

Visit to Uganda

Our trip to Uganda was to visit a few projects based in the Mbale region of the country. The main project and where we spent the majority of our time was the Bunghoko Rural Development centre.

Rural Development Centre. The Rural Development Centre is owned by Church Army Africa and is run with the help of two Church Mission Society (CMS) mission partners Bob and Rosalind Arnold, with whom we stayed in their lovely bungalow at the centre. The main focus of the centre is vocational training for young people in skills such as carpentry, tailoring, masonry and farming. The skills the students learn at the centre enable them to go back into the community to work and earn a living, often some of them will be the only bread winners in a family sometimes supporting parents and many siblings. The centre's mission is very much to *'help people help themselves'* and it is having a great success.

The centre has a demonstration farm where students can learn efficient ways of using their land for crops and keeping animals. One area of great success has been the introduction of large goats. These have been imported from South Africa and are considerably larger than the goats already in Uganda. For a small fee people in the area can bring their female goats to be *'served'* and produce larger kids. The goats are used primarily for meat.

The other area that the centre works in is the local villages where they have begun digging wells. In June 2007 they began digging 10 wells 6 of which had been completed. When we left the centre they had just received funding to dig another 10 wells. This of course is of such enormous benefit to the people to have clean water and saves the women so much time.

A more recent project has been that of working with people in the outlying villages (mainly the women) to form something similar to a co-operative. The women meet on a weekly basis and bring to each meeting a small amount of money. One group we visited had used the money they raised to rent some land and grow crops. They had grown enough crops to feed

their families and also extra to sell at market. The extra money is put back into the pot and members can borrow money for school fees, medical expenses, etc. This work with the villages has given the women a purpose and for many has enabled them to become a community of people rather than people just existing as neighbours in the same village.

The centre runs a Nursery School held every day from 8am to 12-noon. This gives the local children a great start in their education. They begin their day with a work out and breakfast, and have classes in English and basic reading skills. The children really seem to really enjoy their time at the Nursery School.

Retired Clergy. The other project we visited was the work the church is doing with retired clergy in the Mbale Diocese. (Retired clergy in Uganda don't receive any pension and rely solely on the gifts of other people and farming their land to produce food). The work with retired clergy has been supported by St James Church, Emsworth, over a number of years (it was begun by a previous incumbent); we met some of the people involved with the work. The main problem the clergy has is that they have spent their working lives as priests and are not familiar with working on the land. It is hoped that some of the money we raised will be used to give the clergy some training in how to work on the land.

As we were travelling around the rural areas of Mbale, the absolute poverty that people are living in was very evident. People still have to walk miles to fetch water, although the centre is working to dig wells in the villages, but like anything it takes time and money. Driving around during the day we saw many children walking to school (often walking a few miles) and many of them on dusty roads with no shoes. My daughter Emily spent some time working in the Nursery at the centre, and one of the staff asked her how far she had to travel to get water in England. She didn't have the heart to say that we just turn on a tap! Just one of the many things which we take for granted but for them is not even a luxury.

We had some amazing experiences, like

worshipping one Sunday at a church in the country which was no more than a mud hut, but with a congregation that really had such a faith and vitality. Tom (my husband) felt so privileged when they invited him to preach and to baptise some of their children.

We were lucky enough to have a few days safari at Murchison Falls Park for the last part of our trip. This is a vast area which is now the largest game reserve in Uganda. During the reign of Idi Armin the game was hunted to very near extinction, but thanks to years of work by the Uganda Wildlife Authority is now making a good recovery. We were lucky enough to see giraffe, elephants, antelope and my daughter (who is lion mad) was delighted when we came across a mother and three cubs in a bush. The River Nile makes its way through the park, so one afternoon we had a boat ride up to the spectacular Murchison Falls and saw hippos in their hundreds, crocodiles and so many different species of birds - I think we lost count. We stayed in a Banda in the Red Chilli rest camp which was a great place to stay. We were surrounded by wildlife, warthogs, storks and even at night hippos would come to the camp to find food. It was quite unnerving being in your bed and hearing them roaming around - glad we weren't in a tent!

There is so much more I could say about our time in Uganda, but this is just a brief summary of our visit. The warm welcome we received by the people we met was truly humbling, and the hospitality we received, particularly in people's homes, was truly amazing. Uganda is a beautiful country with fertile land but is hampered by a very poor road system (which the government is trying to rectify). We will definitely go back and hope while we are in England to keep fundraising for the fantastic work people are doing.

My husband, who is the Curate of the Parish of Warblington with Emsworth, was very disciplined and kept a detailed journal which he has published on his website at www.tomkennar.com where you can see many pictures of our visit.

Clare Kennar

