



UGANDA BEADS OF HOPE PROJECT

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Coming from Northern Uganda gave me an impression that I had seen the worst ruins that any conflict can leave. People were displaced from their homes, impoverished and unable to make a living. They have to wait for food from kind hearts that may see their plight and lend a helping hand.

People were displaced from their homes and forced into internally displaced camps in the 1990's. However, there are those that didn't wait for the government orders to move into displaced camps for safety. They quickly moved to far off towns and cities in and out of the country. Many people from northern Uganda fled to the Diaspora (those that could afford to), while others left for Kampala and other districts, such as Masindi and have had to live as refugees since then. Many have adapted and may not find it easy to go back except for visits.

This is what has become of many families in Kireka who moved to Kampala in search of a better life and above all security from the conflict in Northern Uganda. The residents of this area were lucky to be given a portion of land by the King of Buganda to squat on in the meantime. They have settled there and have learned to call this place home. The place, 'Acholi Quarters' as it has been named, is home to many people (mainly the Acholi people who are a tribe from Northern Uganda)

The area is prone to diseases. Many parents are unable to raise funds to send their children to school, while some keep them home to help them in blasting of rocks in the quarry to make gravel in order to raise money for their families. They live in mud and wattle houses with polythene bags as windows and roofs.

Early every morning they go to the stone quarry by 6am and leave at 7pm in the evening with only half a dollar earned after the hard day's work, which is not enough for food. Many of the women are widows; the children are orphans with no hope for income but work in the stone quarry. They are filled with hopelessness. As it is for most orphans and widows in Uganda, when they lose a father or husband, the relatives normally come and take all the property and belongings leaving the women and children with nowhere to start over. Many of these women lost their husbands during the war while some died of HIV/Aids.

It is this state that I (Jessica Okello) found the women in when I visited the area after a friend told me of the appalling conditions of the people there.



I was so grieved on seeing the kind of life in this area that I prayed for God's direction in helping these women.

God provided some money through ALARM to enable the women to explore alternative ways of raising funds for their families. A volunteer from within the area with knowledge of bead making was hired to teach the women to make beads. A group of 22 women were taught bead making and they started doing the work with the hope that they would find a market and sell them to raise some income for themselves and their children. Within a few months the number had risen to 25 women. Currently there are 135 women participating in bead making. They are divided into 4 groups: 3 in Kampala (Kireka) and one in Gulu.

The women have since been encouraged to make fashionable beads to be able to compete with similar ones in the market. ALARM has also been able to give them a machine for cutting papers.

By the grace of God, ALARM has managed to find a market for the beads among partners and friends mainly in the US. The US office has been very helpful in this. In turn, the women are paid well above the Ugandan market price for their efforts and they are very happy with it. This has brought a big improvement among the women, many of whom have left the stone quarry and are resorting to other less stressful income generating activities.

ALARM has been able to employ two people to help with the beads: one in Gulu helping Molly, the Northern Region Coordinator, and Jane helping in the Kampala office with the Women and the Children programs that are growing.

Achievements of the Bead Project

- There has been an increase in household income for most of the women with which they have been able to pay for their children's education and improve feeding of the family.
- The bead project has contributed to housing improvement of the participants from mud and wattle houses to brick and mortar houses. This has reduced the risk that comes with poor housing conditions.
- The women formed work groups which have been essential in offering social support to members. They can thus counsel, advise and pray for each other within the groups and even offer moral support. For example, when a lady in the Gulu group lost a son in an accident, the group members helped in strengthening and encouraging her during this tough time. Also when one of them gets sick they are very concerned, so they visit, encourage and provide needs where necessary.



- The women have formed a dance group, which has been important for psychosocial therapy and also as a source of income since other people are able to hire them to entertain guests on different occasions.
- As part of a group activity, adult literacy classes have been started among the women, most of whom were initially illiterate. As a result, many have been able to accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior as they can now read the Bible for themselves and also do other tasks that require basic literacy.
- Some of the money raised from the beads has been used to pay school fees for some children, especially those at higher levels and with expensive fees that the women may not afford.
- Through the income from the beads, ALARM has been able to offer medical support to children and women that are very sick and have no means of accessing health services.
- The women have also received a number of trainings in skills such as crocheting, knitting, hygiene, parenting, business skills, and bookkeeping.
- At least 20 women returning to their homes in Northern Uganda from the Internally Displaced People's (IDP) Camps have received 20 goats to help them as they start their new life at home. The women who are returning will also receive hybrid chickens as they go home from the camps.
- Some of the women returning from the IDP camps and going back home have been able to put up new huts for their families after over 20 years in the camps.
- They have also been able to open up the land that they vacated many years ago and have started cultivating it, they now employ people to work in their garden. The rain let them down the last season but they are expecting a good yield this season.
- We have also opened up for each group bank accounts for their group saving which is compulsory for the Kampala women who make beads. This helps them to develop a culture of saving and also have a savings when times get hard.

Testimonies

1. Akullu Helene in Gulu

Akullu Helen is a 60 year old widow with four children, two girls and two boys, and lives in Koro Abili in Gulu. She lost her husband in March 2003; this is what she had to say:

“Before I joined the group, life was very difficult. I would go and dig in people’s gardens with my children and also brew beer for money for our survival. I could not afford paying school fees for my four children.



Only the two boys were in school. We also did not have proper clothing for me and the children. We basically wore rags. We shared a hut with my four children and slept on two old papyrus mats with no coverings. We owned few utensils which included three plastic plates, one leaking water jar, a pan and pot for cooking. When ALARM came to our area, we formed a group and started making beads, and with the income from the beads I have managed to do the following:

My children are all in school; my eldest son finished a course in building and construction and is now supporting the family as well. My other son who was in High School unfortunately died in a motor accident in May, but he was in school too.

I have been able to purchase most of the basic essentials such as utensils, mattresses, blankets, sheets and clothes for my family. We also eat well nowadays.”

2. Alice Oyella, a displaced widow living in Kampala.

This is her story: “I have lived in this area almost 15 years. My husband died 6 years ago of HIV/AIDS. My 4 children have not been going to school. I have been living in a temporary mud house with a polythylene roof, which the wind has been blowing off every time there is a lot of wind and rain.

But when I learned about making beads, which ALARM-Uganda helped me sell, my kids now go to school. I started buying a few bricks at a time and saving. Now I have been able to put up a two room brick house where we are sleeping with my children. My children go to school, eat well, and dress well too. I can buy antiretroviral (ARVs) drugs for myself. The greatest thing that has happened to me is I have received the Lord as my personal savior. I have hope. I have eternal life. Thank you ALARM.”

Conclusion

The bead project has brought hope to not only women, but also many families whose standard of living has improved greatly.

The thousands of beads that have been made and sold have each represented the hope that now is reflected on the faces of the many women. Each bead on a string represents a ray of hope brought to an entire population.



ACHIEVEMENTS IN PICTURES



Class in progress-Adult literacy lessons



Wait! Don't dispose of those posters! I can make jewelry out of them!



A widow receives a piglet



Women receive goats



Pigs at the Demonstration Center where women will be trained in piggery



Alice in front of the house she built with proceeds from the beads



It's celebration time!! Women get to the groove; a therapy activity as well as entertaining. Who said I am too old to dance to the African drum?? Women entertaining onlookers