

Welcome to our Winter Bulletin...

In it you'll find much to read, news from each of our five partner countries, and some challenges, too.

Village AiD opens new programme in Nigeria...

For the first time in nine years, since the Cameroon programme started in 1998, Village Aid has expanded operations into a new partner country. Why now, and why Nigeria?

In Agnes Ingwu, Village Aid has found an exceptional Nigerian woman as leader of our partner organisation, prepared to put 110% effort into helping her own community. Born in a remote rural area of eastern Cross-River state, Agnes' own mother is a poor widow, so Agnes knows the problems of poverty well.

Despite this, she managed to finish not only high school but also university in Nigeria through sheer hard work, and then received a Ford Foundation scholarship to study for a Master's Degree at Reading University in Development Economics. She volunteered at our office in Bakewell for two months in 2006, and we caught her enthusiasm about the organisation ADA which she helped found back in 1988.

The Abanbeke Development Association (ADA), helps 150 people, mainly young

mothers and widows, with finance and micro-credit and Agnes has now returned to Nigeria to manage an expanded programme, covering twenty four more communities.

Village Aid could only afford an initial grant of £3,500, but additional funding of £15,000 has been provided by the Isle of Man Overseas Committee, and we can now commit to running the programme through 2008.

Single mothers (39% of the population) and widows (19%) in the area face desperate problems in providing the basic essentials for their children. In 2005 the annual household cash income from subsistence farming locally was equivalent to \$36, far below Nigeria's average in the same year of \$790. Deep-rooted patriarchal customs make it impossible for a widow or a single mother to find a chief willing to guarantee a loan.

The work of ADA so far:

- 11 orphans have been supported in primary and secondary school



ADA Group Members

- 3 of these 11 have been supported to complete their college education (national certificate)
- 30 widows have acquired farm plots
- 10 unemployed youths have set up small retail businesses
- 10 single mothers have been able to pay for school fees for their children
- 2 widows have successfully claimed their deceased husbands' property
- ADA has accumulated over £1000 as credit from savings and interest on loans.

Village Aid would really like to be in a position to partner Agnes and ADA for years to come, but we need financial help to do this. If you would like to become a Project Partner for ADA, please ring 01629 888230 for more details. Any gift would be gratefully received.

Floods devastate Northern Ghana...

First there was a crippling drought across Ghana. The rains failed in early summer which meant the water courses emptied and the country's hydro-electric power station on the Volta River system could only offer intermittent service. Village Aid's partner SIMLI reported how hard the villages in the Northern region were finding it to farm and plant crops.

Then in June, the rain started and what seemed like good news then turned out to be an even worse disaster, as the highest floods in more than fifty years wiped out entire communities and destroyed homes, farms, roads and bridges. The floods rose across central Africa

as far as Uganda, and northern Ghana has suffered as badly as anywhere. There is now a real threat of cholera and typhoid, and thousands of people have been made homeless.

In response to SIMLI's call for immediate help, Village Aid has sent out initial funds of £5000, and we hope people responding to our harvest appeal will help us send more. As the rivers recede, people have to rebuild their mud based houses, and buy new tools, animals

and seeds. George Ferguson, our Africa Programme Co-ordinator for Ghana is there now, and we await more details, especially about how the precious tree nurseries, so carefully planted in recent years, have survived.

To partner the work of SIMLI with extra financial support, please phone Susanne on 01 629 888230.

Africa Matters

2007

Eight partners from West Africa joined more than fifty people for a Village Aid conference in June 2007 on the theme of 'partnership'. This came at the end of a two week partner consultation and evaluation, ably led by Alache Ode. Village Aid really wanted to be judged on its work by those African organisations it serves.



A keynote speaker was Linda McAvan, MEP for South Yorkshire, who explained the European Funding programmes for aid and development in a most helpful, cogent way.

The conference and consultation was supported with funds from the Baring Foundation as part of a three year programme to build capacity within Village Aid and its partner organisations. Much of the hard work in setting up the conference was done by Richard Ponsford, our hardworking intern for 2007. Richard has now left us to work in Bangladesh as a VSO volunteer, and we'll be advertising early in 2008 for his successor.

Our Africa Matters Day was held in the Parish Centre in Chesterfield, after an emergency evacuation there from the Afro-Caribbean centre in Sheffield, which was five feet under water from the floods!

