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Field Trip Journals from visits to Uganda between 2007 and 2010

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Introduction to Field Trip Journals

I visited Uganda on five occasions between 2007 and 2010, initially in order to establish the viability of the plaited braid project that I wanted to set up and afterwards to develop that project. Looking back on the early reports, I am struck by my naivety and ashamed of some of the observations I made. Referencing and printing the reports has shown me this in stark relief. I have not re-worked the reports, as I feel that this is an important part of the project, demonstrating the process of learning and the beginnings of an understanding.

The reports show varying degrees of personal response and indicate a growing affection for the people I stay with and work with in Uganda. Some reports have a more objective voice, but in general, they become progressively more subjective and diaristic in style. I find it very hard to be scientific in my observations of the country and the people. The first report is organised by topics, the rest by dates.

I do not pretend to fully understand the lives of the women that I am working with, but I felt it important to try as hard as possible to learn about the country, the cultures local to my project, some language and customs, as well as how the group manage their many responsibilities, in order to better construct a sustainable project. Names may change slightly from trip to trip, as they have been made clearer to me.

The sustainability of the project has not yet been fully realised, but I am hopeful that it will be firmly established in the near future.

Over the years, I have learned a lot from the women in the plait group and my fiends at Bushfire and will be forever grateful for their time, tolerance and the information that they have shared with me.

Field Trip Report 1- April 2007

Introduction

I went to Uganda for two weeks in April 2007 as part of a group of 22 people, to work at Bushfire Orphanage, Bubutya, Bulange District, Iganga. There was a pre-arranged programme of activities and jobs organised for us by Bushfire, ranging from sorting through clothes donations, typing up exam papers for the local school, activities with the children, visits to schools, prisons and hospitals in the area, mission visits to local villages and evening visits (“family devotions”) to the individual houses at the orphanage.

Bushfire do a lot of outreach work in the local community and are actively engaged in addressing the physical needs of their neighbourhood, in projects such as roof building or pit latrine digging for those in need. Clothing and bedding are handed out regularly in the area. Bushfire is viewed positively by many local Christians and non-Christians alike. There is a free clinic on site and a stream of visitors there throughout the day. Their large church holds 800 people and is full-to-overflowing on Sundays.

The area has a large Moslem population, many of whom send their children to church at Bushfire. Many people in the area follow the traditional religion: worshipping ancestors and various spirits and visiting witchdoctors. Many of the women have large branded scars across their chest - about 8 inches long and like a stretched, horizontal, filled in figure eight. This is a sign that they have been involved in witchcraft, perhaps a sign of dedication. A woman living nearby is married to the local witchdoctor. She started to come to church and enjoyed it, but he beat her so that she stopped.



Entrance to Bushfire Children's Home, Church and Clinic, Bubutya, Uganda, April 2007



Typical local houses, with small banana gardens, 2007

There is an enormous difference in the standard of living between the children at Bushfire and those in the surrounding area. The poverty outside the gates is marked: children are dirty and ragged, and there is evidence of skin diseases on many of them, as well as distended stomachs from malnutrition or parasites. Most of the staff and children at Bushfire have malaria attacks, but receive treatment for it. On average, attacks happen about once every month, more often during the rainy season.



Children from local village, April 2007



Local villagers, Bubutya, Uganda, April 2007



Land around Bubutya, 2007



Children relaxing after school at Bushfire, 2007



Shop in Bubutya village centre, 2007



Sorting through beans, 2007



Bushfire children, April 2007



Bushfire staff team. Back row from left: Judith, Ayesha (with Sam jnr), Sarah, Paul, Serena, Olivia, Elsie, Susan. Front, row from left: Joseph, Herith, Willy, Ben, Eddie, Moses

Some of the children at Bushfire had only been there for two or three weeks, others two months and others four years. Two girls in one of the houses had only been there for a couple of weeks, having been orphaned by the LRA in the North. Predictably, the children who had been there the longest were the best adjusted, happy and well fed. They go about their chores cheerfully and apparently without complaint. They get up early before school to fetch water from the pump, which is about two hundred meters from the houses. They fill jerry cans and carry

them back on their heads. They wash clothes, gather them in and generally help each other out. In the evenings and at weekends, after their chores, they play together outside. The atmosphere is very harmonious.

