuco, Bolivia, to direct the building of the bridge. The people respect him and follow his lead. He is doing an incredible job under great difficulties.

Obstacle: Encouragement. At a few key points in the construction, Bolivar would need help. He had never built a bridge before and this was an entirely different design. He needed more than just drawings. An engineer from Scott Bridge Company in Opelika offered to make the hazardous journey to

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Bridge

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this remote river site at key times in the construction. Several other teams of Christians went at different times, backed him up on each trip and gave their labor to work with the men of the area. Now after working in this project since January, we scheduled the last bridge support team for October 2. This would be the last obstacle: setting the six heavy cables strung across the river. The Auburn UMC team was ready to go to help him. But...

Political problems broke out in Bolivia. The U.S. ambassador was asked to leave the country. Anti-American feeling was high. American Airline planes quit flying to Bolivia. It took two extra days to get the last team out and they were diverted through Chile spending more than 36 hours in airplanes or foreign airports. Our government issued travel advisories warning us it is dangerous for Americans to travel in Bolivia now.

“Can you just send one engineer?” Bolivar asked over the satellite phone. Up in the top of the Andes, the people are far removed from politics and this rebellion. Their concern is for a bridge to connect them with health care, a church and a school for their children. This last obstacle at this moment has not been overcome. We believe that Bolivar can set the cable. He has done it before on a similar, but much smaller, bridge in Honduras. He has agreed to try. But it is an important and delicate task, and no one can go to help him.

Today, Bolivar and the people of the Chayanta River Valley need your prayers. So many times in the past, our God has come to our aid and removed so many obstacles. Now, we are asking Him for this last obstacle to be removed—for Him to direct Bolivar and help them finish the bridge. Please join us in prayer during the next few weeks as we push forward to share God’s love in practical ways to the people of the Chayanta Valley!

Community members carried all materials on a five-hour hike to reach the bridge base. Here, they are carrying one of four 500-ft. long cables.



Facing AIDS in Uganda

William and Adella, 2007 Practicum graduates, founded an orphanage in Uganda for children whose parents have died because of AIDS.

We have had internet problems and communication has been absolutely impossible. We wanted to send information about the orphanage sooner, but have been unable.

The sickly children were tested twice for HIV/AIDS. The first time, three children’s results showed they were positive. We involved ourselves in prayers and fasting for three days, and then we retested the children. This time, only one child tested positive — praise the Lord!

When you have tried everything, cried, reasoned and still cannot find answers to why these innocent kids are suffering, you continue to pray. God answered! What a mighty God we serve!

Resources have been meager, but the Lord has been our power and strength. Goods and services prices have skyrocketed, so we began growing some food. The orphanage has five acres cleared to plant maize. Thanks to God, the SIFAT Practicum endowed me with fantastic agricultural techniques!

We thank our donors for their prayers and support. As we approach Thanksgiving, we pray God may enlarge their territory as they support us in this Lord’s Ugandan vineyard. Sometimes we do not know how we will survive the next quarter because it takes \$5400, but we trust in the Lord and know He guides us.

STM 2008: Ecuador Review

By Peggy Walker
International Team Coordinator

Atucucho, Ecuador, is almost a textbook example of what SIFAT prays to accomplish when we train our STM teams to work with people in developing communities.

Seven years ago, I walked with a SIFAT team through Atucucho, an area of almost inconceivable poverty outside of Quito. There was no infrastructure; children were playing in raw sewage running through muddy unpaved streets, women peered at us through locked doors with fear and distrust in their eyes, pagan symbols were painted on walls and everywhere one sensed a feeling of complete hopelessness.

Not backing away from a challenge to bring Christ to those who do not enjoy the abundant life, SIFAT's Ecuadorian staff convinced Tom Corson to work with these people and employ those ideas we teach in community development and self-sustainability to bring about permanent changes in Atucucho.

Understanding that the children must be given a safe environment in which to learn and grow, the first teams concentrated on repairing the humble homes that caring mothers in the community had given up to provide small daycares, safe sanctuary, for the children. Nourished physically and spiritually by our team members, the changes in the first two years were hard to quantify. They thrived.

One hundred fifty teams later, our work in Atucucho is almost done. SIFAT teams have built two state of the art daycare centers in which more than 300 children are equipped yearly to advance to public school using the SIFAT developed childhood curriculum. In the first graduating class at Little Seeds of God, every child passed the government test allowing them to enter the first grade.

Early this year, teams completed Mama Yoli's House. In January, 250 children will be taught, loved and cared for daily at Mama Yoli's by SIFAT-trained mothers.

But caring for the children is not enough. For the community to sustain the progress they have made, children and adults alike needed a church and a community center in which to

gather. By the end of 2008, SIFAT teams will have completed this church, Agua de Vita, the newest Methodist church in the UMC Conference of Ecuador. After much prayer, we were able to bring in Pastor Balseca and his family to pastor the church and work in the community, c o n c e n t r a t i n g especially on the youth.

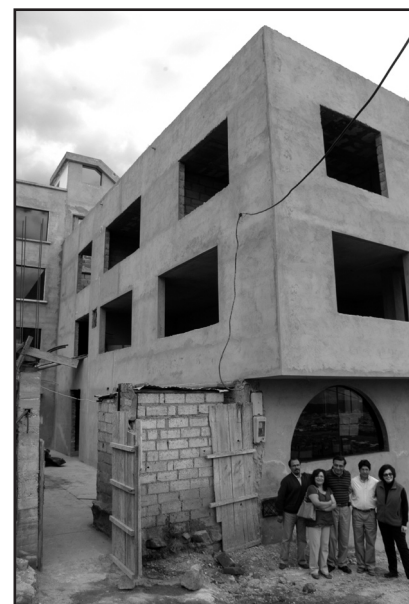
This year, we sent 22 teams to Ecuador. Seven of those were medical teams working not only in Atucucho, but also in other parts of Quito, in the Andes and with the Tsachila Indians in Santo Domingo.

