

Dear friends,

One month ago, five friends of UPLIFT in Norway (the land of winter vikings) ‘cast anchor’ and set off for Uganda. As so often, our expectations were met! In fact, three of us (now on the FUP board) made the same journey 12 years ago, in the first year of the Norad project period and five years before establishing ‘Friends of UPLIFT’. No need to say we were ‘smitten’ back then, in 2007.

To skip directly to a moment in time: Picture a happy international group of ten, safely arrived Nebbi Town from capital Kampala the previous evening, in our ‘regular’ 20-seat bus (the four at the back serving as baggage rack) – and now halfway between Nebbi and Erussi on the border to Congo. Destination: UPLIFT Graduation Ceremony, in Erussi Sub-county. After an hour’s drive on a bumpy road of soft dust and hard stone, Moses the driver reveals what he has been suspecting during the past quarter-mile: We have a puncture.



UPLIFT officer, travel guide and saviour Mark in action

Why? Because of ‘overload’! Before leaving the hotel in Nebbi, a bunch of other party participants (for the Graduation) who didn’t have *transport* turned up. Among them, our regular ‘hitch-hiker’ Judith, a former UPLIFT

coordinator, and half of her children’s choir. And we are picking up more along the way. They sing in harmony at the back of the bus, and after two hours I try to remember if they even took a break in the build-up to the event. As to the puncture, what’s a spare wheel for, anyway? We’ve got one, and a handy guide! But I can’t help thinking how 15 children and 15 adults would happily tackle a subsequent second puncture out there in no man’s land. One could always say, what’s a mobile phone for, anyway?...but to try to get hold of a bus?



– and some bus passengers confidently chatting

It all goes well, and at 1 p.m. sharp we arrive, escorted by singing and dancing greeters along the last hundred metres to the festivity ground, where local dignitaries are already seated in the front row under huge tarpaulins on banana palm trunks. Soft armchairs and a sofa (!) await the Friends of UPLIFT visitors.

And when the ceremony begins, we’re seated *ringside*, shoulder to shoulder with County representatives and the mayor of Erussi.



Ringside: Friends of UPLIFT and Nebbi / Zombo politicians

Obonyo Ronnie, the master of ceremony, takes us effortlessly and efficiently through a 21-item (!) program. Accordingly, this year's speeches by politicians (always in plural) are admirably short and to the point, focused on how the graduates will apply what they have learnt to benefit themselves, their families and their local community [11 sub-counties, 32 parishes]. The results match those of last year: out of 1,500 enrolled, 1,400 were able to complete the one-year training; 2 out of 3 are women; and 9 out of 10 have passed the exams and will be proud keepers of an UPLIFT Certificate.

For all of which UPLIFT, as well as Friends of UPLIFT, receive praise in speeches and songs throughout, with audible and visible gratitude.

In that connection, words of gratitude were spoken to the memory of UPLIFT's initiator Tom Gossen, who passed away in December. Dr. Hizzaya shared the touching as well as amusing story of the early beginnings in Nebbi – a village group of 16 in Pakwach. By 2019, 27,000 have completed UPLIFT training! Friends of UPLIFT (Norway) were also given opportunity to honour Tom – to some of us a dear friend – for his zeal and steadfastness. Without him there would be no Friends of UPLIFT (and this letter would not have been written)!



Pride and joy - more disciplined than ...? (cf. Feb 2015 letter)

As always, the peak of the ceremony was, after presenting of certificates to new mentors and to learners (a few representing the many), the announcement of best results. Like on some earlier occasions, the host sub-county had the highest score— *“and the winner is... Erussi!”* To be followed – again, as always – by lifting the cup, and a bit of unrestricted behaviour...



This year's 'witchdoctor' – or just the ceremonial jester?

Friday morning has become our established time for *joint consultation* – an opportunity for UPLIFT and Friends of UPLIFT boards to share plans for the coming year and address common concerns. Main topics this year are:

- 1) Evaluation and documentation – in practical terms, follow-up of learners in focus groups 6 months after exams (cf. November newsletter). Reporting.
- 2) Production and study of Health booklet – prepared for mentors to supplement the annual training curriculum.
- 3) Increased need for means of transport – a number of bicycles to be used by mentors with long distances and a light motorcycle for wider district transport.

All of these items have a cost (note: no salary) to be specified in revised budget proposal and presented in the FUP May letter. Even at this time, however, we would indicate that in light of last year's successful contributions, and considering these added needs, the FUP board will recommend an increased pledge also in 2019.

On this optimistic note, let us report that our first quarterly contribution of USD 2,500 was transferred on February 1st. Adding the funds carried over from 2018, UPLIFT was ready to print learners books and cover other initial costs from day one of the 2019 course, and everyone is happy.

On UPLIFT's behalf, let us once again extend heartfelt thanks to friends in Norway, Canada and Uganda for financial and moral support!

And, oh, from one friend to another, within this select association (!) – let's keep it up, eh?

Warmest greetings,
on behalf of Friends of UPLIFT in Norway,
Gunnar Lange-Nielsen



To feed hundreds, even the 'waitresses' have queued up –



– and boxes of water bottles are emptied by the dozens.



Friendship! Friends of UPLIFT? Oh, yes!

