



Issue 50

Newsletter

Autumn 2019

Trustees' visit to Uganda in March 2019

Chrissy Bentley writes:

“Michael and I had a wonderful trip to Uganda this March in the company of fellow-Trustees Jane and Christopher Sturdy. Although I have been a Trustee of FOAG for many years, it was my first visit so a great pleasure to put faces to people and above all be reminded of the courage and resilience of Ugandans some of whom are faced with huge challenges in their everyday lives. To witness their good humour, warm welcomes and generosity of spirit is humbling and it renewed my energy to keep supporting them financially through FOAG's projects. That of course means thanking all our supporters and finding new ones to make all this keep happening and growing!

We visited all four of the rehabilitation centres to see the young people FOAG supporters are sponsoring in their education and for surgery. A great day was going to Budaka, Sofia's home for many years and sharing in her celebration of her achieving her Nursing degree. An inspirational speech from Sofia to all the disadvantaged young people brought tears to my eyes. And of course there was music and dancing and cake to complete a very special day.

Among others we visited Kobbi, who gets around with wheelchair and crutches, and is completing his Accounting studies and wants to set up a little business.

Of course not all children are high achievers but in the right setting, education is life-changing for the students and their families.



Budaka Centre residents

A very important new Project has grown out of this visit in which I have a particular interest as it marries the needs of the Centres to feed their children – no mean task to find two meals a day when income is negligible - and our Grow More Project. On meeting Patrick Walusansa and learning of his experience in Sustainable Agriculture it seemed an ideal opportunity to match his experience and expertise with the Centres who each have a small acreage of land which could be much more productive if better managed. With the best will in the world the wonderful Sisters are not agriculturalists so their yields are poor and food bills relentless and high. Patrick has drawn up a plan to not only increase their yields of maize and beans (the staples of Ugandan diet), but to develop a vegetable patch with the children's help and do it in a way that improves yields and increases the sustainability

of the land. These plots will hopefully also provide inspiration for farmers nearby as well and Patrick plans to run an education day for the community too. So potentially lots of gains! As you read this, the first crops have been sown and the rains have come – hopefully not a deluge but just right for the January harvest! FOAG is committed long term to this work in three homes and two schools as establishing such practices takes time but in the long term there are great benefits.”

Chrissy’s report introduces a new phase in the expansion of our Grow More initiative.

Climate change is already making farming more difficult in Eastern Uganda. In sub Saharan Africa there have always been periods of drought but drought and its consequences seem to be getting worse. It is widely reported that grain yields are falling, and with a rising population this is not good news.

There are no quick and easy solutions to this issue but the answer does largely lie in the soil. Before people came along and removed the tree cover the land was very productive producing a lot of green matter. It was productive because the soil was shaded and there was lots of organic material returned to the soil.

It is now widely appreciated the world over that soil fertility and farming sustainably can be improved by minimising disturbance of the soil, building organic matter levels, maintaining a green cover and employing legumes in the rotation. Furthermore, in an environment such as Uganda, trees fixing nitrogen and providing dappled shade can enhance soil fertility. This type of farming is known as Conservation Agriculture (CA) or agroforestry, as it combines food production with trees.

In essence, CA involves the following practices:

- Ripping grooves in which to plant seeds and any fertiliser instead of ploughing. Ploughing increases the surface area of exposed soil and thus increases evaporation and also the oxidation of precious organic matter.
- Leaving crop residues and all organic matter on the soil instead of raking it up and burning.
- Planting the crop in alleyways between rows of nitrogen-fixing shrubs (see photo). These shrubs need trimming each year and the trimmings can be fed to livestock or dried in the sun and used as fuel to bake bread.
- Leaving scattered larger trees in the crop area to provide a degree of dappled shade from the strong sun near the Equator.
- Making gently sloping contoured terraces on sloping ground to minimise runoff and erosion.



Conservation Agriculture alley cropping

We have long wished for all the Rehabilitation Centres we support to be able to more successfully feed themselves by growing crops on their plots.

We are introducing CA practices to the three Centres which we have supported for many years, at Budaka, Butiru, and Pamba (Soroti), also at the new ‘Youfra’ institution at Ngetta near Lira further north, and at Kigulya Primary School near Masindi.

To facilitate this we have enlisted the services of Patrick Walusansa. Patrick is a colleague of FOAG Associate Ben Barnes and has been involved in the grain monitoring of the Waste Less project. He is an agriculturalist and familiar with all these issues and has a long interest in growing crops in such institutions to improve nutrition and food security. He has shown himself to be diligent, thoughtful and compassionate. He has already begun his visits and will be overseeing the introduction of CA to these establishments, guiding and encouraging.

