



Empowering African Women

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ANNUAL REPORT

The year 2013 was another fantastic year for Grassroots Uganda- Empowering African Women (GRU). With our dedication to both the Arts and Women's Empowerment, we have been able to make significant changes in people's lives allowing them more economic freedom, more focused skills, and an overall improvement of their quality of life.

We are currently working with 5 Women's Groups located around Uganda. We assist these Women's Groups by providing them with skills training, marketing assistance, financial counseling, and other small community development initiatives. In 2013, we were able to bring over 34,000,000ush in economic empowerment and supplies to our Women's Groups, which together encompass approximately 150 women. These groups consist of Lubanga Twero Women's group in Jinja, MUMYO Women's Craft Group in Naggalama, Lwazi Women's Group in Mbale, Rwo-Tek Women's Association in Kitgum, and St Isaac's Women's Group in Kainogoga.

With this economic empowerment, some of our women have saved their earnings and are in the process of constructing permanent, brick homes. They pay their children's school fees, use their earnings for medical care, nutritious food, clothing, and supplies. Also, many have invested in income generating activities such as live stock and animal husbandry, opening their own shops, renting larger plots for farming, buying and leasing out boda bodas, and enrolling in trade schools.



Crafts made by our women's Groups and Co-Op Artisans

Our GRU Artist-Co-op has been hugely successful. It encompasses a variety of local artisans. A huge injustice in Uganda is that the arts, the act of creative expression and new and innovative ideas, is suppressed and literally beaten out of people when they are children. GRU has fortunately been able to isolate individuals who are breaking out of the mainstream mould, and are creating their own designs and expressions. We are promoting and featuring these artists on an international level, and assisting them to find economic empowerment, which is worthy of their talents.

The GRU Artist Co-Op currently consists of Aisha Nandudu, Tina Kyambadde and her sisters Phiona, Claire, and Robinah; Nyambura Beatrice Wahu, Mark Guithu, Joel Balimanya, Eva Nabinoba, Irine Faith, Catherine, Flavia Anying, and Josophing Amoni with and her sister Joyce Allum.

Peace Demonstration Farm located in Nyenje village is doing very well. The purpose of Peace Farm is to lead by example and teach Ugandans that by growing and selling cash crops to a new and ever-changing multi cultural market, they can pull themselves out of poverty. Peace Farms teaches how to care for such crops through innovative

methods such as crop rotation, using manure and proper composting, mulching, raised compost heaps, raised garden beds, sack gardening, garden planning, greenhouse gardening, and watering.

Our primary achievement at Peace Farm this year was installing the borehole at the far. The borehole is currently the primary source of clean water for the villages of Nyenje and Budugala and we use it at the farm for irrigating the crops. We are currently fundraising to install the rest of our planned water system, which includes installing a solar pump next to the hand pump, water storage tanks, and a drip irrigation system. As it is, we water the crops by hand and fill 20 liter water bottles with holes poked in them to use as drip irrigation during the dry season. The borehole is open to the villagers from 8a.m. until 8p.m. and is provided and maintained free of cost to them. We were able to drill the borehole through massive fundraising efforts and donations/ grants from private individuals, Water for Humanity, and Global Giving.



Drilling the borehole at Peace Demonstration Farm. The borehole is now the primary source of clean water for villages of Nyenje and Budugala.

Sseko, an ethical sandal making company here in Uganda donated 500 pairs of sandals to our ladies. We had to provide our own straps which we rigged out of colorful ribbons. As there are literally hundreds of ways to tie your Sseko sandal straps, the women had a fantastic time playing around with new styles and ideas.



We distributed 500 pairs of strappy sandals donated by Sseko.

Fortunately, this year we were awarded a grant of 11,944,590 ugx from Virginia Guildersleve International Women's Fund (VGIF) for our Reusable menstrual pads and eco/solar cooking initiatives. The trainings are still in the process of being implemented, and so far we have trained Lubanga Twero Women's Group in both the re-usable menstrual pads and the eco-solar cooking.

