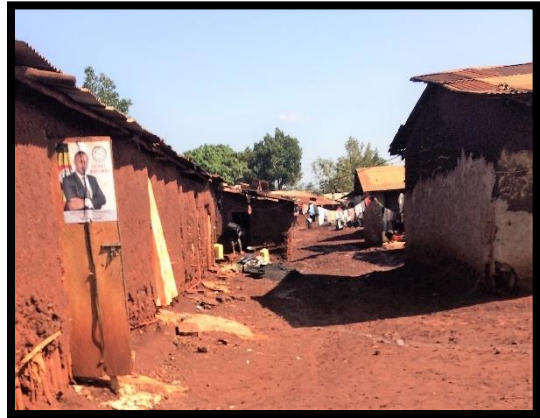


Macedonian Vision Africa Update – March 2018

The heavy rain had cleared earlier in the morning but making my way up from the main road through the Masese settlement the red African mud is thick and sticks to my shoes.

As I reach the hilltop I can see there are quite a number of new brick-built homes. Clearly the area is up and coming. The homes with mud walls and tin roofs all look the same and it is easy to get disorientated, so I follow the line of the factory wall along. There are shouts of Mzungu! some of the children nearby call out the standard East African greeting – ‘hello how are you’; ‘fine thank you’, I reply.



Walking up through the Masese settlement.

As I get near the to the MVA perimeter fence I can see areas of land around some of the larger homes are being cultivated and now have barbed wire perimeter fences. Again, quite different from last year and a sign that the area is developing.

I follow the perimeter fence round; the top end is covered with a rainbow of clothes drying in the sun. There’s now a steel gate at the entrance, important as security is very much an issue. A blue pickup truck is ‘parked’ under the tree in the middle of the compound surrounded by a group of students.



A group of Motor Vehicle Engineering students

Betty the general assistant (otherwise known by the students as Senga, or Auntie in English) comes down to greet me. ‘Welcome’ she says with her gentle smile then gives me a hug.

The schoolrooms are pretty much as they were last year; the four on the left have a roof but are just a shell. The four on the right are full of students: motor mechanics, hairdressing, tailoring and one a dormitory for the boys.

We go into the office where a man is waiting in the lobby, I say hello, we shake hands and he introduces himself as Charles. Is he a parent, I wonder? He’s very smartly dressed and I soon realise he is Charles Okello, the new Principal and it’s his first day at MVA. All Vocational Training Centres must now employ a head instructor educated to graduate level. Charles specialises in civil

engineering and was previously head of section at Tororo College. He will be a great asset to the team.

Stellah the Programme Manager arrives and we sit down to review how the work is going. The new academic year started in February and there are now 104 students in the Vocational Training Institute. The Dressmaking and Tailoring section is the smallest with 10 first year and 5 second year students, Angela is the senior instructor assisted by Stella. Hairdressing and Cosmetology has 9 first year and 15 second or third year students, at present Ruth is the only instructor so they urgently need to recruit an assistant. In Motor Mechanics there are 42 first year, 14 second year and 16 third year students, the senior instructor, Moses, is assisted by Sam. The mechanics students now have a covered service pit on site (guarded by a goat the day of my visit) but facilities are still very basic, so most of the practical work is carried out at a garage in town.



The boys' dormitory

MVI currently has 52 boarders - 34 boys and 18 girls. The boys' dormitory facilities are basic and cramped and another 12 bunk beds arrive, stacked 3-high on Boda-boda motorbikes. There are just four latrines on site and the boys wash in an area behind the classrooms. The girls are accommodated in a borrowed house in the centre of Masese. This is a concern as it's a temporary arrangement and the area is not very safe; a dormitory urgently needs to be built for them onsite where it is more secure.

As we walk down to look round the classrooms, we pass the 'kitchen' - an open wooden structure with a corrugated iron roof, three large cooking pots balance on bricks over open fires. I learn that John cooks for all 104 students and staff. 'When it rains hard he does not cook very well', Julius says in a matter of fact way. There are plans to build a proper kitchen as soon as funds allow. Before I depart I leave money for another 4 steel sheets to provide more shelter.



