

15 December 2016

Dear friends of UPLIFT !

Four weeks ago, some 1,500 women and men sat for literacy exams in Nebbi and Zombo districts. Four weeks from today certificates will be awarded to the majority of these – having written, for the first time in life, what may well be termed an ‘official document’ – and a good number of them will participate in the upcoming graduation ceremony. The celebration of the year (!) will be held at Pa’gwata *) Health Centre in Parombo Sub-County. [* When “w” is pronounced “o” it sounds even more African – to a Norwegian ear.]

And as usual, there will be a small band of visitors from Kampala and from this far-away Northern latitude – the latter made up by four women and four men. No need to say our excitement is growing by the week—well, perhaps taking a break for a white(r) Christmas!

During this fall a bizarre incident served as an early reminder of what to expect. No, that’s unfair, rather an association to experiences past – in Uganda. Being well prepared for our last meeting of the Board of the Friends of UPLIFT, the secretary (yours truly) set off expectantly by train to Oslo – a comfortable 2½-hour journey.

Half way, a faulty electrical signal coupled with ensuing breach of telecommunication knocked out the entire operation of the railway network in Norway’s central region. Virtually, a first of a kind in modern times. The unfortunate secretary had (for once) allowed plenty of time to get to the meeting and despite repeated PA messages remained calm and optimistic. Some 100 passengers were ordered out of the train at a remote small station. But it was a sunny autumn

day, and most, except those realizing they would miss their flight connection (the airport being half an hour down the line), took the delay in their stride. We were told there would soon be bus and taxi shuttles. Only, all reserves had been sent to other stations in the district. One hour went by, and then another one. A maxi-taxi came to take a few to the airport, but no buses. When *one* finally showed up, announcing it would *return* to a larger town (passed 3 hours earlier), I opted to accept the offer.



Norway waiting FOR a bus Nebbi: waiting IN the bus

Hours of lingering under the shade of a tree had led to the association to Uganda. To the breaking down of cars, and buses, and, yes, once in the early nineties being stranded in the middle of nowhere and of the night, while travelling on the famous East African (Buganda-Mombasa) Railway. Only, the ‘nowhere’ turned out to be near the Ugandan border, where all passengers were woken up and ushered out into the pitch dark, where a single passport officer was making his slow way along the outside of the train with a tiny torch lighting up the passports one by one. On later dates, living in Uganda, more common incidents with public as well as private transport were numerous – at times having to return to base with ‘mission unaccomplished’.

As did I, last September, in the opposite direction of the Board meeting, with bitter-sweet memories – and anticipation of our next Uganda visit!

In November, the friends of UPLIFT in Norway transferred USD 1.500 – in time to cover the printing of certificates! Though contributions have lagged a bit during the autumn, we are still hoping to attain our pledge of USD 10.000 toward this year's budget. Another 1.500 – one dollar for each learner – will do the trick.

On that note, with Christmas just a week ahead, let me include a reflection about the reality, as well as *relativity*, of life. In comparison with Ugandan women living in West Nile, we in the North are privileged, with access to free and broad education even before adult age. On the other hand, compared to so many in some countries now fleeing from war, or held hostage in a beleaguered city, a poor family in Nebbi or Zombo may consider itself fortunate; with social development, there is hope. While the world is laboriously struggling toward a greater measure of justice and equality, emergency aid and community building continue to be two sides of the same coin.

Some, at our latitude, are in a position to play a part in this work by their own effort. The rest of us may contribute indirectly. We, the Board of Friends of UPLIFT in Norway, have encouraged our members to make use of the gift card on our website – (there's even a 'light' Christmas version!) – and propose to the recipient to imagine the joy of five women now being able to write their own season's greeting.

And so, we end 2016 with Christmas greetings from the Board of Friends of UPLIFT – and wishes for yet another happy new year in UPLIFT-land!

Gunnar Lange-Nielsen
Secretary



Village visit Nebbi, January 2015, the day before graduation

– with curious onlookers (their attention somewhat diverted)