Randomly, we learned that the Acholi ladies (the ethnicity of women who make up Lubanga Twero Women's Group) usually only menstruate one day per month and a very light flow at that. This is likely because they are Nilotic desert dwellers by ancestry and their bodies have adapted to save resources. Needless to say, they did not feel that they needed the pads, though they did enjoy the training day and the massive lunch we had with it!

However, the ladies from central Uganda who we are training next, have expressed a lot of interest in the pads and as they live in a more rural area, access to pharmacies and women's health supplies is limited.

To promote the pads use, we are making the pads and then selling the pads to our ladies at a subsidized rate of half the cost of making the pads.



Our VGIF sponsored reusable menstrual pads training program has been a complete success.

Eco solar cooking is fun. We are contracting with Jinja Empowerment Organization (JEO) and both purchasing their supplies and using their trainers for the training seminars. The trainers are Josophine, Joyce, and Agnes and they have been doing a wonderful job. The solar cook kits include one reflector stove made of cardboard coated in lacquer with reflective mylar attached to one side and folded into a concave 'oven' to focus and maximize the sun's heat. In addition, the cook kit contains a wappi which is a small wax filled container with metal washer weights which acts as a temperature gauge to determine when liquids such as water or milk have been pasteurized. It also comes with an instruction manual from Solar Cookers International out of Kenya, two special heat resistant plastic bags, and two light weight sauce pans which have been painted black. The sauce pans need to be black as black absorbs the heat and helps cook the food faster.

The training was wonderful and while it rained in the morning, thankfully the sun came out at about 11 a.m. and we were able to cook solar cake, beef stew, rice, greens, cabbage, 'boil' eggs, and pasteurize water.



Eco-Solar cooking training sponsored by VGIF with Lubanga Twero Women's Group Jinja.

Fireless cooking bags are also an element of our eco solar cooking. The bags are basically a super padded cylinder with a pillow on the bottom and a pillow with a synch tie at the top. The padding consists of pockets filled with recycled foam, fabric, and styrofoam bits which are packed tightly together and do an excellent job of retaining heat. To use the bag, you need to have food that is boiling or cooking in a liquid base, such as boiling potatoes, beans, beef stew, rice, etc. The food first needs to be brought up to its proper cooking temperature by heating it over fire and getting the liquid at a rolling boil. The pot then needs to be covered and immediately placed in the bag with the pillow put on top and the top tied tightly. The cooking bag will continue to 'cook' the food for several hours and will keep the food warm enough that there is no risk of bacteria growth for up to 8 hours.

Energy efficient charcoal stoves are similar to the common sigiri in size and shape, but they have a thick 1 ½ inch layer of insulating ceramic and air holes which maximize the heat emitted from the charcoal. An energy efficient charcoal stove used less than 1/3 of the charcoal needed to fuel the traditional metal sigiri to cook the same amount of

food. After cooking rice, the primary thing we cooked on the energy efficient charcoal stove was baking cakes using a sauce pan full of sand, a lid, and charcoal stacked on top as well to create a type of dutch-oven. The ladies LOVED it!

To promote use of the eco-solar cooking, we first bought the solar kits and bags, and then sold them to the ladies at a subsidized rate of half the buying price. The Jinja ladies took full advantage of this half-price option and nearly every woman bought the solar kit while about half of them bought the fireless cooking bag as well.

These are excellent as they cut down on cooking time as women are able to cook multiple things at one time, it reduces charcoal and firewood use helping prevent deforestation, saves the women's lungs from inhaling unnecessary smoke, reduces the risks of household fires and burns from cooking, and helps the women save money as they need to buy less cooking fuel.



Basket training with Lwazi Women's Group in Mbale.

As we stopped working with our former women's group partner in Namukuma, we replaced them with Lwazi Women's Group in Mbale. But as the paper bead market is WAY down and our main income generating activities in our women's groups is paper bead making- we needed to devise new crafts and skills to train the ladies with.

