

Report on trip to Kitgum, Uganda, June 2011

Team members:

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In June 2011 Five Talents UK and Five Talents Uganda sent a team to the Diocese of Kitgum, in Northern Uganda, to follow up a needs assessment that had been conducted in 2007. The people of Northern Uganda have suffered the long-term impact of the war between the Lord's Resistance Army (**LRA**) and the government of Uganda, which lasted over twenty years and had a devastating effect. Whole villages were displaced into camps, men, women and children were killed or abducted and the local economy and livelihoods were entirely destroyed. At the height of the conflict the majority of the population in the region lived in displaced persons camps, although since 2006 people have started to move back to their own land. During Five Talents Uganda's first visit to the region in 2007, many people were still living in camps and relief agencies were still operating and providing emergency aid. Since then it has been Five Talents' intention to return to the region to conduct a follow-up needs assessment and to establish how we could work alongside the Diocese to meet the needs of the people and support their recovery.

The Five Talents team visited the Rt. Rev Benjamin Ojwang Bishop of Kitgum and his team, including the Planning and Development Officer, George Omal. The Diocese of Kitgum covers the districts of Kitgum, Pader, Agago and Lamwo. In the past they have had many programmes to manage but now the relief agencies are phasing out and some of the programmes are ending. There is now a great need for longer term activities to resume, and for the people to receive help and training on how to balance their agricultural activities with small businesses in order to provide for their families and guard against the risk of drought or crop failure.

The team visited a group of women who had all been widowed during the conflict and had started saving as a collective. The support they each received from fellow group members had helped them deal with the traumas they had experienced during the conflict, and also enabled them to support their children, grandchildren and orphans of relatives.

The team learned that there were many such groups supporting each other in this way and wanting further training in setting up small businesses to support their families. Some of the groups are working to set up economic activities as a group, but most of them do not have enough start-up capital to do this. The structure of the church in the Diocese of Kitgum provides a ready-made network through which Five Talents would be

able to provide training and access to start-up capital to the communities recovering from conflict.

Following this visit, Five Talents UK is hoping to enable Five Talents Uganda to expand their activities to Kitgum, Northern Uganda. The people who will benefit from this work will be disadvantaged communities and female heads of household who currently do not have access to any formal types of finance, all of whom have suffered the effects of war.

Please consider supporting Five Talents UK in this work. We do not currently have the necessary funds. Below are the stories of some of the women this project would directly benefit:

Vicky Lapiro: (pictured below) Said that life in the camps was very restrictive, they weren't able to collect firewood or cultivate their gardens. Vicky is a widow and lost her husband in the war. She has two children to support. She was not able to say any more, which was the case with most of the members - they just gave the facts. She had tears in her eyes and had to sit down.



Filda Ogang: (pictured right) Said that while she lived in the camp she was not able to conduct a small business because it was impossible to travel to town to get supplies. Filda explained that the group started on their own



during the conflict and displacement as they tried to bring people together to support each other as they were all suffering. Even though they were in different camps they still tried to meet on Sundays after church. Filda looks after eight children, the last is in Senior 1, and she has even been able to support some of them through university.



Penny Wakwok: (pictured left) Said that now they were back in their home areas they are able to have a fireplace where they can gather their families and teach their children (this is most likely a reference to the fact that in the camps the huts were so close together there was a risk of fire as they had grass roofs, as well as the fact that the tradition of passing on skills and knowledge was weakened during the time people were displaced). Penny is supporting two children, and the group has helped her to buy uniforms and pay school fees, as well as provide food for her family.



Damalie: (pictured left) Damalie used the group savings fund to accumulate enough money to put one of her children all the way through university. Her three other children are still at school. She also takes care of her sisters' children after her sister died. Damalie started a bakery shop with money borrowed from the joint fund.

Pompila Otang: (pictured right) Pompila is a widow, and uses the group's loan fund to support her three children. As we continued hearing their stories, it was evident that most of the ladies had been widowed or lost children during the conflict. They didn't go into detail, and we were told they try not to talk about it, or remember, as it brings back the trauma.



Concluding meeting with Bishop Benjamin, Bishop of Kitgum

The Bishop was abducted by the LRA in 2002, and was caught in the crossfire between the Ugandan army and the LRA, with both sides accusing him of supporting the other. He managed to escape, but during his time and throughout the long history of conflict in the region he has witnessed first-hand the atrocities inflicted by Joseph Kony (the head of the LRA). He described Kitgum as the LRAs 'bread basket' - being so close to the border with South Sudan, they would pass through here on their way into Uganda, and then back again - every time abducting children and raping women.

In our concluding meeting the Bishop said: "When we see you, we know we are not alone. We are still traumatised. Like a sick person in hospital, seeing someone you know is like a healing tablet. We are still sick."

Appeal

The proposal for a future partnership with the Diocese of Kitgum has been on hold since the initial feasibility visit conducted in 2007 due to funding constraints. Subject to funds becoming available specifically to support this project, Five Talents is proposing to start work in Kitgum in early 2012, beginning with training for community and church leaders, existing groups and community members. Five Talents Uganda would also establish an office in Kitgum town to provide ongoing support and business mentoring. After receiving training and formulating plans for small business activities, individual group members will be eligible to apply to Five Talents Uganda (Kitgum branch) for a small loan to start a business and support their family.

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