

## The Nkondo Excitement

We have been to Nkondo, but I have never got that feeling of being uplifted I had yesterday! For the record, this was Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2012.

Many will recall the early days (six years ago?) when Patrick Batumbya, aka “Kidera” had a home hospitality at his country home in Nkondo – a home hospitality I missed – where the social event turned into individual pledges to support the Nkondo community in their efforts to improve their lives. Petwa, it will be recalled, was a major stimulant in this. Fast forward and we see the three Rotary Community Corps formed about two year later – Kyebajatoobona; Nakasedhere; Tukorere Ghalala. Fast forward again, and there is our Natalie, a fresh Rotarian, commissioning the computer donated by Atwooki to Immeri Primary school. Some of you will have heard the story, ad nauseum, of the huge mango tree where Kidera, in baggy hand me down clothes, started his long road to being a consulting engineer. During this same visit where Natalie performed the honours, and a team of Rotarians, full of energy from bringing two projects at Namalemba to conclusion, are raring to go: they stay overnight in Nkondo, conducting so that they can conduct a needs assessment through interaction with the three RCCs. For those not in the know, this was the energetic Coco de Mer Project Team, said name having been suggested to them by now Prez Jjooga.

Let us forget this for a while and pick another thread of our story, going back to more than ten years ago when one Steve Brown (not Trustee Steve Brown) from D5340 started the linkages between D5340 and D9200 (ask people like PDG Nelson about this). Out of this collaboration, yours truly, working with now PDG Philippe Lamoise (an honorary member of RC Kampala North) plan a GSE Team Exchange for the year 2006/7 when both will be District Governors. We meet during the International Assembly (this is where incoming Governors from all over the world meet to be trained – Enter to Learn and Go Forth to Serve and all that) in San Diego during January 2006 to concretise plans. Out of this GSE planning and implementation, friendships develop, more projects are planned and implemented between the two Districts, and a team of 12 or so Rotarians from D5340 visit D9200. Let us fast forward again to 2008/2009, and the planned start of the Future Vision Pilot during 2009/10: we agree with Philippe that it would be good to plan a joint global grant together, ready to roll by 1<sup>st</sup> July 2009. We have just the right project, I say, based on the Nkondo needs assessment. I go to San Diego during January 2009, both as a Training Leader (these being the people that train the Governors-Elect from all over the world, but that is not the thread of this story) and as the incoming DRFC to receive training for the Future Vision Pilot. Talk about killing two birds with one stone. Actually four birds: during the same two weeks, we have further meetings about the potential project with Philippe and others from D5340, accompanied by then DGE Stephen who was there as the “student”. Said Stephen by the way is also an Honorary Member of Kampala North. Small world, small world! The fourth bird is a meeting among D9200 leaders; D5340 leaders, and several Rotary leaders from Japan to plan for another global grant, the Masai Water Project. Incidentally, then Trustee Sakuji Tanaka – now RIPE Sakuji Tanaka, was part of this meeting. This I remember very well because when DGE Stephen made some smart crack about him, RIPE Sakuji quickly took the upper hand by pointing at Stephen’s stomach saying he was going to have a baby! Stephen will be happy to verify – we all had a hearty laugh about it. Apologies – I note that I digress.

After the International Assembly, we are informed by D5340 that the grant that would receive major support would be competitive. Kampala North thrives on competition, and the DRFC (meaning me) sends out an invitation to clubs to propose projects. One Rtn Chuck is sent to visit three different locations of proposed projects from three clubs, and interacts with the clubs. The Kampala North proposal is selected as the best,

and no, I did not have any say in that! So Nkondo Adopt a Village moves ahead as GG25002, the second global grant application to be submitted worldwide.

So what is so exciting about this, one would rightly ask. Well, this project is really not a project, but a programme of transformation, changing the way people think so that they can see new opportunities and new solutions to lifting themselves out of poverty. There is therefore heavy focus on training, changing mindset, creating ownership, ensuring sustainable impact. Sounds impossible, eh? Well, Kampala North specialized in doing the impossible – this is what differentiates us!

We are working with the community to tackle the different aspects of poverty through several related components of the programme: maternal and child health (Jessica, Judith, Isaac, Catherine, et al); water and irrigation (Frank Chaff, Wilson, Roger); Basic education and literacy (Natalie, Tina, et al); Community Development (Harriet, Fred as in Kimuli; Eve; Nakanjako); Microfinance (Eric, Cissy, Jjooga). We work with the Nkondo Kidera Development Union (NKDU) as the community trustees and advisors, also managing the microcredit component with Kampala North oversight; the Faculty of Food Science and Technology (training the community with respect to high value crops; value addition; food processing and hygiene; etc); and Salama Shield Foundation (microfinance and development training).