We decided to teach them how to make tightly woven good quality baskets out of banana fiber which we can export to the USA and other western countries. The baskets are made from reeds, buso (raffia fibers) and fibrous peelings from the stems of banana trees. We hired Rose Kulabako from the St Isaac's Women's Group to come and hold a 5 day training seminar where she trained about 35 women in basket making. She did an excellent job and while the ladies are still learning, the quality of their baskets is steadily improving.



Goat and chicken give-away with MUMYO Women's Group in Naggalama.



One of the rabbits donated to our Jinja orphans from ESTC trip.

Small scale community development initiatives are important as they help bring the community together, and help combat feelings of jealousy (bayuda) that often break out when the community feels that a few of its members are benefiting above and beyond the rest. Our initiatives are chosen, and implemented by our women themselves. They meet with the LC's and community leaders, identify needy individuals, and we do things to help those individuals.

Every year with MUMYO Women's Group in Naggalama we host a goat and chicken give-away where the village identifies 5 especially needy people and we give them a few pieces of livestock. They each get one pregnant female goat, and three mature laying hens of local breed chickens. The goats are cross local and mzungu, making them have a larger size but a high resistance to disease, and chickens are a local variety which makes them VERY resistant to

diseases and they still have their instincts and are able to feed themselves, escape predators, and basically require very little maintenance. Both the goats and chickens can then be used to either provide sustenance to the beneficiary, or can be reared and reproduced as an income generating activity to the beneficiary.

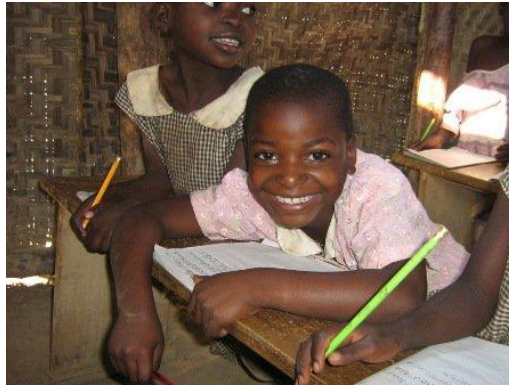
Another small scale development initiative we are continuing is to support and provide education for Mary's Jinja Orphans Rogers, Isaac, and William. They were orphaned by AIDS several years ago and they were being jointly catered for by the women of Lubanga Twero Women's Group as they were friends with the mother and the children have no surviving family available to take them in. It was literally a village raising the children and while they continue mothering them and teaching them to be respectable young men, we contribute with the financial needs of the boys. As additional income, the boys do odd jobs to raise money such as rearing ducks and rabbits, digging in people's gardens, and cleaning churches. Unfortunately during a very wet and cold spell the rabbits fell sick and died. Then during the tour day we had with the GVN Eat So They Can Distribution Trip, the trip members contributed enough money that we bought the boys 3 new rabbits. One buck and two does so that their rabbit project can continue.

When someone dies here, burial costs are shared between all the friends and family of the deceased instead of sticking the immediate family with the total costs. This is important as brings friends, family, and neighbors closer together and they all share their money and labor as well as their grief. Family and friends tend to the body, neighbors bring food, cook, and care for the children. Men dig the graves, and everyone contributes money. When Lubanga Twero member Sara Odil died from complications of HIV/AIDS, we attended vigil and contributed substantially to the burial costs.

Then as usual, we passed out several hundred condoms to boda boda drivers as a way of promoting safe sex and protecting women from STD's, HIV/AIDS, and unwanted pregnancies.



Grace Orphanage



Rita, a child at House of Hope Orphanage



Flavian Anying, member of our Artist Co-Op

We also continued to support organizations we currently partner with providing financial support, supplies, and friendship to Matherine Nursery School, Grace Orphan Care and Primary School, House of Hope Orphanage, VOLSET, Divine Mercy Primary School, Nalusse, and a few others.

