

Turning Leaves Uganda

Newsletter 17, July 2021

Dear friends and family,

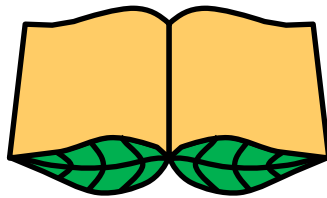
Greetings from Uganda! I hope all are well and enjoying the relative freedom of life in the UK (and elsewhere), now that many of the restrictions have been lifted – a great encouragement! Here in Uganda, we are unfortunately experiencing a second wave of Covid, with many more people than before becoming unwell and needing hospitalisation. The country has, therefore, entered another lockdown with a number of different restrictions in place, including no inter-district travel (apart from for a few categories of people), no use of private or public vehicles (again, apart from for a few categories of people), a curfew, mandatory mask-wearing in public places and the closure of all schools and tertiary institutions. This is for an initial 42 days. Much to my relief, cafes are still allowed to open, as long as ‘standard operating procedures’ are observed! So access to the internet and a good cup of coffee are still possible. Unfortunately, one of the biggest challenges in Uganda is that the hospital system is struggling to deal with the crisis, not only in terms of a lack of hospital beds, but also in terms of a lack of oxygen, even though more is now being produced. I hear that there are not even enough oxygen canisters to meet demand. This simple lack has led to a number of people dying where they might otherwise have survived. Some private clinics and hospitals also seem to be charging outrageous fees for Covid inpatients. This means that many people simply cannot afford hospital care, even when they are very unwell. This is a general problem but is getting a lot of press at the moment because of Covid. Another problem, more generally, is that there appears to be a rise in the number of children on the streets. This is probably for a number of reasons, including that schools have not been fully opened for over a year. I never quite know whether to give something to the adults and children begging on the streets or not. On the one hand, they are desperate. On the other, giving handouts (especially money) can unfortunately make a bad situation worse. Sometimes children and adults with physical disabilities are sent to beg on the streets by other people. If you give money, there is a good chance it may end up in the hands of the one who is forcing them to go to the streets.

Nonetheless, life goes on and there is always something positive to balance out the sadness. I am about to become an aunty to a biological niece or nephew in the UK, and an adopted aunty (again!) to my family in Uganda. My sister, Ruth, is now nearly six months pregnant with her first child and is looking great! I am more and more keen to visit the UK at Christmas so I can meet the baby (as well as Bob, my brother-in-law). Here in Uganda, Irene is about to give birth to another little boy. I seem to be learning rather a lot about pregnancy! All the talk of babies has perhaps gone to my head as I have felt inspired to create a child development workshop for Nursery teachers, for which I have done a little on the development of the baby from conception – very interesting! I look forward to presenting this to teachers, whenever schools reopen again.



1. Appreciation

Many thanks for all who have given in encouragement, prayer or financial gifts. It is much appreciated. It has been great to be in touch with friends and family, from all over the world! Despite the current inability to travel much, I am grateful for technology, which enables easy communication with people both near and far. However, I continue to hope I can thank many of you in person, later on in the year.



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2. Food Aid and Malnutrition Projects

Thank you so much for food aid donations. We were able to provide 26 families in Namabasa with food aid packages containing posho (maize flour), beans and cooking oil. The elderly, those living with HIV/Aids and orphans were prioritised. Family sizes in Uganda are generally a lot bigger than in the UK, for example, with extended family members all living under one roof, or in one community. This can make feeding everyone a big challenge. With the effects of last year's poor harvests (due to the first Covid lockdown) still being felt and a disappointing harvest this year due to climate change, it would be great to be able to donate some more food to the most vulnerable, especially in Namabasa. If you are interested in supporting this project, please contact Dad!

We also managed to harvest beans from the Turning Leaves land. A number of community members got involved with the harvesting and 75kg of beans were dried and are now being replanted: 50kg by 10 farmers in Namabasa and 20kg by Anna and Dinah (two of Joseph and Irene's foster daughters) on the Turning Leaves land. Additionally, seven families in Namabasa received beans to be eaten, and we also enjoyed some at home. We are hoping for an abundant harvest!



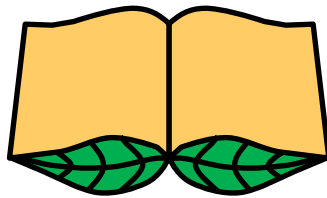
3. Schools Work

We are now unable to do any schools work because all schools have been closed. As I mentioned above, I am taking the opportunity, while I am both unable to do my normal work and to study, to work on a week-long workshop for the Nursery teachers we have been working with in Musoto Christian School (in Mbale) and Shammah Junior School (in Soroti).

4. Demonstration Farm

I thought I would share some stories from day-to-day life on the farm. Two of the bulls died (one because it fell sick and the other because it managed to swallow a plastic bag and there was no way of getting it out). This was, of course, unfortunate but the result was that around 150 families in Namabasa received meat and, therefore, enjoyed some much needed protein that night! I should, perhaps, add that the meat was examined by a local vet and declared to be fit for human consumption. Joseph told me that nothing went to waste; all even remotely edible parts of the bulls were consumed (including head and legs)!





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You can never start learning how to farm too young. Dollar (age 5) is already interested in all aspects of animal rearing and enjoys taking the goats to graze and helping to feed the various birds in the morning (we also have a small farm at home). Fairly frequently, we eat chickens, ducks and turkeys and, believe it or not, Dollar had been keen to slaughter a duck for some time (and was always refused to do so by the older children). However, Joseph decided that the time was right for Dollar to do the deed, and indeed he did (eventually) succeed – apologies to all animal lovers. When I said to him, afterwards (I missed the actual event), ‘Dollar, you’re covered in blood!’ he responded with, ‘Oh, I’ve just come from slaughtering a duck.’ I think it was something of an initiation rite. Irene told him that he had now entered manhood! In all seriousness, however, it is great to see such young children so interested in farming, and willing to get involved.

5. School Land

As mentioned above, the school land is currently being used for farming purposes. As well as planting beans, Anna, Dinah and Joseph have also been planting eucalyptus trees which, when grown, can either be sold or used as building materials for the school. Dad has found a very interesting school being built near Kampala. It has an ecological bent and they are using all locally produced materials for construction. It would be great to visit it sometime next year in order to get ideas for our school. It would also be interesting to see whether we could build a partnership as they seem to have similar interests and ideas regarding education. I hope that Dad will be able to visit next year, so that we can explore options.

Conclusion

Despite lockdown, life is continuing and things are continuing to move along (albeit a little slowly). Many thanks again for your continuing interest in Turning Leaves and all the various things we are getting up to! I very much appreciate it and it is always great to hear from you.

With love and best wishes,

Emma

