

25 Years of Supporting Women in Uganda – A Success Story

1990, on my first visit to Uganda, I brought small “gifts”: a few notebooks and 80 chicks for four families.

Now, after twenty-five years, 54,000 families with 324,000 children are able to generate their own income. These families founded fourteen SACCOs (small credit unions) and benefit from 300 schools that had been improved and enlarged.

What happened?

In 1990's Germany, the traditional yearly New Years Singing (Sternsinger) featured Uganda as a beneficiary and German television was showing reports. I saw horrible pictures of the civil war under Idi Amin, but also majestic landscapes and courageous, energetic women.

This set a spark in me and since, Uganda has become the location of a great mission.

How come?

I was always convinced that developmental aid has to start at the lowest level, that all men and women strive to earn their own income, provided they have a training and the chance for seed financing. I estimated that the women in Uganda would be the best partners for sensible investment.

And that's how it became!

On my first visit already, I met wise people with developmental aid background who shared my conviction. They became partners. In Germany, I founded the association “Freunde Ugandas” and in Uganda it was the association “Voluntary Action for Development” (VAD).

From the onset, our goal was to permanently improve the life of the families, to allow the many children to visit school but also to demand something in return. Hence, the ailing schools would only receive support if bricks had been made by the recipients, credits were given to women only after having received further training.

Our program consists of several steps:

- Women form groups of ten members each. They meet weekly and discuss their investment planning.
- Training in modern agriculture, stockbreeding, bookkeeping, family planning and the “rolling loan system” – our key to investments.
- My yearly inspection visits during which time an average of 240 groups received about €250 per year.
- Bank credits (VAD Bank) for successful women, allowing for expansion of their projects.

For the women it was a new feeling to be taken seriously and in fact, they initially had to combat the distrust of the men.

One moving episode was from a man who publicly acknowledged to support his wife, because they all do better now.

Meanwhile, our model had been applied to Uganda's North, the former war region of the child soldiers. And finally, a first brick school is being erected by a private endowment.

Through negotiation by Freunde Ugandas, VAD has found sponsors for water programmes from Ireland and Great Britain. There were great accolades and awards – only recently, Bill Clinton honoured the organisation for their efficiency with \$60,000.

Margaret Nakato, one of the first women to receive funding from us, has become the spokesperson of the fishermen of the world at the FAO in Rome. She says: "When you believed in our work and started to support us, you unleashed the potential of women to transform themselves and the community. It is believing in local organisation and giving them first stepping stone and they will work out of poverty."

Naggujja Rose, who started with a small grocery and now is the proud owner of a clothing shop, says: "We shall never be as poor as we used to be, because our heads have changed."

For thousands of women a dream came true through pig and chicken farming, fisheries, soap and juice production, through tailor shops and restaurants or through the communal marketing of agricultural products.

Thanks to the self-governed SACCOs and the low-interest credits, the way to a stable future is paved.

All can find a future in their own country – nobody needs to emigrate.

Twenty-five years of work in Uganda also stand for two million Euros in donations. The German government was responsible for 75% of this sum but €500,000 was collected by the many faithful donors in Germany. A great feat. Thank you.

Dear faithful donors, we should be proud because our commitment will bear fruit for years to come. This is owed to projects of daily life, through integration of the affected people and through enabling responsibility.

In February 2017, I have done the final invoicing with the German government but the association Freunde Ugandas will persist for now, for small projects in the beloved Uganda.

<http://www.freundeugandas.de>