Our only remaining sponsored child is Mukumbi Nicholas who is currently in Senior 2. He is steadily ranked 2nd or 3rd out of his class depending on the term, and we are very proud of his performance. A miracle also happened this year, as while Nicholas was diagnosed HIV+ and has been taking ARV's since 2005, this year when taking a random HIV test with his friends at school he tested negative. He was clearly surprised by the results and expected it to be an error. He went to St Josephs, his HIV care facility, informed them, and they performed another 3 unique tests on him, all of which came back negative. They then took his blood and GRU paid to have it sent to South Africa and fully tested and analyzed. In November the results from that also come back negative. There is a slight chance that Nicholas is one of the few people in the world whose body cures itself of HIV, but it is almost 100% more likely that whoever tested him in the first place back in 2005 faked the results as a way to skew the statistics in their favor. Either way we are extremely excited for him and Nicholas has a new lease on life as he feels like an entire future has just opened up for him.

We do good deeds other places too. When Prunes, a local Ugandan business had a devastating fire which destroyed all their assets and insurance refused to pay, a benefit was held and GRU donated many books from our book

exchange and herbs from Peace Demonstration Farm. We donated a skirt and a necklace to the International Women's Organization raffle where the proceeds from the raffle went to benefit Afripads. And we donated baskets to two additional different fundraiser in Montana, which were benefiting children with life-threatening illnesses.

One of our biggest challenges is having enough funding to run our NGO at a sustainable level. Grants and donations are fantastic, but in the long run they are not sustainable so we have embarked on a variety of other income generating activities to raise money for GRU. The Book Exchange is particularly fun as books are awesome. We buy books at 3,000ush and sell them at 6,000ush so the income generated is little, but well worth it. Several local establishments have allowed us to put books in their places, including Prunes Café, Café Tomato, and Kampala Premier Inn and Hostel. We also sell books at a variety of events around Kampala at International Schools, second hand flea markets, and private sales. The Book Exchange both generates funds, and promotes a healthy and affordable reading culture to expats and Ugandans alike.



Bountiful Baskets fundraising initiative.



Book Exchange fundraising initiative and to promote a healthy reading culture in Uganda.

We have also started selling our craft items in Uganda, something we originally abandoned back in 2006 when we were selling sling bags to Source Café in Jinja and then EVERYONE started copying us. We have now decided it is worth having some of our designs plagiarised to have the local exposure to other, larger NGO's, companies, and individuals who may want to buy our products. We have been selling crafts at venues such as international school bazaars, holiday markets, LMS markets, International Women's Day Pop Up Shop market, and privately hosted markets.

In accordance with Peace Demonstration farm, we have started a Bountiful baskets program here in Kampala where we deliver baskets of fresh produce and locally made items to subscribers every Monday morning. This serves as income generating activity, and a way of connecting small scale farmers and producers to the consumers. The local farmers get a higher, fairer price for their yield and the consumers are awarded with fresh, local, organic, and healthy veggies delivered to their doorsteps. In the future we would like to be able to produce upwards of 70% of the basket contents at the farm, but for now we are sourcing with many different farmers to ensure variety.



Masks from our fundraising Masquerade Ball at MishMash.



Our booth at International Women's day.



Our weekly booth at Abalimi Farmers Market.

We also have a stall at the Abalimi Farmers market every Saturday morning selling plants, herbs, and books.

In June we partnered with MishMash Foundation and held a month of awareness campaign and fundraising activities for Grassroots Uganda at their bar/ restaurant in Kololo, Kampala. We did not actually make much money, but it was a MASSIVE learning experience. Our activities included a photography exhibit of our women with a documentary about women’s empowerment, a masquerade ball, trivia night, a raffle, and an end of the month festival featuring local artisans, dancers, and music performers.

Overall it was a very good year. Our international craft sales were comparable to other years, and the economic empowerment we were able to bring to our women and artist co-op was comparable as well. Our biggest accomplishment was buying an additional acre of land in Budugala which we are using to expand Peace Demonstration Farm, and which we will likely establish our main office sometime in the future.

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Lee Koelzer
Director