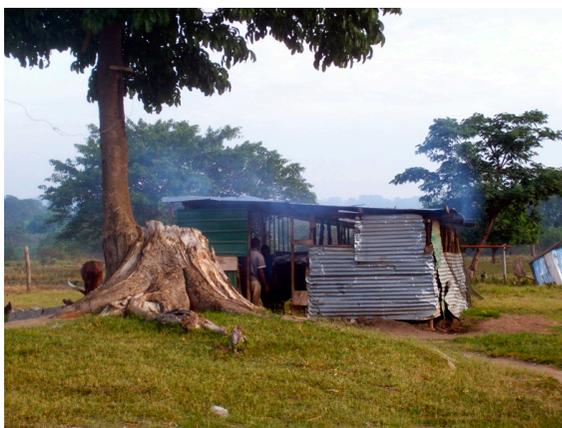
The core staff team began as volunteers, mostly educated people from Kampala or Jinja; devout Christians, without being rigid and legalistic. They smile continuously and live out their beliefs on a daily basis, sharing everything: no one more important than anyone else, caring for and supporting each other and the children, as well as people in the local community. It seems to be a form of socialism in action.

In the four years that Bushfire has been going, it has grown and gathered strength. They are currently setting up a vocational training centre for people in the area as well as some of their own teenagers, to learn skills such as mechanics and building that would enable the less academic - or those who had not had a chance to go to school - to make a living.

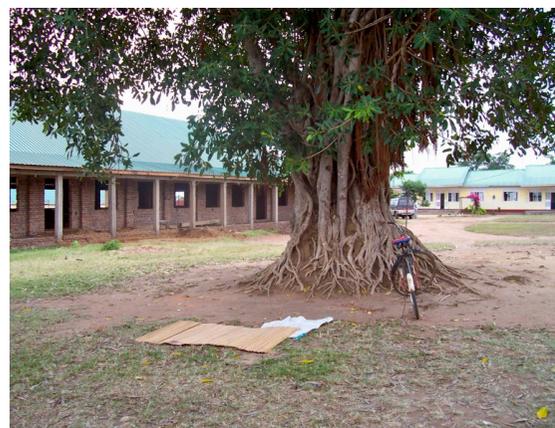
Another house is being built for a new 'family' of orphans and there are plans to set up a similar facility elsewhere in the country. Uganda Family Resources Link is setting up a centre in Jinja to train counsellors and mentors for those who have been through trauma and loss.



Bushfire, April 2007



Kitchen at Bushfire, 2007



The big fig tree at Bushfire, under which I taught plaiting, 2007

Local people

The people in local area – Bulange - are generally Basoga. Like all Bantu peoples, their origins appear be traceable to the Katanga area of Central Africa, although the Basoga claim to have come to Uganda from east of Mount Elgon. They are quietly spoken, using Lusoga, Luganda or Swahili. Lusoga language is very close to Luganda, although it has many dialects and thus there is much debate about how words are spelled or pronounced. The meter of the language - at least the way some people were speaking it- is reminiscent of Japanese: quite staccato although a little softer. I found that 'r's and 'l's were sometimes confused when local people spoke English. Some had learned a little English in school, but most people had not.

Local costume for women is the 'gomesi': a long top with a high yolk, buttoning at the side, with a long skirt. The top is bloused up over a wide belt or sash. Thighs are considered extremely erotic and the voluminous fabric masks their outline. Sleeves have a series of tucks radiating from one position on the top of the shoulder, giving a dramatically pointed effect. Fabrics are cotton or polyester blends. A shawl is worn around the shoulders on cooler days. The head is usually wrapped in a scarf or length of fabric, although some wear nothing on their heads. Men wear western clothing, generally in poor condition outside Bushfire, but wear smarter shirts tucked into trousers or African suits for church. Most of the women and children wear their best clothes for church.



