

February 2014

Dear friend of UPLIFT !

“A new day, with new opportunities.” In our part of the world the phrase is becoming a rhetorical one rather than a promise of a better future – *aní ma ber*, in Alur language. But what if we adjust the expression – “a new year, with new opportunities” – and move the location to UPLIFT territory, in 2014?

Then, all of a sudden, it takes on a most significant meaning for 1.700 adult learners: now they, too, will get the opportunity to learn to read and write. Moreover, they will do so by linking the training directly to relevant knowledge and practical skills, both of which serve to boost social conditions. “To uplift the quality of human life”; this is the overriding aim of UPLIFT, in a remote corner of a country where the gap between ‘those who have and those who have not’ remains severely unjustified, and where those who have not are in great majority.



*Members of the majority – and literates-to-be!*



*Fine handwriting – a next step dream, for some?*

In late January, eight ‘pilgrims’ to that different world returned to Norway, after a memorable visit to the West Nile region of Uganda and participation in the festivities of the UPLIFT graduation ceremony for last year’s learners. A wonderful experience, at once inspiring, amusing and deeply moving – and a physically strenuous one, for those unaccustomed to hours in a small urban bus on rocky roads, climbing the mountain sides of Zombo District.

So, with this year’s graduation – celebrating the results of 2013 – what’s new? Here is a list of opportunities, presented and taken!

- The target was to provide literacy training to 1.700 adults, similar to the year before (1.650). To the surprise of many, the goal was succeeded by another 350; during the year, UPLIFT received a request from AFARD (Agency for Accelerated Regional Development, working primarily with West Nile agriculture). They were seeking assistance for participants in their local development project in the area to merge with UPLIFT’s ongoing training programme. And so, by examination time there were 2050 learners.

- Out of this number of enrolled learners there were only 10 dropouts - 99,5 % completed the course, 99 % sat for exams – and 94 % passed with certificates! This is **the best result in the 13-year history of UPLIFT** (refer to the Statistics Summary, under ‘UPLIFT’ in the website menu). The exam papers are evaluated in cooperation with the District authorities.
- As always, on the big day guests of honour were seated in the front row under the shade of a wide awning. Contrary to the modest representation at last year’s ceremony in Nebbi District (Atego Sub-County), the speakers were virtually queuing up to take the microphone and praise UPLIFT: political leaders from local to district levels – including a Member of Parliament – and NGO representatives, and no less than 3 Norwegian friends of UPLIFT! Allowing for the translation to Alur we busted our allocated time slot (set at 2:10–2.25 p.m. in the programme...)
- Words of wisdom or praise are fine and welcome, but the artistic parts of the ceremony are the most popular. Beyond the numerous and colourful songs and dances, more than ever before the substance of the UPLIFT training was rendered dramatically in a series of little plays. Blackboard tapping to the rhythm of *ma-me-mi-mo-mu*; malaria treatment by neem-tree leaves or witchcraft; promiscuity and alcohol abuse – it was all there. In the customary day-before-the-day village ceremony and demonstration, this year in Komkech Kucwini Sub-County (Nebbi), one drama followed another until four parallel, story-connected scenes were played out under a huge mango tree simultaneously. Impressive!



*Dramatised: Disease, concern, and caregiving*

- A ‘brand new feature’ of the year was the honouring of the junior youth program – a branch on the UPLIFT tree which will add fruits to community development. Edvard Jónsson, our first Icelandic member of the Friends of UPLIFT, was inspired after his visit to last year’s graduation (in January 2013) to produce a Youth Cup for the best netball team (girls) and football team (boys). On his return home he put the idea to a group of Icelandic youth to raise money for a specially engraved silver cup. This year’s finals between the two best boy and girl teams in Zombo and those in Nebbi were played at the pre-graduation village venue in Komkech. At sunset and in the quickly fading daylight a slightly improvised mini-ceremony was arranged – to the great surprise and joy of the youths of the four teams – where Edvard could present the shiny ‘UPLIFT Youth Cup’. The winning teams – girls and boys – will proudly look after it for half a year each, in 2014.



*Boys' finals: Movement, and respect*



*Winning teams captains: Another lesson in sharing!*

As this letter has taken the form of a hybrid report cum travelogue, allow us to admit to a stopover *safari* on our return from Zombo and Nebbi, organized for the 8 pale winter dwellers of the North and 4 not-so-pale visiting guests from the South (Kampala!) Seen in the context of our journey to participate in the graduation ceremony, as friends and supporters of UPLIFT, *this* could well be regarded as a dessert after the main dish (and a splurge it was!) The intention, however, was to offer a carrot (to stay with the vernacular) for new friends to visit beautiful Uganda and make first-hand acquaintance with UPLIFT.



*Murchison Falls + 3 from FUP*



*A quiet hour after a boat trip on the Nile*

Dear friends, it is an unfair challenge to try to convey the joy, the gratitude and the sense of pride with which we were met – indeed, which meets whoever sets foot in the UPLIFT ‘territory’ of Nebbi and Zombo to rub shoulders with learners, mentors and coordinators of the UPLIFT family. It is truly an extended one, and it keeps steadily extending – with the grateful support of the local authorities who do not themselves have sufficient public means or capacity to meet the need for the training generously provided by UPLIFT.

To complement, this is where WE, the Friends of UPLIFT, have the privilege to play our part. Inspired by the unprecedented degree of volunteering of the UPLIFT workers, we find ourselves willing and happy to contribute to the basic financial requirements of the programme – a community building effort for material as well as spiritual growth.

Let us end this report, therefore, by quoting a letter received on our return to Norway from the aforementioned MP, Grace Kwiycwiny:

"I would like to thank you for coming to Zombo District for the graduation of the Uplift learners. I thank you very much for your support and a future and confidence you have built in our people thru the Uplift programme. As I said in my speech, more than ever before, we now need to link the learners to practical activities that can improve their socioeconomic life - agriculture, health care, income generation, etc. It was nice interacting with you and we look forward to more interaction, God willing, in the near future.

May God bless you and your team abundantly.

Kind regards,

Kwiycwiny Grace Freedom

Member of Parliament for Zombo District

