



Uganda November 2014

Feed the hungry! Help those in trouble! Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you shall be bright as day.

Isaiah 58: v10

I was fortunate enough to travel to Uganda again from October 29th to November 11th, staying in Jinja, to work with the slum project Macedonian Vision Africa (MVA), in Masese. Thank you to Nick and the boys for their understanding and support.

Macedonian Vision Africa is a Christian NGO established and run by Pastor Alfred Adundo, which works in the Masese slum, Jinja, Uganda. Its main aim is to 'equip people to transform their lives', out of poverty. They do this in a number of ways:



L to R: Senga (admin/MCOP), Moses (tailoring), Pastor Alfred Adundo, Christine (MAYI), Alice (Administrator), Evelyne (hairdressing)

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Macedonian Microfinance (MM) – provides capital to groups that mainly consist of women (although not exclusively), to enable them to develop their small businesses and save. MM offers capital at a lower and affordable interest level compared to microfinance banks on Jinja high street, and also doesn't demand a property lease as guarantee.

Macedonian African Youth Initiative (MAYI) – teaches sexual health education and builds self-esteem among girls in the slum.

Macedonian Children's Outreach Project (MCOP) – pays for children's school fees to enable the poorest to go to school. The project tries to support one child from families in the slum with two thirds of their school fees, encouraging families to maintain contact and interest in the education by paying only one third. It also gives them breakfast on Saturday morning and they attend PSHE and bible study classes. There are 156 children in the programme.

Macedonian Vocational School (MVS) – teaches girls (and one boy!) tailoring skills and hairdressing. There are other vocational schools in Jinja, but the demand is high, and MVS is able to focus on the Masese population.

Macedonian Children's Outreach Project

The trip this autumn was very busy and I feel, very productive. The main bulk of my work was compiling profiles of children who are in MCOP, in the hope of finding them a sponsor here in the UK. The child sponsorship scheme began in February, when we noticed a couple of children writing to their American sponsors, and I realised it was possible for something similar to be set up in the UK. It took three months for me, Nigel Harris and Paula Gabbott to open a community bank account in the name of Macedonian Vision Africa (UK), but we already have 16 children sponsored with at least another 10 lined up.



Alice is reading out a letter from a child's sponsor, whilst Grandma looks on.

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The scheme only pays for two thirds of their school fees, which makes it very affordable for people here in the UK to commit to long term. Through the scheme a primary child costs £30 a year and a secondary child £82.50. In sponsoring, it helps secure the child's education and also the project itself. If you are interested in sponsoring and would like to find out more, please email me on masesejinja@gmail.com, and please spread the word.



Some of the children in MCOP having Saturday morning porridge

Macedonian Microfinance

There are a number of groups within the microfinance scheme, and I was able to see two that were a success (i.e. groups that were paying back the loans on time and developing businesses to encompass saving)

The first group was in the 'Police Quarter of Walukuba East'. The group of women included businesses such as, rug making, the sale of eggs, and the sale of poultry.



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Although they were paying back the loan on time, they felt the time scale of the loan repayments was difficult as a lot of their businesses were dependent on 'seasons' i.e. farming. They were requesting longer loan periods to take this into account. They also felt they weren't progressing and saving as quickly as they wanted to.

The other microfinance group I went to see was in the Karamojong area of Masese. The Karamojong are an ethnic group from the North East of Uganda who are displaced due to harsh desert conditions and fighting in the area. I was fascinated to hear how their culture of hard work, discipline and tight community is lending itself to a very successful microfinance group. The group consists of 24 people, comprising of businesses which are mainly street hawking and selling pots and pans. The group gets a loan which is shared out to people in the group who need it, three or four at a time, they pay back the loan with a little interest as well as contributing to the running of the group and saving in the general pot. Since April the group has managed to save 1,600,000USH, which is approximately £400, I think that is pretty good going. They of course want to grow their businesses more quickly than they are, and were keen to learn new skills and talk business ideas, to enable them to do that. They want me and Alfred to travel into the Karamojong area next time I'm in Uganda, to increase our understanding of who they are, and the help that they need.



Karamojong microfinance

Macedonian Vocational School

The vocational school runs both tailoring and hairdressing courses now, the hairdressing is in its first year, this is the second cohort of students for the tailoring. From the 11 students who graduated at the beginning of 2014 in tailoring, 5 of them

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have work, 4 in Kampala, and one in Jinja. The other six graduates get part time piece work in Jinja.

For about a year Lisa Watson (www.quiltsbylisawatson.co.uk) and I have been discussing the idea of setting up a co-operative group with the vocational graduates, to make quilts and import them into the UK for sale. My last trip to Uganda resulted in two failed attempts to meet up with the Ugandan co-operative representative in Jinja. This trip was going to be my last attempt at getting this idea somewhere off the ground.



Tailoring group

I had a really helpful conversation with Joseph, a tutor at Nile Vocational Institute, about potential business ideas if a co-operative was set up through Macedonian Vision Africa. He suggested the group made school uniforms and got a partnership going with primary schools in Masese. At Nile vocational Institute they run the separate departments as businesses whilst training the students, to generate some income for the department. I talked to Pastor Alfred about Joseph's idea, with the schools even potentially becoming members of the co-operative, and I could see that Alfred was excited by it.

The students attempted making a couple of quilts which I have brought back to the UK for Lisa's perusal as well as finding out what demand there is back home. Coupled with advice from Billy Butamanya the co-operative representative in Kampala, we are a step closer to helping MVA become self-sustainable.

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Macedonian African Youth Initiative

I talked to some of the girls we taught how to make washable sanitary towels back in February, about the impact that has had on them. They think the washable sanitary towels are fantastic, allowing them more movement and freedom during their periods. These are girls that two years ago, only owned one pair of knickers and were using rags for pads. (Thank you for all the knicker donations – keep them coming). They are so thankful, and want to help girls in Budaka (between Jinja and Mbale) as they were shocked to hear some of those girls don't even own one pair of knickers. It was wonderful to hear the positive impact Christine Adundo's work is having, and the knock on effect our sanitary towel teaching is having.



Sanitary towel teaching in Kitenda

A villager recapping on the teaching technique from the previous session

Faith Latigo who is the head of HR at Nile Vocational Institute was also taught how to make washable sanitary towels back in February. Since then she has assisted the community Health worker in his trips into village communities NVI are connected with, and taught the women in those communities how to make sanitary towels. I accompanied them on one of these trips, to a village called Kitenda. It was exciting to see them both catch up with the villagers' progress, and hear about the women's plans to take the teaching into primary schools. Girls in P4 (aged 10) and upwards would hugely benefit from having these more comfortable sanitary towels; Towels they can keep cleaner than the rags they've used up to now.

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I talked to Christine about the work NVI are doing, and gave her Faith's number, so they can share ideas, the difficulties they face and generally encourage each other.

Conclusion

Macedonian Vision Africa is a small NGO with big ideas. Each time I go to Uganda, I'm encouraged by the work they are doing and the progress they are making. There are at least 14000 people living in Masese, and MVA reaches only a few, but they build relationship and trust in the community and I believe they are having significant impact on the families they work with.

They are hoping to buy the building they've been renting since 2005, as the owners after years of resistance, have just agreed to sell it to them.

If MVA can set up a business to generate jobs and income for the organisation, again this will be a huge step in the right direction, helping them become less reliant on fundraising.

But we're not there quite yet!

If you have any bright ideas for fundraising, would like to sponsor a child and help with their schooling, or would like to get involved in another way, please let me know.

Rachel Muter
17/11/14

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