

The Story of Strong and Resilient Trees and Children at Gyero

To the Children and Young People of Ltyentye Apurte Community

Thank you for sharing news about your Trees of Life with us here in Gyero, Nigeria. Your document was read as a part of our celebration, and we loved to listen to it. In Nigeria it is hard to make everyone quiet at one time, but we were very quiet when your document was read to us. Even the adults were still!

Here is our story about our trees.

We are children who live at Gyero Care Centre. Gyero is a small village in Plateau State in the heart of Nigeria. Our village is surrounded by flat fields and huge rock formations for as far as the eye can see. It is not easy to grow things here. We have no rain for many months, and then when it is rainy season, the rain is so hard plants can be washed away. To survive here, trees have to be strong and find ways to survive. For example, some trees grow up between rocks where the roots can be kept cool.

We have all done our own 'Tree of Life' and by drawing, writing and talking, have thought about how our lives are sometimes like different parts of a tree. Most of us live at Gyero because we cannot live with our families. We have had troubles, but like the trees at Gyero, we have survived and we are strong. In this document we would like to share some of the things we noticed about ourselves with other children who have also done their Tree of Life. We hope it helps others to survive troubles.

Some of the troubles a tree can have are termites eating it, or people chopping them down for firewood. Branches can break and leaves fall off in a storm. They can be burned by fire and they can get too dry when there is no water. Thunder and lightening comes. These things aren't the trees fault - it just happens to them. Animals that live in the trees know how to look after themselves when these things happen. They hide, run or fly away, warn others with special sounds, dig a hole or go to another tree.

For us at Gyero, some of the troubles we know about are road accidents, crisis in Jos, bomb blasts, bones breaking, not feeling fine, paining, injury playing football, falling out of a tree, curses, being accused of false things, fighting, being left alone, people we love die, HIV/AIDS, having no family, snake bites, scorpion stings, dirt in our eyes, secret cult and hunger. "Hunger can make you steal". "I can't sleep when Mummy died". These things are not our fault - they just happen to us. Just like the trees and the animals that live in them, we have ways of staying safe, and we survive.

Some of the ways we stay safe when there are troubles are by listening to adults and obeying them. Sometimes we run fast, hide, or shout for help. We pray, and ask God questions. We read the Bible and have faith. We talk to people we trust like parents, pastors, neighbours and friends. "I will talk to my older brother". Sometimes we are still and quiet or go to another place. We get angry. "I said 'No!'" We protect each other.

Making our own Tree of Life has been a good way of remembering. Remembering is a good way to stay strong. "It made me feel close to my dreams". Sometimes remembering and sharing made us sad. We miss people we loved who are late. Sometimes though, remembering made us smile - even though some of us have forgotten, writing the names of special people like our brothers and sisters, people who have cared for us, our parents and grandparents was good. We also remembered special places and favourite memories. We laughed at Uncle Bawa's memory of his father dashing him the intestine of a goat to eat at special occasions because this was his favourite part!

We all have things that we are good at doing. Some of these things we have learned from the people on the roots and the leaves of our tree. There are many, many things we can do, including singing, playing football, sweeping, washing dishes, caring for the younger ones, farming, dancing, making others laugh, writing, reading, and being obedient. We are good in many things. We all have hopes for our future and the skills we already have will help us. Some of our hopes for our future come from people who have helped us or who have taught us many things. Instead of our storms taking away our hopes, sometimes they have made new ones. For example, some of us would like to be soldiers, mobile policemen, pastors, reverend sisters, doctors and nurses. We want to grow good families, and help orphans and poor people. We want to be Godly men and women, and we want to be patient like Mama Sati.

At Gyero we are like a family. We look after each other. We have Mama and Baba Sati and Pastor Jege to help us, as well as our many aunties and uncles. All of their names are on our trees. We put them on the leaves because they are special to us. We have a safe place to live, and sometimes, like at Christmas, we get gifts like clothes and cake. "God has dashed me many things".

We have over 120 trees from the Tree of Life at Gyero. To celebrate we have met together and have invited some visitors to see our trees. We will plant a flame tree so that we will always remember our trees. The flame tree will give us good shelter. At the driest time of the year, when other plants die, the flame tree makes beautiful bright orange flowers. Just like us, it is resilient!

We would like to share our trees and their stories with others, and we would like to hear about other trees too.