

18 February 2016

Dear friends of UPLIFT !

Once again, by the end of 2015, some 1400 adult learners in the West Nile region have sat for their government-approved literacy exam. And once again, with the annual UPLIFT graduation ceremony last month, the vast majority of them were awarded an elegant certificate officially recognizing them as having completed their courses, becoming literate in their local language.



A testimony in writing – for its owner to proudly read!

And, once again, we who come from the far North – we who regard being literate at a young age as self-evident – may take a moment to reflect on the significance of illiterate adults being given the chance to read and write. How will this newly-won skill be applied in the years ahead? How will its effect provide change, not just for the learner, but for her family, for her children and grand-children? Will literacy truly lead to less poverty and more social welfare, even in the short term?

One thing is certain, on the 14th January – as the pictures reveal – the pride and joy radiating from this year's graduates was quite contagious!



Zombo District 'winners' - on behalf of all being winners!

To those of us who take pride in being just 'supporting actors' on the advocacy and funding side of the programme, the UPLIFT Statistics Summary makes for a 'good read'. Nine out of ten pass the exam. With the incredible results of the past three years, however – 96% (2013), 94% (2014) and now 92% in 2015 – one might question the reliability of the large number of successful graduates. How is it that such a large percentage of students can not only complete the courses but also pass examination? Since quite a few have wondered about this, the question was raised in our meeting with the UPLIFT Board 15 January. Two answers were given:

The first being that in accordance with government policy a student is given a passing mark if the results are 40% or more. UPLIFT will consider discussing with local authorities the method of correcting papers and, if feasible, to raise the passing mark to 45%.

The other answer may come as a surprise to some. Among the course participants are some students who join the course a second time – even though they might have passed the exam the first time. The explanation being that they 'enjoyed the course so much' and are determined to learn even more the second time around!

Ideally, the courses should be offered only to new learners, as the demand is great. The UPLIFT Board will go through the last years' registers to get an overview of the number of repeating learners.

One other overlap that we have noticed earlier on (to which we have no objections) is that some of the dancers and musicians from a neighboring area find their way to the present ceremony to join ranks and repeat last year's entertainment success. Think of it as 'successive' entertainment. Those who have attended the annual graduation ceremony will know that to a growing number this is the peak event of the year. If you live close enough – say within two hours walking distance – or if you can hitch a ride on the back of an over-filled lorry, then the temptation to attend is great. This time we recognized two of last year's "front figures" – a singer and a self-appointed village clown!



The lead singer – and village clown

During this year's graduation ceremony UPLIFT was formally recognized and appreciated for having completed 15 years service to the larger community within the national framework of the UN Millennium Goals. Among these the continued combat of poverty will remain a central one in the coming 15 years of relating to the new UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). In a local context UPLIFT has spearheaded the concept of «transformative learning»; most likely to become a household word by 2030.

There was a sense of history being made during Hissaya's talk and summary of local as well as institutional development since the modest beginnings in 2001.



Doctor, or Director, or both – Hissaya on top form

Friends of UPLIFT were given a special "thank you" for their (our) financial and moral support during these past four years. Let this February letter also be a special "thank you" to each and every contributor and their loyal support of the work being done by UPLIFT.

At this time of writing the 2016 batch of learners, scattered across four new parishes under the guidance of 32 mentors, are embarking on their 'year of discovery'. We congratulate them on being no longer on UPLIFT's waiting list! In Norway the Board of Friends of UPLIFT is counting on the support from its members to continue, on the news of this programme to be shared with family and friends, for contributions to trickle in throughout 2016.

We have just forwarded NOK 15.000 (about USD 1.750), emptying the VUP bank account. The money will be used to print learners' books for this year's classes.

With warm greetings from dear friends in Uganda and from the FUP Board –
Michael, Helge, Victoria, Inger-Johanne and Gunnar