Three visitors came from Ghana, one from Sierra Leone, two from Cameroon and two from The Gambia, and between them produced excellent workshop presentations for the conference. Representatives from other charities working with rural African communities, from the new Economics Foundation and from our many student supporters talked and ate together.



Smiling faces...

...New Hope for Orphans in Sierra Leone

Village Aid has been able to support a remarkable orphanage in the town of Mile 91, where we have our main base in Sierra Leone. In April 2007, James Kellie, VA Chair, and Susanne Garnett, the Director, both visited, and were serenaded by all the children who gathered before school to sing a welcome song. We were able to donate £2000 to the "Life for Relief" orphanage, housing more than fifty children who had all lost both parents in or after the civil war, and Nuhu Salihu, the Africa Programme Co-ordinator recently visited them again in September 2007. He was able to observe the impact of the support that Village Aid and SLYEO had provided to the orphanage.

The main house has been plastered, tiled and painted. The surrounding dormitories have also been refurbished with beds, and mattresses. Food bowls have been bought for the children – names of individual children were painted on each. An open meeting hall has been built and is hosting meetings of the Networking Alliance (a coalition of organisations and common interest groups based in Mile 91).

Mrs Kamara, who runs the orphanage, opened it when she returned to Mile 91 from Kono during the civil war. She had lost her husband during the war and so decided to return to Mile 91 where they had



Some of the orphanage residents with Mrs Kamara and Charles Lahai

a family home. She at once noticed the large number of homeless children roaming the streets with nowhere and no-one to turn to. She decided to take them in and in a very short time the compound was busting at the seams with these street children.

At the start she got support (food aid) from a battalion of UN peace keepers stationed in Mile 91 and when they left she struggled on her own, benefiting from the occasional generosity and good will of individuals. With a team of women helpers and loyal local support she has built a unit which now houses more than forty children in the orphanage, more than a hundred foster placements for others, and a primary school which educates them free of charge. The older children are sponsored to attend the local secondary schools. Conditions are very basic, but the children are loved, secure and encouraged to look to the future without self pity or bitterness.

Village Aid will be focussing its Christmas appeal this year on the Mile 91 orphans, and other vulnerable children in our partner communities.

All Change in Sierra Leone?

The 2007 elections in Sierra Leone were nail-biting for those on the ground interested in peaceful democracy. After a second round of polling, the Sierra Leone People's Party left power which has passed to the "All People's Congress" (APC). However, the real winners were those fragile concepts, peace and democracy.

Apart from some minor incidents, the elections went off without violence, much to the relief of Village Aid's partners, YAPAD and SLYEO. Staff members from both organisations were on the streets in the run up, promoting peaceful dialogue and tolerance.

YAPAD also printed and distributed posters and other materials carrying clear messages of political tolerance, circulated to all political parties. In addition, YAPAD funded educational activities at chiefdom and district levels. Above all it helped in monitoring the elections, and supported the work of the National Electoral Commission by making its vehicle available for awareness raising campaigns and displaying NEC posters.

SLYEO printed NEC materials for distribution in all its operational areas of Tonkolili, Kono, Pujehun and Freetown. It engaged in a series of radio programmes including phone-ins and supported the electoral process by using its Mile 91 office for training and recruitment of polling agents and election monitors.

The participation of both SLYEO and YAPAD in the election process enabled young people to make more informed choices, and created a safer space for them to take part in positive political activity.

People power in Sierra Leone, only five years after the end of the brutal civil war, is alive and well indeed.

Charles Lahai, Chief executive of SLYEO, and Board Chair of YAPAD, is currently studying for an MA degree in Peace and Conflict studies at the European University Centre for Peace Studies in Stadtschlaining, Austria. Exceptionally, Village Aid has sponsored Charles for this crucial period of training. He writes, "In peace work, one of the most important elements is gratitude. I am very grateful to Village Aid for their support. Although Village Aid will benefit from this learning, my country will benefit the most".

If you would like to help sponsor Charles during his MA studies, please call Susanne on 01629 888230.



