



CRWRC

Christian Reformed World Relief Committee

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Greetings from Kampala.

Josephine and I are happy to be back in Uganda after eight months in the USA. Although I returned to Uganda for six weeks in February and March, Josephine had the opportunity to experience an entire West Michigan winter for the first time. We were in America for this extended period so that Josephine could process her US citizenship. She had benefitted from US permanent resident (Green Card) status but this was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain due to our lengthy absences from the USA because of my position with CRWRC Uganda. According to US Immigration law a permanent resident remaining outside the US for more than 180 days at a time can very easily lose residency status, a rule we had been stretching to the limit. Several years of continuous residency in the US are normally required for citizenship processing, but we took advantage of a clause that allowed for "expedited" citizenship for Josephine, due to my status as a full-time American missionary working for an American based religious denomination.

While back here in March I traveled 400 kilometers to Kabale to visit my colleagues at People of Purpose, my PAG (Pentecostal Assemblies of God) partner organization. Just 22 kilometers from the border with Rwanda, Kabale is located on a major international truck route. African truck routes are notorious for having high rates of HIV/AIDS infections, largely due to the sex trade that flourishes in communities along the highway, fueled by the mix of poor women desperate for regular income and the desires and cash of truck drivers far away from home for days and weeks at a time.

Scruffy Katuna, right on the border, is a one-road town, lined with trucks waiting to be cleared to enter Rwanda, or parked after crossing into Uganda. It's a loud, lively and colorful place. Businesses along this road are geared to travelers, offering food, accommodation, music and sex. Large signs painted on some of the buildings proclaim the dangers of unsafe sex, but they seem to be largely ignored. Young women move restlessly among the trucks.

In the midst of all this is the Katuna PAG Church, the only church in town. Located in a small rented structure downhill from the highway and next to the swamp, it is led by Pastor Johnson Mwikirize. Pastor Johnson established the Katuna church in 2002. He was disturbed by what he saw around him in Katuna and attempted through his preaching to make a difference. He says, "We tried all ways of preaching but it was not yielding results as we had expected." In 2006 he felt God calling him to reach out to the needy with a poverty fighting program. He experimented with agricultural

projects, including a demonstration plot for growing Irish potatoes for seed, but felt unsuccessful. However, due to his efforts in community development, he was appointed to be a board member of People of Purpose, the community development department of the PAG church in the region around Kabale.

As a People of Purpose board member, Johnson had the opportunity to participate in governance training for PAG board members, partially funded and facilitated by CRWRC. He got involved in Participatory Evaluation Process workshops which were facilitated with funding from PAG and CRWRC. The Participatory Evaluation Process is a biblically based approach designed to help churches and communities discover their own resources and how to use them to serve their communities. Johnson says that through these workshops “we were sharpened as metal sharpens metal.” He was “challenged and strengthened” to try new strategies of helping the needy and vulnerable in Katuna.

Johnson says, “I sold the strategy to the church and it was picked and people started to contribute for this project which is running up to now. There are lots of success stories without outside support.” Katuna PAG church is now reaching out to widows, orphans and other vulnerable people, particularly those infected with or affected by HIV/AIDS. As a result of their involvement in the Participatory Evaluation Process, church members have identified several individuals and families living with HIV and AIDS, including orphaned children, and have agreed to give them some support using their own funds.

Pastor Johnson is only one of a number of people I have met in and around Kabale who have humbled and inspired me with their dedication to helping others, and who have gone ahead to do this without waiting for outside resources to fund their ideas.

Thank you for your prayers, letters, emails and financial support of our work in Uganda. Please pray too that Ugandans will learn how to work together peacefully for change. Last week’s riots in which a number of people died, property was destroyed and lives disrupted, brutally reminded us that we have a long way to go.

Warm regards,

Jim and Josephine Zylstra