The benefits to the Centres of moving away from open field cultivation are:

- In the long term, increased fertility of the soil rather than depletion or just maintenance. To use a model of farming to improve yield, be sustainable and easier to work.
- Greater food security and reduced food bills.
- To give the children a more varied and nutritionally sound diet. This improves their food security, their health and may earn a small amount of income.
- Such plantings may function as a demonstration plot to the community thereby spreading good CA practice.

Secondly, we are partnering with Eastern Archdiocesan Development Network (EADEN) to introduce CA on a larger scale to many hundreds of farmers and growers in the Mbale-Iganga-Tororo area initially, and our budget for this over the next five years is £25,000.

The project with EADEN will start in January 2020. A local agriculturalist experienced in agroforestry will be employed to oversee the project and work in conjunction with the EADEN agricultural extension workers. Local experience and that from neighbouring countries will be distilled into a plan and training manual. Three farmers from existing cooperatives will be selected to establish and run three demonstration gardens. In the second year these demonstration gardens will be used as the basis for training more farmers. Sustainability for the long term will be achieved by involving local government extension workers and working through the cooperative's structures.

If you would like to hear more about either of these Grow More projects then please get in touch, via Robin Dean our Administrator, Rectory Cottage, Stanford Bridge WR6 6ST; info@foag.org 01886 853295. We are very happy to come and talk to your group.

For those of you interested these are informative sites:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/226214821_Evergreen_Agriculture_A_robust_approach_to_sustainable_food_security_in_Africa

https://conservationagriculture.org/portfolio_page/choolwe-mwinga/

Waste Less

Food security with simple technology

For the fourth straight year, the number of hungry people in the world has risen – it now exceeds 820 million, says the United Nations.

An additional 1.3 billion people have experienced food insecurity at moderate levels, meaning they did not have regular access to nutritious and sufficient food – and Africa is worst hit.

There are many varied and complex reasons for these staggering numbers. In Uganda, one reason is that farmers lose on average 30 per cent of their crop before it has ever reached a cooking pot or plate.

That's why, with your support, FOAG has developed three Waste Less Food projects where we work with farmers and local NGO partners to prevent food loss and improve farmer livelihoods.

Our first Waste Less Food project continues to go from strength to strength. It was established in 2016 with a local NGO, CIRIDE, in a small village called Namalu, in the Karamoja region of north-eastern Uganda where farmers face extreme weather conditions and food shortages.

With your help, Namalu is now taking back control of its food – and reducing food waste at the same time.

Three years ago, we installed a 40-foot second-hand shipping container – our food store. CIRIDE then trained 300 local farmers in post-harvest handling and gave them all a tarpaulin on which to dry and clean their maize harvest.

Apart from improving their home-stored food, these farmers also sell their high-quality maize to CIRIDE at 10% premium on market prices. CIRIDE then store it in hermetically sealed 'PICS' bags

inside the container. The bags are kept safe and dry in the container and the grain quality is maintained.

Later in the year when local food supplies run low, market prices soar and become unaffordable. This is when CIRIDE sells the maize at a 10% discount to vulnerable families. Farmers win. Vulnerable families win. And CIRIDE even turns a profit – around £4,000 to date – to reinvest into the project.

Now moving into its fourth year, CIRIDE is reinvesting profits to help farmers increase the capacity of the project from 30 to around 60 tons of maize, which can help save 20 tons of food loss every year, providing food security to thousands more vulnerable people in the region.

More expansion, with your help

Our second Waste Less Food project, with our NGO partners EADEN, has also grown considerably. Last year, EADEN kicked off the project and enrolled 300 farmers to train and store 30 tons of food. This year, thanks to your continued support, we are pleased to announce an expansion of the project to support a further group of 300 farmers, doubling the storage capacity to 60 tons, to prevent more food losses and provide food security to thousands more.

In total, the EADEN and CIRIDE-led projects have now initiated around 120 tons of improved storage which could save around 40 tons from ruin every year, providing food security for tens of thousands. In addition, we are working directly with 900 farmers, improving their livelihoods and their own ability to feed their families.

We don't want to stop there. Please get in touch to learn more about the project and how you can help to grow it even further. If you would like to support financially, £12,000 would set up an entire Waste Less Food project for 300 farmers, while just £3 will buy a 100kg PICS bag for a farmer to improve their home storage.

For more information, contact williamtsurman@gmail.com.