Charles Lahai

Good news for

YOWE is one of Village Aid's key partners in Ghana. This year, an anonymous Charitable Foundation has pledged £95,000 to Village Aid to support YOWE's work over the next four years. Active in Eastern Region, YOWE runs reflect literacy programmes, agricultural support and micro-credit loan schemes which assist people in finding a way to earn a decent living. They have the land for a new office development to include shops and a conference centre where rural people can sell their produce and receive training. The venture could make them self sustaining as a development agency in the near future. This would be a great opportunity for a charitable investment by any philanthropist!

Akumatey Peter Tetteh, the Micro Credit and Enterprise Development Officer at YOWE has written the following article explaining how YOWE has been able to encourage and support bee-keeping and honey production.

Tackling rural poverty through Beekeeping in Ghana

Opersika is one of the rural communities in a forest zone where farming used to be the main occupation. Increase in population, and crude methods of farming practices, have rendered the arable land infertile and farming has become less profitable. The alarming rate of deforestation and desertification is now a major concern to both government and the rural folks, since the ecology is fast getting replaced by pure grass. These communities including Opersika also suffer from annual bushfires which destroy the vegetation and threaten the biodiversity. These conditions render the rural dwellers more impoverished due to poor yield resulting from erratic rainfall pattern. Nevertheless, some species of trees and shrubs still grow and serve as bee forage.

Youth and Women Empowerment (YOWE) is a local non governmental organization in Ghana, committed to development projects with the marginalized. It operates in remote rural communities in the Eastern region of Ghana. YOWE sees beekeeping as one of the effective tools for poverty alleviation and community development.

Beekeeping does not destroy the habitat which naturally provides sustenance for animal and green life thereby ensuring the sustainability of rural livelihood activities. Bees play a major role in the process of plant pollination which is necessary for high productivity in flowering plants such as maize and fruit trees which support rural life and economy.



Beekeeper

from YOWE

Youth's and Women's Empowerment

Realizing the economic importance of beekeeping, YOWE, has conducted beekeeping training, provided beehives and hive tools to participants at Opersika and other communities in which it operates. Working with these communities, YOWE argues that honey from bees is an essential part of a healthy agricultural economy these days. For instance, it does not require huge initial capital to start as it relies on local materials.

The nutritional value of bee products (honey, pollen) are very high and can be used to supplement the diet of rural people especially children. Incidentally, beekeeping can be practiced alongside other livelihood activities since it does not compete with other resources. The rural dwellers use propolis or bee glue from hive to treat skin diseases like ringworm (fungus) eczema, foot rot and rashes. The community even believes that bee venom if extracted, could be medicinal, especially for the treatment of rheumatism and arthritis. They make candles out of bee wax, which is cheaper than using kerosene. Beekeeping can be practiced with minimal outlay.

Most of the participants took the training seriously and established individual apiaries. Some few months after the installation of hives, some groups harvested and realized a substantial amount of income. They then compared the income generated from the sale of honey and wax to the farming and realized that beekeeping is a "gold mine" for the rural folk.



At Opersika, Mr Addo Teye, a family man, explained that "I have been a crop farmer since my childhood and have experienced the seasonal difficulties and the risk associated with farming. The high cost of farming inputs, poor yield as a result of erratic rainfall pattern, pest and disease infestation and above all, low market price for farm produce has been the annual problem for us." He appreciated the work of YOWE.

“ I harvested 20 gallon of honey this season and realized an amount of ₺4,200,000 or £233 which I used part to pay the hospital expense of my wife when she was provided antenatal treatment during her pregnancy, and also provided the family household needs out of the income generated from the sale of honey. ”

(Mr Addo Teye and Family)

Cameroon

The Mboscuda team in Cameroon undertook a mid term evaluation of their project, funded by Comic Relief. This was a chance to show off the skills learned, including George Ferguson from Village Aid avoiding falling off a horse when taken out for a ride by Nuhu's father!

More importantly, many of the literacy circles showed real progress and demonstrated how much they enjoyed the learning experiences through "Reflect" Training.



Circle members in Cameroon show their day's learning



George Ferguson & Mr Salihu Sr. ride out

World Class Act...

Helen Greenwood, Village Aid's Drama Education Co-ordinator, has been working all year with groups of Derbyshire students to expand their horizons and help them with their citizenship lessons in global understanding. She was joined in July by Josephine Sackey from Ghana, to run a summer school programme.