Most of these teams have gone to Ecuador for several years and are devoted to the people in Atucucho. We are turning the daycare centers and the church over to the community, just as the SIFAT model stresses we must, but their hearts are there and every team has expressed the desire to return to Atucucho for one day of their mission trip in 2009—to have VBS, to hug the children and to strengthen the deep connection they have forged with the adults.

We leave Atucucho a much changed community, and our team members forever blessed for having served and worked along side the wonderful Ecuadorian people there.

In 2009, our Ecuadorian projects have been selected from proposals submitted by the Ecuadorian Practicum graduates. These will be smaller construction projects, and the teams will work with older children in our VBS—up to 400 daily!

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The SIFAT Ecuador staff gave me a tour of Agua de Vita, the new church attached to Mama Yoli's House. Services are being held every Sunday with Pastor Balseca leading worship.

SIFAT Student Worries About Homeland

By Sarah Corson
SIFAT cofounder

As the fall Practicum continues, our staff enjoys getting to know the students personally, who come from five different continents, many cultures and walks of life. Each of them is a great inspiration to us.

When we hear the daily news, often the countries mentioned are no longer far away unknown places. Sometimes they are the home of one of our students. News becomes more personal. That is the situation with us at SIFAT with Rev. Mannipalli Ramaiah from Bangalore, India, one of our Practicum students this year.

Rev. Ramaiah is senior pastor of a church in Bangalore, as well as director of Basic Needs India, an agency working among the poor. He is also director and trainer in Institute of Community Transformation and is involved in many other Christian activities in his city.

Increased violence has broken out in his area during the last few weeks. Presumably, it is because the number of Christian converts is growing, and a militant Hindu group wants to stop this growth. Numerous attacks have been made on churches and against church leaders. Christians' homes have been burned. On August 25, a Christian leader was burned alive. Although police are trying to stop the attacks, the situation is still tense.

Ecuador

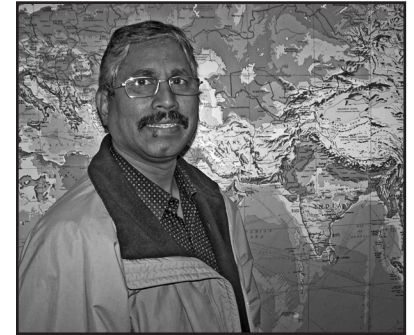
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Our projects are in small communities outside of Quito and in tropical areas of Ecuador. I will have updates next month on our work in Ecuador as we finalize the 2009 team schedule. It promises to be a challenging, but very exciting, year.

Left: Tom and I had the opportunity to visit with Dayana, who was badly burned earlier this year. She is recovering wonderfully after having skin grafts from her hip area on her legs. She has to wear a body stocking for a year. Dayana and her family send their love to the teams.

Several teams offered to help with her medical expenses. Please contact me if you are still interested.

Two weeks ago, a group of more than 1000 Hindu extremists threw gasoline on a church and set it on fire. Fortunately, the people escaped through a back door. The group then marched on the church where Rev. Ramaiah's wife and daughters were worshipping. They surrounded the church, yelling and waving torches threatening to burn it down with the people inside. Because some of the worshipers had cell phones, the police were notified in time to save the church members and their building. Of course, this is disturbing to our student, Brother Ramaiah. He wants to be with his family during this time of danger, but feels responsible for finishing this training that can help him do much more for his people.



Ramaiah, our Practicum student from India, shares about the prosecution Christians are facing at the hands of militant Hindi groups.

Today, all the students at SIFAT are fasting and praying for the safety of Brother Ramaiah's family, as well as for the other Christians being persecuted there. We remember the angry militants who are causing the violence and pray that they may know the love of Christ and repent of this violence. We ask you to join us in prayer for this problem.





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SIFAT's Vision: Bridging the First and Two-thirds Worlds to alleviate spiritual and physical poverty, encouraging people to develop their God-given potential.

SIFAT's Mission: To share God's love through service, education and personal involvement with a needy world.

From the Desk of Tom Corson

Right now our fall Practicum for 2008 is going on here at Galilee Campus, our international headquarters, with 16 students from 10 countries. Five continents are represented. Among them all, they speak more than 40 languages, but God has brought us all together with a common goal to take the Love of God to the lost and those who are suffering. As they learn our technologies and Biblical principles of facilitating the development of their people, they also teach each other and our staff. We all learn from each other. It is an exciting time at SIFAT. Though they are busy in classes during the week, we welcome you to invite the students to your churches or homes on the weekends.

Constance, a church worker among often neglected girls and women in her home country of Nigeria, established a center to teach poor women to sew and make other crafts, which she helps them market to make a livelihood. When the church leaders recommended her for a scholarship at SIFAT, the women sold their sewing machines to help Constance have money for her airline ticket to SIFAT.

All of these students have stories that inspire and challenge us to do more for Christ. We still have some students who are here on faith...their faith and ours...because they still do not have the money to pay all their tuition. You can partner with them as they return to some of the hardest places in our world by helping them get this training. Contact Kathy Bryson, training director, to find out which students still need your support. By helping one of these students, you are helping a missionary go back to his or her own people...to places where it would be hard for some of us to live and minister, but they are called and eager to go.

You can be involved in God's mission for the whole world...to reach the lost and to help them develop holistically in Christ. You can go on a short-term mission with SIFAT, or you can help train a Christian worker at SIFAT to go.



Dave Kennedy, of Leaf for Life, watches as Constance waters the garden our Practicum students planted as part of their hands-on training. Practical skills make a difference in the daily lives of people throughout the world.