John, cooks for 104 students and

It is good to see how the vocational training has grown over the last 12 months. This is very important as vocational training places are in short supply (Pastor Alfred often only gets 5 places per year at the Nile Vocational Training Institute) and the boarding students provide income for MVA.

I ask about the Macedonian (young women's) Youth Initiative, led by Nabwire Christine. Stellah explains that they now have an agreed budget and are looking to purchase another sewing machine. This will be used to make reusable sanitary pads for women and girls in the local communities. It has been a difficult time for Christine as she was robbed and her room was set fire to. She had arranged a vocational training place for a young girl who was pregnant, meaning she was no longer obliged to get married. The girl's family were very unhappy about it because they missed out on her dowry. However, looking ahead the MAYI team are very excited about the imminent arrival of a machine from India, funded by a US Charity partner. This will be used to manufacture disposable sanitary pads from local materials and will provide jobs for a number of the local women and a valuable source of income.

As well as preparing the MVA annual budget, Stellah says that she has been busy working with the local microfinance groups. This has been difficult, as there have been many bad debts, due in part to poor documentation and administrative process. These issues have now been addressed, a programme of visits to homes/businesses has been put in place and independent checks of place of residence have also been implemented.

Stellah's final update is on the Macedonian Child Outreach Project (MCOP). There are currently 86 secondary and 58 primary school children enrolled on the programme. They have 75% of their school fees paid and attend a Saturday morning club in the school holidays. Around half of the places are supported by UK sponsors through MVAUK. Julius, the MCOP coordinator, looks after the welfare of the children and makes sure they attend school regularly and I arrange to catch up with him the next week.



Friday afternoon general assembly with the students

The day ends with the Friday afternoon assembly for all the students and staff. It is a privilege for me to be welcomed and introduced to the students and have the opportunity to share a few words, and for us

to be able to pray together.

It's still raining as I go to meet Julius a few days later. Patience arrives with her father to enrol as a new primary student – one of 10 new ones who need sponsorship through MVAUK. While Julius and her father fill in forms, Patience



Patience with her father

and I sit in the porch and use some chalk to practise drawing stick men on the concrete floor.

On Saturday I had taken a group up to MVA to hand out letters and presents from some of the sponsors and now Julius and I sort through thank you letters from the children before we update all the child profiles. It all takes several hours and I cannot help but be impressed how Julius knows the details of all the children without having to look at the sheets. It's a reminder to me that these are not just names on list, but children with families, often living in difficult circumstances, who depend on our support to get a basic education.

I had also taken over 10 laptops I'd brought from the UK. These will be used to provide basic computer training for the MVI students – a new requirement for Vocational Training Schools – under the watchful eye of Joanna Nairuba, the new part time IT instructor.

My final MVA visit is to talk with Pastor Alfred. It's been a challenging few months. Firstly, I was sorry to hear that for the second time this year he has had an accident on a Boda-boda motorcycle, this time resulting in a broken ankle. Then, in January, a wealthy local businessman came around with papers



Pastor Alfred with Stella the MVA Programme Manager

saying that the land that MVA occupies had been earmarked for industrial development and that he was now the owner. This is an example of 'land grabbing' that is now prevalent in Uganda, facilitated by corrupt local officials. Pastor Alfred had to engage a surveyor and lawyer and go to court to fight the case, a time consuming and expensive process. Thankfully, he has won the case. Because of the strong support of the local community he was offered the freehold of all the land (nearly 7 acres). This is a real

blessing as it will enable MVA to secure the future of the project for many years to come and provide space for the future development of the work. So far £4,000 has been raised out of the £12,000 needed. Alfred has requested prayers and support as he seeks to raise the balance of the fund. Despite these challenges he is quick to highlight all the positive developments there have been over the past 12 months, and as we finish with a prayer time together Alfred gives thanks to God for his provision and blessings. 'Macedonia does not depend on strength but is God's work', he says.

Nigel Harris

8th April 2018