

THE MIFUMI PROJECT FACT SHEET

Mifumi Village

Mifumi is located in Kirewa sub-county, 33KMs West of Tororo Town in the South East of Uganda one of the worlds poorest nations.

- The village has a population of 3624 people
- 1,993 are aged under 20.
- There is no access to electricity or safe drinking water.
- The only form of transport means available is by bicycle.
- AIDS has affected every household.
- The overall life expectancy in the district is 47.
- There is currently no access to medical services in the village.

Background

The Mifumi Project started in 1993 as a community effort to reopen the primary school in Mifumi Village.

Through interaction with the community, other needs were identified and in 1995, a revolving loan scheme was established in collaboration with the Women's Guild.

In 1998, the project further expanded with the inclusion of the domestic violence intervention project. In the same year, the Mifumi Project received official registration status as an NGO (Non Governmental Organisation) from the Uganda Government.

AIM

To improve the quality of life in the villages through education, health-care provision and women's enterprise.

VALUES

- We believe in removing barriers and creating opportunities for women and girls within an equal opportunities framework
- We believe in working with and children who cannot provide for their basic and strategic needs and who live in very remote areas
- We believe in innovating and designing low cost but effective projects

Partnerships

Promote Mifumi Project (PROMPT) is an affiliated organisation and a registered charity in the U.K and our principle partner. Prompt is the main fundraiser and also provides technical assistance and expertise for the foundation of projects.

Our local partners are the Nagongera Women's Guild, The Mifumi School Management committee, Parents and Teachers association, the District Local Council and District Local government.

Mifumi Primary school

History

Catholic missionaries known as the Millhill fathers founded the school in the late sixties. In 1980 it was taken over by the government and in 1993 was phased out due to low enrolment and the lack of any buildings. In 1996 it was re-opened by the Mifumi Project with the aim of providing the community with first rate educational opportunities.

A year later the school gained its first building with a three classroom block built with funds donated by the Allied Dunbar Charitable Trust. The Mifumi Project and PROMPT have continued their support through donations and technical assistance and the school remains at the heart of the Mifumi Project.

Status

Currently the school has 538 pupils with 237 girls and 301 boys up from 1998's total of 470. Eleven pupils are disabled for which the school has no special equipment or provision. The school buildings consist of three classrooms and five latrines. Staffing is at present 7 teachers who are aided by unpaid trainee teachers from Nagongera teaching college and one volunteer from the locality. The serving Headmaster is Mr Jalwoch Owor Dominic.

Progress

- **New Buildings:**

The past school year has seen further construction in addition to the three class room block built in 1997. In response to cholera epidemics brought about by the El-nino rains, RUWASA (Rural Water and Sanitation) financed the completion of five pit latrines, the pits having been previously sunk by the parents and community members. These have

recently come in to use and are a great improvement over the previous latrines.

The villagers are also collaborating with the government in the construction of an additional two-classroom block. The community has contributed bricks, sand and labour, and the government; timber cement and iron roofing sheets. Currently the foundations have been laid and the walls built, further funds are awaited before the construction can proceed. Therefore four out of every seven lessons take place under a tree.

- **Nursery Class Established**

This month a nursery teacher has begun taking a nursery class. This has proved very successful with the class having over forty children. By providing the opportunity for pupils to begin their schooling at a younger age, we hope the school will benefit from improved levels of education in the future.

- **Helpers From Overseas**

We have also been able to welcome three volunteers who have come in-connection with PROMPT. They are Becky Rogers 25 from England, Stefan Dourrouj 21 from Sweden and David Schiller 24 from England. Much of their work for PROMPT will be at the school and we are expecting them to be very helpful especially with the pupils' use of English.

- **Continuing Donations From Well-wishers**

We have received uniform donations from PROMPT currently approximately two thirds of the pupils have uniforms. The volunteers have brought a small number of further uniforms and these will be distributed according to academic performance by the pupils. Also brought were a few items of sports equipment and some textbooks.

The Future

Building construction will continue initially with the completion of the two-classroom block. When funds have been raised the school is intending to construct a five-classroom block, one office block, one storeroom and one kitchen block. At some future time we would also like to be able to provide accommodation for teachers which would enable the school to attract staff from further afield. Land has been chosen for these buildings but at the moment providing classrooms for all the classes remains the priority.

The possibility of lunches being provided for the pupils has been evaluated and we hope to initiate a feeding program in the year 2000.

This will help with the concentration levels of the pupils, many of whom currently go from 8 am to 4 pm with no food. Also in an area where malnutrition is common, it will provide a valuable additional daily meal.

We are currently assessing the possibility of providing some civil education lessons for the older children with the aim of increasing their awareness of issues that relate to them. For example, their personal and sexual health, their rights to safety from abuse and the role of the police and government within the locality. This would allow the other branches of The Mifumi Project to work with the school for their mutual benefit.

