

Dear friends,

Today, we had the good fortune of a mid-day visit by African friends. Not in itself unique (neither midday nor African), but combined with the occasion, it was. We watched together the direct TV airing of the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony from the Oslo Town Hall. Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed of Ethiopia was awarded the Prize in the presence of the royal family [as always] the entire government and many MPs and dignitaries, the members of the Nobel Committee, and this time, members of the Ethiopian/Eritrean diaspora living in Norway.



Norwegian Chairwoman of the Nobel Committee awarding the Peace Prize to Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed

To Norwegians, this annual event on Human Rights Day is a privilege – to be able to observe human dignity close up, to be moved and to reflect. For me, the nearness to Eritrean friends right next to me made it a special one. Come to think of it, they are also friends of UPLIFT!

What I'm talking about, in essence, is the short distance between the human heart and that foremost identity of the keeper of the heart – the world citizen. All other identities come second, third, and can only serve as melody, colour, and spice, to further beautify the whole.

Last Sunday, I visited a Christmas Fair at our local town arts and crafts collective (named "The Factory" due to its abode). The studios and workshops and wide corridors were showcasing creativity to the hilt – not unlike the sales booths

around the compound of Uganda Crafts by the national theatre in Kampala.

On a well lit glass shelf outside a pottery studio, between ceramic bowls, I spy a tiny village of ceramic glazed cottages. While modest in shape and colour, they have individual character. What catches the eye is the birds on the roofs. The saying 'A bird in the hand is worth ten on the roof' [the Norwegian version!] comes to mind. Only, not this time— for next to the funny houses, all slightly different, there are two small stacks of visiting cards; one bearing the artisan's name and logo, the other, a portrait of a Nebbi woman and the web address of 'Friends of UPLIFT'.



Norwegian 'house pigeons' – carrying a message to UPLIFT

Talking to the artist, she tells me that during the few days of the Fair, she has sold ten houses, put the money into the account of Friends of UPLIFT, and given a card to each customer to read about the good cause thus supported.

Who said that the time of 'crocheting pot holders for the Christmas Fair' is over?

And speaking of contributions in kind; last summer at the end of our FUP AGM (Friends of UPLIFT annual general meeting!) the chairman displayed a solar cell lamp, imported at a low price from China by his son, upon a suggestion that it might be of use for UPLIFT work after dark. Remaining friends bought the samples at double price, donated half to UPLIFT and recommended buying another ten for UPLIFT. Come January, our chairman will pack in his suitcase a dozen smart lamps (number suggested by UPLIFT) – China-Norway-Nebbi – 'free of charge'.

As always, this time of year, while the Norwegians are getting busy with their (renowned?) Christmas preparations, UPLIFT learners and mentors are in full swing preparing the grand graduation ceremony, this year on 9th January. That event, known to all after 19 years, has a higher popular 'turnout' than Christmas!

As many of you are aware, both Kenya and Uganda have been severely affected by torrential rains and flooding. A week ago, the bridge crossing to West Nile was inaccessible and the floor of Pakwach on the Nebbi side was literally under water. In mid-November, however, conditions were better, and out of this year's 1.485 learners about 1.440 showed up to sit for exams in their respective parishes. In the course of the year learner groups in four sub-counties have joined to form 10 new CBOs (community building organizations).



Advanced gardening resulting from a CBO collaboration

Dear friends, this communication was meant to be our 'November letter' – at the outset intended for despatch on Nov. 5th for a particular reason: The day after, (5 weeks ago) this correspondent underwent a shoulder operation which proved more complicated 'after the fact' than expected by surgeon and patient. I missed that deadline, hence the delay.

While the 'short rains' have extended through December in Uganda, the first full winter storm has hit the West Coast of Norway and, colder inland, we had a huge blizzard during the night (having now reached the 11th). Nature couldn't have been whiter. Yet, by 3.30 it is dark. Come early January, however, West Nile beckons once again, with sunset at seven!

Wet or white, thanks to the friends of UPLIFT south and north (as well as our 'associate members out west' in Canada) contributions keep trickling into UPLIFT accounts in Norway and Uganda. By early November 9,500 \$ had been transferred from Norway, while still aiming for our goal of 12,000 USD by the end of 2019.

And on that optimistic note, we send our warmest Christmas greetings from the Friends of UPLIFT in Norway – as well as on behalf of the FUP Board,

Gunnar Lange-Nielsen
(secretary)



Sunrise on the Nile (Jan 2017)



Our verandah (now)