Matlock Summer School acting group with Josephine Sackey



Buxton Community School members in World Class Act project

Students from Buxton Community School and Highfields School, Matlock, were among those who learned to express themselves through social drama and role play. While learning about the lives of African children today, and during the slave trade, summer school participants made links with young mill workers in the Derbyshire textile industry in the 18th and 19th centuries. As the Village Aid office is based in an old Arkwright Mill, this was particularly appropriate.

New faces at Village AiD

Johanna Williams (Jo) has been appointed as Village Aid's Donor Development Manager, and will join us at the end of October.

She writes,

Hi, my name's Jo and I'm very excited about joining Village AiD in October as their new Donor Development Manager.

I have been interested in international development since childhood. After studying and working in European marketing in Germany for five years, I bit the bullet and volunteered in a Maasai village in northern Tanzania. Since then I have worked for an international development charity, both in east and

west Africa, and more recently in the UK.

My experience initiating partnerships with local organisations has shown me the powerful effect that an organisation such as Village AiD can have on a village. With Village AiD I know the possibility of making a tangible and long-lasting difference to a community and to someone's life is within reach.

I look forward to working with you and getting to know you soon.



New trustees

At the 2007 AGM we welcomed three new trustees:

Jebbeh Florence Francis lives in Sheffield but originates from Sierra Leone where for many years she was a teacher. Since coming with her family to the UK as refugees from the civil war she has retrained completely and now has a Sheffield University degree in nursing. Mrs Francis is especially experienced in community health care, and HIV Aids awareness training.

Alan Davies was a senior civil servant with the Department for Education and Skills until taking early retirement in early 2007 - and is now a self-employed facilitator and consultant. He trained as a statistician, and his career has featured a range of both statistical



and policy posts, mainly relating to education, training and guidance for young people. He has considerable expertise in working through partner organisations and in policy development / evaluation. Alan is married with three (almost) grown-up sons - he and his family have lived a few miles from Bakewell for 20 years. He has been a volunteer with Village Aid and is a non-executive Director of Business - Education South Yorkshire.

Kate French now lives in Derbyshire having been based in London for many years as a highly experienced management consultant, specialising in social services, health care and voluntary organisations. A former Chair of the Terence Higgins Trust, she has worked and lived in Southern Africa, and is especially experienced in supporting organisations through change and structural development.

And thanks to our retiring trustees...

Peter Peel, Sandi Filby and George Wolfe have retired from the Board this year. We are most grateful for all the help and support they've given Village Aid, and wish them all the best for the future.

Academic links...

Village Aid is making new links with local Universities. Not only did we have excellent volunteer help this summer from IDPM (Institute for Development Policy and Management) students at Manchester University, but we are also setting up close ties with both Sheffield and Derby Universities to share our development expertise and knowledge with students and staff alike. A visit to The Gambian partners from Sheffield University is planned for January, and International Development students at Derby have Village Aid's work now built into their syllabus.

Environmental audit...

As part of our commitment to carbon use reduction, we have undergone an environmental audit, funded through the Baring Foundation, and will use the results to create an energy policy for ourselves, and for our partners who are very keen to expand the use of solar power, so our campaign to send solar light units for learning circles continues on. We are also looking for ways to limit our air travel, and local vehicle use, as well as recycling all our waste paper and cardboard, and using email to communicate with supporters where possible. **TELL US YOUR EMAIL ADDRESS, PLEASE!**

Ways to help Village AiD

Not just any old Christmas cards?

Please support Village Aid by buying your Christmas cards this year from www.studio51.com. We receive a ground-breaking 51p in every £1 you spend and they are good quality cards. The website is easy to use and prices start at £3.99 for 20. They will be delivered to you by first class post within a few days. Be sure to stipulate that you want to support Village Aid. If you're not "online" we'll have some cards for sale here at the office, as well as a locally made selection of very nice crafted ones suitable for all occasions.

The London Triathlon 2008

Village Aid has pre-booked 10 places for this exciting event, to be held in August 2008. You have plenty of time to start training, so why not give it a go? Just get sponsored for Village Aid. These are precious places, much sought after by athletes. Teams of a cyclist, a swimmer and a runner can also do the event as a relay. For more details, email Jo@villageaid.org or visit our website for the link to the official London Triathlon website.

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