Volunteers Viewpoint

It has been over two months since I arrived in Mifumi and the longer I stay the more I am enjoying the experience. People in the village have been extremely friendly and their help has made the lack of facilities a lot easier to adapt to. Hospitality here seems to be instinctive.

Six weeks ago I started teaching at the school. I take P6 whose ages range from 14 to 16 in English, PE and Social Studies. The children are a pleasure to teach, as they are keen to learn and very well behaved compared to English school children. The staff has also been very committed. Their lessons are lively and fun, and excellent considering they are often under a tree with nothing more than a black board and chalk. The village as a whole has been supportive of the school raising the money for the bricks and providing the labour for the construction of additional buildings.

Classes run very differently from those in the West. Firstly there are only three classrooms the other lessons being under trees. As in the whole of Mifumi there is no running water or electricity, and when it rains the lessons under trees have to be abandoned. There is very little equipment, classes of twenty may have to share three or four textbooks and until recently the sports equipment consisted of one slightly deflated football. What the school has however is made the most use of and the opportunity to receive education is greatly valued by the pupils and their families. Apart from some Jap (the local dialect) I've learnt how much we take education for granted in the West. Education here is of enormous importance in improving the lives and choices of the pupils at the school and the community as a whole.

Domestic Violence intervention Project

History

Funded by Comic Relief the project was founded in May 1999 and is one of the first of its kind in Uganda. The project aims to develop a co-ordinated community response to D.V. It puts in place a number of policy, procedural and practical measures to increase the safety of victims, to hold abusers accountable and to provide a clear message to the public and perpetrators that D.V. is unacceptable and criminal.

Status

Currently there are two staff members; Purity Umotho the Womens Project Officer and Mary Asili the Outreach Worker although in future assistance will be provided by the volunteers. The office is located within the Sub-county offices in Kirewa about 4 km from Mifumi village. Counselling is available to all women who come to the office and cases are followed up in the field by the outreach worker. In serious cases the project co-operates with the local police to stop abuse.

Domestic Violence in South Eastern Uganda

- **Domestic Violence And Dowry**

The Domestic Violence Project operates within a culture that devalues women to that of the husbands' property. Due to the Dowry system whereby cattle are paid to the parents of the Bride, the wife becomes in effect owned by the family of the husband. This of-course has ramifications in the way that women are viewed by society but also in their relationships with their husbands. Women become not only materially dependent upon their husbands (who own the land, cattle etc) but can be trapped by the debt of dowry. The family of the husband will often demand the dowry to be repaid before the wife can leave. With the possibility of escape closed to them women are forced to remain in a violent relationship.

- **Children And Domestic Violence**

With violence at home children inevitably suffer either directly through beatings, neglect, psychological abuse, being denied their basic needs or their education. Or indirectly due to the suffering of their mother.

Common problems faced by local children are:

- Forcing girls to get married for the sake of dowry, maybe so their brothers can get married with the cows paid (dowry is commonly 5 cows and 3 goats).

- A drunk father beating children together with their mother.

- Being disowned due to allegations of different fatherhood.

Progress

- **Adolescent support:**

The domestic violence intervention project has recently extended its services to boys and girls in P6 and P7 and secondary schools in Kirewa. The activities involve sensitisation of the adolescents about the presence and nature of domestic violence, counselling, advice and practical support within the community. This has been largely due to the increase in adolescents seeking help at the advice centre that followed the participation as respondents of school children in the recent research.

- **Community Safety Forum:**

The forum was formed to bring together influential members of the community to seek ways of addressing the problem as a whole. Members include representatives of the local and district police, the chair of the Womens Guild, local politicians and councillors and religious leaders. At the last safety forum meeting members formulated concrete action plans for the local institutions to tackle domestic violence. This included ways to improve the police handling of cases and how pressure could be brought on local councillors to act. Other issues discussed included the problems caused by excessive drinking, polygamy and unfaithfulness, dowry and poverty.

- **The “Dream Team”**

The Womens Forum was founded to expand on the work of the DVI project and to ensure continued progress is made by the community when the project is disbanded (it has only been budgeted until 2000). Therefore much depends on the Womens Forum or “the dream team”. Four women have been recruited from each of the four parishes and we are glad to report that they are performing very well. As they come from a wide area victims will have at least one person to report to within their vicinity. The training of the “dream team” continues on counselling victims and ways to evade DV.

- **Facilities Improved**

More good news is that at last we have been able to move to a new office that offers more room and privacy. Women can now report confidently without fear of their husbands seeing them.

Also Mary our outreach worker has become a very proficient cyclist due to our recent acquisition of a bicycle. This is proving a great help in handling distant cases.