Michael and Chrissy at Namalu

Solar-powered grain milling

FOAG Associate Ben Barnes has started this very exciting initiative. Most of the people living in Uganda are very small-scale subsistence farmers; Apart from matoke, a variety of green banana, they grow crops of maize, millet, sorghum and beans mainly for their own consumption, but hopefully with a bit for sale. The most important grain of these is maize. Traditionally the dried maize kernel is milled to flour, then made into a kind of porridge called posho, and eaten with cooked beans. All over the country are small electric or, more usually, diesel-powered mills to which the farmers, unless they have one of their own, will bring their maize.

To reduce dependence on fossil fuels, on the need for engine maintenance and repair, and on unreliable electricity supplies, Ben has involved Farm Feed Systems of Cinderford to adapt one of their robust standard small mills to be powered by a 24 volt DC motor instead of the conventional mains 240 volt AC one. This will be powered by solar panels feeding into standard lorry batteries.



Matoke on sale by the roadside

As far as we are aware, the only other solar-powered mill available uses traditional (for Europe) granite millstones which have to be dressed and replaced regularly, something Ugandans are not used to. Our mill uses easily replaced rotating steel flails with the flour passing down through a perforated sleeve.

What a wonderful revolution this might be. FOAG has committed £9,000 to the development and testing of the prototype, its transport to Uganda, and installation and evaluation with the co-operative at Budhaya near Tororo, the site of our new grain-storage project.

Like all we do, this is hands-on bench and spanner practical small-scale work on site, by unpaid supporters. No conference visits, no focus groups, no years of indecision, no Land-Cruisers.

Sponsored Education

Thank you again for your generous response to our Summer Appeal last year for funds to help educate children, whose parents do not have the means to pay or who have no parents at all, identified by the nuns running the Homes.

We now have about 30 secondary-level students in the Scheme, as well as (of course) our three flagship graduates who have been supported by FOAG's donors all the way from their homes down the narrow dusty track to professional employment in their home country.

We are sending over £15,000 per year to pay for secondary and College education.

Please keep going, everyone, with this support – you are changing lives. See 'how to donate' below.

Medical Operations

Many of the children in the Centres have disabilities in varying degrees, and FOAG has for many years funded some of the necessary operations. In the past year we have sent over £10,000 for these and for prostheses such as prosthetic legs for child amputees.

We also have provided funds for doctors to examine and recommend treatment for ten young children who can only get about by crawling.



Mother with club foot baby

The 2019 Summer Appeal

This year our Summer Appeal was for Kigulya Primary School, near Masindi in western Uganda. Our thanks to all who responded, and so far it has raised over £4,200, which will have a buying power equivalent to over £50,000 in UK – or about £70 per pupil in our terms.

At Kigulya this is an almost unbelievable uplift.

The Head Teacher James Mugema has bought two computers and a printer, books, shelving and consumable materials. Building work is now going on to improve pupils' access to the classrooms, and to replace the earth floor of several classrooms with polished concrete.



Improved classroom access under construction at Kigulya

Young Franciscans at Lira

We are supporting a new (for us) Centre established by Franciscan nuns who are long-standing colleagues of FOAG, assisted by a group called Young Franciscans (YouFra).

The Sisters and YouFra have offered refuge and sanctuary and schooling to some of the refugees left after the LRA Uprising, such as young mothers who were teenage rape victims, and their children, who are now aged from about five. We all remember the barbarity of the so-called Lord's Resistance Army in and around this area, and these people are traumatised by what they have seen, suffered, and experienced. Some are orphans.

Among them are a number of the "usual" disabilities - club feet, bent legs, inability to walk or squat, often due to wrongly administered quinine injections hitting the sciatic nerve, and at least one

leg amputation in an 8-year-old due to snakebite, with no prosthetic leg. A FOAG supporter's very generous donation of £3,000 plus £750 Gift Aid is being used to attend to their medical needs – and that girl now has her new leg. The Centre's facilities are inadequate almost to the point of absence, so FOAG is sending £7,500 to enable the building of a kitchen, toilets, doors and other necessities.

