

17. 09. 2020 | September letter to friends of UPLIFT

Dear friends,

Last month the Norwegian Friends of UPLIFT arranged its annual general meeting. Alas, like so many get-togethers at this time, online. To avoid being affected, but with less affection! A mere 12 faces showed up on the screen, mostly of the die-hards who show up 'in the flesh' on this annual occasion.

Just in time for that AGM, we received a most encouraging greeting from Hizzaya on behalf of UPLIFT:

"To the Norway [Friends of] UPLIFT Board Gathered For UPLIFT Consultation.

Beloved Friends,

We the UPLIFT Mentors, Coordinators and Program Officers are delighted to report that all the 32 literacy classes in both Zombo and Nebbi have started working, that yesterday the Minister for Northern Region visited 6 of the 32 classes and commended UPLIFT for its work and that your moral support and sacrificial contributions for the work of UPLIFT... are very precious to our memory and hearts.

With loving and prayerful remembrance,

Hizzaya Hissani for UPLIFT Board"

This was wonderful news, at a time when we were surely in need. The Friends of UPLIFT board, in Norway too, have struggled with a sense of powerlessness after the long awaited facemask project seemed to run into the sand. With the early lapse in March of the regular literacy programme, to also have to postpone for months an initiative assumedly beneficial both for UPLIFT and for local communities in Nebbi and Zombo districts has been a test of perseverance. Especially since this intervention, however modest, to reduce the spread of the corona virus was halted due to *other* measures (i.e. regional barriers) imposed by government.

But now, things are looking up. Less than two weeks ago we received a report from UPLIFT officer Mark Ssemukasa – who happens to be also a tailor! – about the implementation of the Face Mask Project (the report is attached). And last night Mark sent an update, saying that so far, over 400 reusable masks have

been made and some 150 have been sold. Furthermore, sensitisation of local communities has begun and information about protection from the epidemic is being included with the health training sessions of the regular literacy training. To what degree the information will motivate use of masks in public places may well depend on how the threat of the virus is perceived. Until now, the number of cases in the two districts Zombo and Nebbi have been negligible, so despite the delay of the project, the precaution may be seen as premature.



Theory: Studying "the Document"



Practical outcome: Face mask production



Demonstration – after trial and error, success!

As for UPLIFT's recent return to the core training programme, after all of five months and now observing the guidelines of social distancing even in the classes, it is too early to assess how time lost can be compensated for. As it now looks, the 2020 course will stretch into next year. At this point, let me just quote from Mark's recent email:

"Literacy classes are going on, and around 60% of the classes are working perfectly, with 40% needing some extra effort."

To return to our annual meeting last month, we would like to share with you a particular item on the agenda. UPLIFT is in principle as well as in practice a development programme – to combat poverty through literacy and skills training – and not an emergency aid programme. To the Friends of UPLIFT this is understood, in line with an unparalleled input of volunteerism, as our basis for financial contribution. The influence of the pandemic and the changing uncertainties in the budget have brought up the question of allocating, as an exception, a modest amount toward the livelihood of a few key officers of the Programme who have been locked in without access to income or basic household needs. In view of this, with unanimous support by the AGM participants also for the 'exception', a proposed pledge to contribute USD 12,000 in 2020 despite reduced activity was upheld. We humbly invite you to join us in this aim.

And with that, on a more optimistic note than foreseen two months ago, we send our warm greetings and prayers that the year ahead will bring some healing to the world.

On behalf of the Board of Friends of UPLIFT,
Gunnar Lange-Nielsen, secretary



Nation-wide transport before regional borders were closed. Still, during the pandemic, truck drivers coming in from the neighbouring countries (esp. Congo and Kenya) have been the main source of spreading the virus.