The Revolving Loan Scheme

History

The project was initially funded by Comic Relief with further funds for additional loans and business training for the women coming from the Department for International Development DfID. It is run in collaboration with the Nagongera Womens Guild. It covers a large area; three sub-counties Kirewa, Nagongera and Paya.

The project aims both to increase the wealth, training and entrepreneurial spirit in the population and to promote the self-sufficiency of women. Small loans are given to individuals in groups of 3-5 to set up small businesses and a time scale agreed for the repayment of the loan.

Status

Grace Anguparo the womens credit officer runs the scheme. To date we have granted 183 loans totalling 8,225,000 Ugandan Shillings around 3,400 pounds. The scheme currently has a 94% repayment rate in all its areas of operation. The number of registered Womens Guild members in the region covered (who are entitled to loans) is 1350.

Businesses Started Through the Scheme:

Piggery and Poultry Farming

Animal husbandry has been a popular choice for the use of loans. Most commonly Turkeys or Pigs are kept and bred. This provides the women with a source of income from the offspring if they are sold, and if not a way of saving. Often women will use some of the loan to purchase an animal as security against the debt. For example a lady in Soni used some of her 50,000 Ush loan to buy a piglet for 6000, within six months it had matured and produced six piglets 3 males and 3 females. She then sold these for 33,000 making a profit of 27,000 in six months. Also she retained the sow which when mature is worth 10,000 and will continue to produce up to 12 piglets every six months or so.

Agriculture

Loans are commonly used by the women to hire land on which to grow crops. A group in Petta recently harvested seven sacks of groundnuts (peanuts) from the hired land. This practise not only benefits the women but the owners of land who are inevitably men.

Shops

Many of the women who receive loans open small shops selling general necessities, farm produce, fish etc. These are often located in the villages where before the villagers would have had to walk maybe as far as 3 km. One lady called Fidelis Opendi of Petta opened a small bakery the profits of which enabled her to buy a calf for about 150,000 which is now ready to produce calves of its own.

Restraints

The high rate of illiteracy amongst the women continues to restrict the number of women that can have access to the loans. In order to gain a loan the women will have to at least be able to write their own name and recognise it in their own handwriting. Many women run their businesses without any records as they cannot read or write. The Mifumi Project is still hoping to achieve funding for an adult literacy scheme for the women.

In contrast to the great beneficial effects the scheme is having on the lives of the women and their families it has also made them a target for thieves. Several women have become victims, their profit or produce being stolen by gangs of thieves who may come to their houses after dark.

Progress

- **Living Standards**

The scheme continues to have a large effect upon the community. Most obviously it gives the local women the chance to have an income.

Women have been able to afford to send a sick child to hospital or to pay for school fees when previously their husbands would have been unable to provide the money. There have even been cases where the women have paid the annual government tax (owed by the men) so their husbands don't have to sleep in the bush to avoid the tax collectors.

Even the small changes the extra money can make are greatly valued by the women's families, for example buying a charcoal stove so they no longer have to search for firewood or to be able to afford to have sugar in their tea.

The communities as a whole benefits from the increase in money changing hands and from the businesses and services that have been started as a result of the loans. Villagers may not now have to walk so far to buy provisions. Land can be rented more frequently and the owners of

a plough and oxen can hire them out where previously the rice paddies would have been ploughed by hand.

- Empowerment of Women

Importantly the scheme also empowers women who are almost considered the property of their husbands having been 'bought' by wedding dowry. Traditionally the men are in control of any money the household produces and how it is spent. With the income their businesses provide women now can have the power to ensure that there is money for clothing, school fees or medical expenses.

Also through running their businesses the women will learn how to handle money and some basic reading and writing. As well as improved skills some of the women have been able to buy bicycles and are therefore able to travel much more freely, one lady is even hoping to buy a moped. The wealth and empowerment of women helps promote development of the community as a whole; by giving women the chance to improve their lives and the lives of their families the patriarchal status quo is challenged and half the adult population has the chance to change their way of life for the better.

- Evaluators Report

The scheme was recently given assessed by Olive Kabatalya an expert in Micro Credit. The report concludes that the Women's Enterprise Project has a positive impact on the recipients in social terms, poverty reduction and gender issues. Overall the women's lives have improved economically and socially. The women are now self employed and can afford to feed, dress and educate their families better.

- Expanding Loan Base

In May this 1999 the Co-operative bank in Tororo (and throughout Uganda) which was handling the money to provide the loans was closed suddenly by the Government. All accounts were frozen. The loan scheme suffered in two ways firstly the number of loans we could provide was less than we had intended and secondly with the lack of the incentive of a further loan, loan repayments became less punctual.

However we have high hopes for the near future; as we have recently gained access to the remaining money (over twice the amount that were currently using).