

Dear friends!

Somehow it seems like ages since we last wrote, about the life of UPLIFT and sundry. Such a sentiment is not uncommon in times like these (note the plural); for the way we perceive time has been also affected by this pandemic, which has become a reference we seem unable to avoid when writing a letter. Time becomes fleeting, time is put on hold, or we shrink from the thought of the time that comes – afterwards.

Yes, it is words like *afterwards* we adopt, when the world goes through dramatic change. But changes happen continually – before, during and after – while we keep moving toward better times, for all who were given a place on the single life-sustaining planet we know.



And yet, in the midst of it – for those who have lived a long time and still want to be part of it all for yet another while – it is as if the days are disappearing. Where did they go, while we were cooped up in our homes? We would fain have reached further toward that apparently evasive goal: Peace on earth. And we realise it's high time to acquire a truly universal perspective – if need be, impelled by microscopic organisms gone astray. To twist a Robert Browning phrase: "God is in his heaven, *but* all's *not* right with the world."

What, then, does this have to do with UPLIFT?

The global challenge, "this great enterprise",¹ may make humble projects like UPLIFT in its remote geographical pocket seem insignificant. But to our friends who see the reality of things from within – the family, village or region – even the close perspective provides an exercise in empathy. They know the

meaning of cooperation and sharing with a neighbour – like everyone will now have to, across the earth. Like we also do, who are the friends of UPLIFT.

So far, Uganda has been spared the death toll of the virus. At this time of writing, there are only 220 active cases, not counting the several truck drivers who commute in and out of the country. The greater cost, however—until now steeply rising—has been the lockdown of normal life in the community. People are fearing starvation more than the disease.

For UPLIFT, this year's training programme was interrupted less than two months after first enrolments; new learners were being organised in village groups, mentors had been designated, but learners' books and the health booklet had not yet been printed. At the time of lockdown about five classes were up and running, and a couple of groups were given a spare copy of the health booklet for trying out. With the last extension of constraints it is too early to predict if or when the literacy and other skills training may resume – possibly in smaller classes.

'In the meantime' – what to do? A month ago an idea for a new home industry was looked into; production of protective face masks, modelled after an initiative by the Ugandan Nurses' Union. As the community gradually opens up to work and travel, a shortage of simple face masks is to be expected. Many former UPLIFT learners with tailoring certificates are in a position to step forward and assist in this capacity. If started, and deemed successful, the project might later develop into tailoring training centres in Nebbi and Zombo. [Until now, the tailoring learners (6 per year) have been supported through a scholarship for external training].



¹ Establishment of *the unity of mankind*, in Bahá'í Scripture.

The Friends of UPLIFT Board in a recent meeting discussed the need to re-purpose some budgeted funds this year to a local production of face masks to help reduce spread of the virus. The interrupted literacy training costs are reduced, but this alternative project (or, certainly, auxiliary activity) will need initial funding.

So dear friends, seeing the need to also sustain the flow of contributions, we have asked the Norwegian members of Friends of UPLIFT to support this reshuffling in the 2020 budget. And to contributing members abroad, we ask the same acceptance – or, if they or you have concerns, to feel free to let us know.

We are presently looking ahead, hoping and praying that the gradual lifting of restrictions due to Covid-19 will remain under control by careful behaviour, in Uganda as elsewhere.

For Friends of UPLIFT we decided to withstand the desire to meet and hug (!) and conduct our annual meeting on Zoom this year, about a month from now. But perhaps a rendez-vous *in autumn* when, God willing, the perception of *time* has returned to tangible.

With good wishes and warm greetings,
on behalf of the Friends of UPLIFT Board,
Gunnar Lange-Nielsen (secretary)



UPLIFT mid-January: One half of an African HUG, two months before the Corona lockdown.