

Dear friends of UPLIFT !

A flood of refugees and migrants across the borders of Europe. Climate change and the global summit in Paris. The 'Jasmine' revolution and an award ceremony for the Nobel Peace Prize. An autumn filled with long-term visions and poignant footprints.

For those with experience and empathy to translate the factual language of this year's Nobel ceremony to the language of the heart – as did the song of Emel Mathlouti – the awarding in Oslo of the Peace Prize to the Tunisian "Dialogue Quartet" was a moving experience.



Emel Mathlouti sings Kelmti Horra (My word is free)

And once again surfaces an association: Tunisia, a modest nation in a vast Arab world, and UPLIFT, a virtually unknown organisation in a small African nation. Both have shown, by their example, that through commendable goals, bridge-building methods and use of local resources it is possible to mobilize civil society, raising it to higher levels of dignity. Not only is the scope of activities, but the phenomenon itself significant.

Both examples also stand in stark contrast to the upcoming national elections in Uganda, described by a Ugandan journalist in a recently translated article in Norad's

«Bistandsaktuelt» (Norwegian language, free subscription). Here he describes an election process sullied by vote purchase in the form of promises of money, goods or special favours – a reverse form of political corruption where a practice of bribing the voters has become widespread.



District politicians applauding UPLIFT last January

When a handful of Nordic friends of UPLIFT in some weeks' time travel south, we shall – as was the case four years ago – witness this contrast. Election posters are stuck, not one at a time, but in the tens of thousands, onto entire walls and fences, while native drums call people to demagogic election meetings in towns and neighbourhoods. Quite different from the joyous celebration of newly-acquired knowledge, shared in simple, but free and open consultation under the local mango tree, or in grassroots groups of CBO's (Community-based organisations) formed by UPLIFT learners.



*'Learning to apply knowledge and skills in social action.'
[Malaria treatment skit, at UPLIFT graduation 2014]*

Recently we received a greeting from one of the Friends of UPLIFT, expressing thanks for the new information cards. Here is an excerpt from the letter:

“I think it is nice to be able to give some small contribution to UPLIFT because I know that what little amount used for administrative purposes is minimal, and the learning results are amazing. There are many organisations asking for money, so one has to pick certain objectives. So, I must rather attempt to stick to the ones I have chosen.

Thinking about the flood of new people coming to our country, and what many of the refugees have experienced as well as had to leave behind, I am provoked by comments that we cannot afford to help [so many]. Not that I think we should open our doors for what I call fortune hunters, but we do have sufficient resources to welcome those that truly are fleeing from war. This should be all the more evident during the presently hectic shopping month we are in”.

Which is to say that Christmas is fast approaching. At a party the weekend before Dec. 10th (Human Rights Day being also the day of Peace Prize ceremony) we ended up sitting with a group where small talk quickly turned to development aid and social development and dialogue as a path to peace. Specific examples capture attention, and it didn't take long before the group was more than willing to listen to the story of UPLIFT. The new info-cards were received with genuine interest.

Christmas was not once mentioned – not even as a stark contrast. Nor should it have to be – Norway without May 17th or the Christmas celebration is unthinkable. Now, the same has become the case with the annual UPLIFT Graduation Ceremony, – after just 15 years.

*Latest news, yesterday, from UPLIFT:
Some 1.370 have passed the examination,
and certificates are being printed.*

And so: Christmas greetings from the Norwegian “Friends of UPLIFT” Board!

From all of us –

(Helge, Inger-Johanne, Michael, Victoria, Gunnar)

– to all of you.

(our dear friends and supporters!)

