

Today it feels unreal, somehow, to set out to write about development work. The war in Ukraine, ‘closer to home’ (which home?), may seem to place UPLIFT further at a distance. Acute violence trumps the peaceful, slower. Emergency aid before development aid.

And then there’s the media; one may easily despair. Some are fixated on news channels, while some, in Europe, now find it easier than before to open their doors to the new surge of refugees. Yes, perhaps closer to home.

But history has taught us that the Big Picture consists of other perspectives, too. While we are reminded each day of the nearness of war, there are villages in West Nile – in Nebbi and Zombo – where people are hardly aware of a war going on in Europe. They work to support their families, their local community, for many a daily struggle to make ends meet. Side by side with world-shaking events, innumerable small ones also contribute to change – and, as we would like to believe – for the better.

The same is true of the UPLIFT family; in itself a minute cross-section of humanity, practicing the catchphrase “Think global, act local”. Two years of pandemic behind us, the time had finally come to arrange yet another graduation celebration for literacy learners in West Nile. Out of 1,342 enrolled participants, 1,304 were able to complete the ‘courses of 2020’ (now stretched over two years). Four out of five are women, and four out of five passed the exams – comparable to the results of the ‘top year’ with the NORAD project [2009, cf. Statistics Summary under *Articles*, www.upliftvenner.no]



A modest tailoring student receiving her Certificate, commended by the Deputy Speaker of the House (LC5) Nebbi District .



Agwara dancers and singers with enthusiastic musical director.

The graduation ceremony this year was one of the most impressive ones; musicians, singers, dancers and, not least, the dramatic actors were all on par with the best we have seen. The “we” referring to old-timers (“Welcome, Norway vis’tors”) Michael Vitols og Gunnar Lange-Nielsen, as usual honoured with front row seats along with local dignitaries.

The Agwara dancers, musicians and choir were led by an eagerly participating director, and a comprehensive dramatisation of UPLIFT training played out on four (!) parallel ‘stages’ with integrated acts and movement of actors from one tableau to another. All, seamlessly addressing treatment of malaria, excessive drinking, too early pregnancy, and counsel to join UPLIFT literacy cum development training. Awesome! Even without understanding *Alur*, we got the gist of it.



Women were in charge of the actors’ roles. Drunk men and stiff bureaucrats, all played by women – a microphone in each group.

Equally encouraging, this year, was listening to the politicians' speeches – while on earlier occasions too often a long 'wishlist' of what UPLIFT might contribute, now replaced by a sincere pledges to collaborate toward goals shared by UPLIFT and local authorities. These were further followed up in meetings the next day, as well as in written statements both at District and Sub-county (municipal) level.

[Cf. attached statement from Hassan Ringtho, Speaker of the House (LC5) Zombo District]

Our UPLIFT/Friends of UPLIFT consultation was especially interesting this year. With the recent renewal of the UPLIFT Board, women are presently in majority. Central to our joint discussion was the Concept Note for FOKUS (well prepared by Michael) as a first draft to participate in their collective application, on behalf of member organizations, for Norad funding next year. Not quite making it, four years ago, we feel a better targeted project design, including women's rights as well as sexual and reproductive health, may fall more directly within the focal aims of FOKUS.

In this connection, Michael's advisory function vs. the Uganda Nurses and Midwives Union is bearing fruits – at best, of mutual benefit to UPLIFT and UNMU alike. Their regional head officer travelled several hours to participate in the first part of our meeting. For the purpose of a potential project, collaboration as well as details for a Memorandum of Understanding were agreed upon.

Furthermore, a tip from FOKUS about a Ugandan NGO offering legal assistance to village women was followed up and resulted in an intention to collaborate. The concept note was 'polished' after the meeting and electronically submitted 'directly from UPLIFT territory', in the nick of time before the April 1st deadline.

In all, a happy project visit (on Michael's part, extended until tomorrow) with due optimism. On that note, let us conclude with two simple reminders: That we would like to see a rise in FUP membership (easy to invite a neighbour or colleague or family members) – and that this year, we hope to climb back from a USD 9,000 annual contribution (pandemic years) to USD 12,000 (still below 2022 budget draft). After all, we succeeded with that in 2018!

With a prayer for Ukraine and those who suffer 'on behalf of the rest of us' – best wishes to all.

Gunnar Lange-Nielsen
(secretary, Friends of UPLIFT)



Modern village women – no fear of using a microphone!