Again, this is not really exciting. So, what is exciting?

- i. A water harvesting system capacity 20,000 liters was set up using the church (being built by one Patrick Batumbya and family – I believe I have mentioned this name somewhere?) as catchment area. This resulted in major savings on water costs for the primary school. They used the savings to set up a rudimentary but more sanitary food serving area. Now, this is exciting! A donation of \$500 from Amanda, who was a member of the incoming VTT from D5340 has been used to set up a better permanent structure along with a utensils drying stand.
- ii. One of the classrooms was used to set up the computer room and library (and it all looks very nice). The primary school has put in window curtains, and computer covers made of cloth; and a computer teacher has been posted to the school. Now, this is exciting!
- iii. At the launch of the computer room and library, the local administrative district leadership was invited, and they were visibly excited by such a small rural school having the most modern computer facility in the district. They pledged to set up a new block with additional classrooms and facilities. This was six months ago, when DG Eric presided over the handover. Yesterday, we find a spanking new classroom block in the stages of roofing and plastering, and a new five stance VIP latrine block. Now, this is exciting!
- iv. Amaranthus, a fast growing vegetable with both high nutrition and market values, was introduced to the community through the Faculty of Food Science and Technology. 50kg of seeds were given to the community. Yesterday, a single farmer brought 50kg of seeds for sale at about \$1 per kg. Others are making amaranthus seed balls and biscuits for sale in the market. And people are eating the amaranthus leaves as vegetables. Now, this is exciting!
- v. Since the microcredit programme started, compliance has been running at 100%, and the first cycle will be completed by the end of May 2012. All members are now saving. The agreed minimum savings were 2,000/= (about \$1) per month, but many have taken this to \$3 (in this community, the loans are about \$50 - \$80 per person – and that does go a long way). Other members of the community have requested that they start depositing their savings from other

activities with the group. Now, this is exciting! Modalities and legal matters are being looked at to enable this.

- vi. Where does the maize mill go? What about the food driers and juice processing equipment? Kampala North has insisted that there must be security of land ownership for this to happen. Guess what, without NKDU or Kampala North knowing about it, the three RCC have formed a joint holding organization called KYENATU (name composed using the first syllable of the names of each of the RCCs). They have bought a plot of land worth about \$800, fully paid, measuring 30x100 ft, and they proudly tell us they are now ready to receive the equipment. Of course we must work with them and NKDU to put up a basic structure, but this is definitely very, very exciting! KYENATU will be registered as a community based organization to take up legal ownership of the project assets.
- vii. The clinic has become more and more active. The community is asking for more space! HIV counseling and testing has picked up with 33 referrals to higher centers to-date. How many lives will be saved? Government has seconded a nurse to the facility, and there is now a regular subvention for drugs through NKDU. Very, very exciting!
- viii. The community has now established their own leadership structures: the main committee along with sub-committees for each of the sub-projects. We have points of contact outside NKDU for the community and the sub-committees. The chair of the main committee is a lady. Who would not call these developments exciting?

You will gather that what gets me excited is not what the Rotarians have done, but what the community and local leadership have done in response to what Rotary has done. Rotary then is just a catalyst, enabling the community to see their direction better, expanding their expectation horizons, making them appreciate their latent potential, and triggering action.

Yesterday is not just a visit, but a working trip. Frank goes out with Wilson and the company contracted to drill the borehole to look at the site and plan for a micro-irrigation project of \$50,000 or so; Natalie and Tinah work with Tony and the Computer Teacher to evaluate utilization of the facilities, identify challenges and solutions, and get the internet connectivity going (we really need a booster for this to be effective); Jessica is at the clinic for three hours, examining statistics, progress, challenges, and gaps and working with the team; Eric (as microcredit) and Nakanjako (as Community Development) are interacting with some of the microcredit beneficiaries to get better insight into what the borrowers are actually doing and challenges; our Rotary scholar Emily is with us, listening to the progress reports from the community, enjoying the entertainment laid on at intervals – the rock-you-to-the-core Kisoga dances packed with distilled waist energy; Harriet is leader of delegation as Ag President, a role she fulfills excellently in her visits to the different sub-projects (in addition to addressing her component of Community Development), words of guidance to each, and in the address to the community and Rotarians present, not to mention the stopover at Mukagwa on the way back to Kampala (the details of which are left for after-fellowship!). Kidera and that wonderful community loving lady Frances Batumbya are there as part of the heart-beat of the community, guiding, encouraging, and of course being very hospitable: the Batumbya feast at the end of each visit is incentive enough for anyone. And one Tusu does what he always does best: talking a lot and making the occasional accidental sensible statement; cajoling and harassing; and eating a lot of food. Thank you all!

Tusu