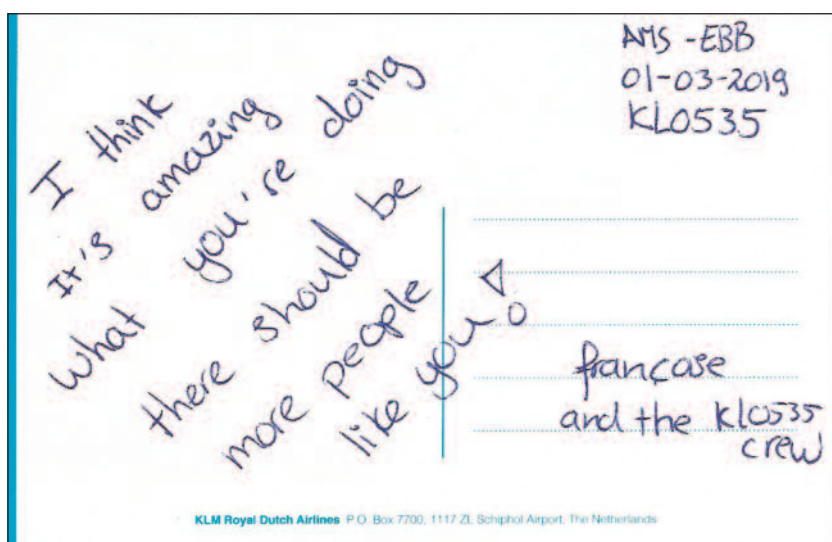
Cyber stuff

We are sadly not including any photographs in the version of this Newsletter posted on our website. This is because Google, and no doubt others, have a habit of pulling photos out of such publications, without our authorisation, and lumping them in a gallery with others which their algorithms think are relevant. However, quite often some other items in the gallery are not appropriate as neighbours; our photos may appear to the viewer to be linked with single-issue fanatics of one kind or another whose photos appear alongside, but which have nothing to do with our work in Uganda.

Tell a friend (or two)

The best way to spread the news about a small charity such as ours is by word of mouth, and personal recommendation. Donations from our loyal supporters are the only way we can make things happen. By talking to friends about why you support FOAG they can become interested and may want to see this Newsletter and join by contacting Robin Dean (the website is sadly in need of a major update).

On our way to Entebbe this year with KLM we were talking to one of the flight attendants who asked why we were going, and she later gave us this card.



However, it's not so much what **we** are doing that's amazing, it is how **you** help us to make a difference, "one child at a time" as they say at Entebbe's CoRSU Hospital. We thank all those who continue to support what FOAG does in its small way, as do our partners on the ground in Uganda, and the many beneficiaries of the work. Thank you.

Going to Uganda

Our visits are funded by ourselves privately. If you are wondering whether you might like to join us on the next one: what's involved, where we go and how, seeing all our contacts and local partners, please get in contact via Robin Dean. But, be warned: you will be hooked. By the warm welcome, the friendly nature of the people, by the country's progress that we see year-on-year, by the need that is still there, by the ongoing dedication of our partners on the ground. You will end up happily sending us more than you thought you could afford, hearing happy and grateful student voices on WhatsApp, and knowing you have made a little difference in a big world.



Buying lunch for the road

Can you help?

FOAG is currently looking for a reliable and self-motivated volunteer to help manage, support and coordinate our work with children's medical operations.

FOAG works with four Centres in Uganda where we support disabled children by financing and giving them access to life changing operations.

We need someone who can manage a small budget, evaluate requests from the four rehabilitation centres we are working with and follow up on information before and after the operations, ensuring the right support is given.

A knowledge of medical procedures is advantageous but not necessary, we estimate around 4 – 6 hours per month are needed.

There will be no salary paid – as with all of us; no travel is necessary.

We would also be really glad of help with co-ordinating the arrangements for secondary education.

If you would like more information, please in the first instance contact our Administrator Robin Dean, Rectory Cottage, Stanford Bridge WR6 6ST; info@foag.org, 01886 853295.

How to donate to FOAG

Please send a payment to CAF Bank, account name Farmers Overseas Action Group, sort code 40-52-40, account No. 00015662, with your name please. Or a cheque payable to Farmers Overseas Action Group sent to our Administrator: Robin Dean, Rectory Cottage, Stanford Bridge, WR6 6ST.

If you would like your donation to go towards a particular project, then please make this really clear in your reference in the Bank transfer, or on the back of a cheque, and we will allocate it accordingly. Please consider FOAG when revising your Will.

Concert

Once again the excellent Cheltenham Symphony Orchestra under conductor David Curtis will be giving a concert in support of FOAG in Pershore Abbey WR10 1BB on Saturday November 30th 2019 at 7.30 pm.

They will perform Grieg's Peer Gynt Suite No. 1, Glazunov's Concerto for saxophone played by Lydia Kenny, and Tchaikovsky's Sixth Symphony, the 'Pathétique'.

Tickets £16, including a free drink, Students £8, children 15 and under free.

From the FOAG Office (01886 853295), Rectory Cottage, Stanford Bridge WR6 6ST; info@foag.org, online at Eventbrite.co.uk (additional charge applies); at Blue, 19 Broad Street, Pershore; and at the door.

The concert is always a good opportunity to meet friends in the 'FOAG family' and we look forward to seeing you there.