Woman in nearby village wearing the traditional *gomesi*, April 2007



Bushfire Community Church, April 2007

Greeting is essential etiquette: the adults always greet each other as they pass. With groups, an elaborate process that sounds like sighing or singing sometimes takes place - a sort of 'call and response'. There is a handshake that has three stages, or more when a relationship is established. Some of the local women and young girls kneeled at our feet, which was very unsettling. This is a mark of respect to those who are older or in authority. There seems to be an automatic authority conferred on *muzungus* (white people), which does not sit well with our post-colonial, post-modern ethos.



Emerging from church, April 2007



Bushfire, April 2007



Plait group on mats, Bushfire, 2007

The Project

My overall aim is to develop a new material for millinery, or a new way of working with an existing material that will provide a sustainable income for a community in rural Uganda. This was my first visit and I approached it with no knowledge of existing conditions, markets, willingness of local people, etc.

My goals on this first trip were:

- To discover and examine any three-dimensional woven forms that are already being produced in the region
- To collect samples of local weaving
- Find out about local demand for a project of this nature
- Find out about local markets
- To collect samples of potentially useful plant materials
- To assess the willingness of potential participants/makers
- Assess the dexterity of potential makers
- Establish how much time the makers would be willing to expend on making
- Teach some basic plaiting and hat construction techniques to local people



Baby Eva in hat of 4-strand rustic plait, banana fibre and palm, April 2007

Local three-dimensional weaving and samples obtained

Jinja has a lot of woodcarving and beaded jewellery - many of these 'local' crafts looked mass-produced and 'generic African' in style. I saw items in many small craft shops that used a range of weaving techniques and was surprised to see that 4-strand rustic plaiting was already being used for bags and hats, often in a combination of palm and banana fibre. Other weaving techniques used were twining and flat twill weave for sleeping mats. Eva Kitalya came with me and showed me around. I also bought some bark cloth- a large sheet of it, about 2m x 2m and a cut and sew hat made from barkcloth. I bought samples of weaving - a pot with a lid that was coiled raffia over some sort of cane

UGX 6,000; several small coiled bowls UGX 2,500, slightly coarser and patterned in two colours; I bought some hat-bodies - rustic 4-strand UGX 3,000, barkcloth UGX 3,000, papyrus UGX 4,000, plaited palm UGX 3,000, some sort of vine UGX 4,000. Small coasters in banana fibre were UGX 2,000 for a set of 6. There were also baseball caps made in the 4 strand rustic plait- about UGX 4,000. For western fashion, products may need to be slightly finer- less 'ethnic', as the products were clearly geared to the tourist market.



Coiled pots from Rwanda, bought in Jinja, 2007



Coasters in woven banana fibre and palm, with 4 strand rustic palm braid edge, backed with barkcloth



Woman in Jinja, 2007



Plaited bag in craft shop in Jinja, 2007



Woven bags of plastic strands - rather like drinking straws- Jinja 2007



Woven sisal bag, Jinja 2007

While Eva and I were waiting for our lift, we fell into conversation with a woman who said that the best weaving came from the south of Uganda: Masaka. It was much finer and more even there. When I asked her why she thought that was, she said that they had been well taught by a Catholic mission. I told her about what I was hoping to do and she looked at the Swiss Strawcraft book. She said that the techniques took a lot of patience and work and that people didn't do that so much now. A woman passed us selling bananas - she had a large bowl of them (balanced on her head) that was made of some sort of cane or rush twined with plastic packing tape. It was strong and gave colour to the otherwise neutral base.



Coiled basket of grass with plastic tape, Jinja 2007

On one of the trips to schools that the Bushfire team went on they found some discarded practise lengths of weaving/plaiting in palm that was being taught in the school. Crafts are enjoying a small resurgence in Uganda, with a new appreciation of the traditional barkcloth production being encouraged in many schools as well as weaving



Hat in plaited braid, similar to sleeping mat plait, Jinja 2007



Braid discarded by schoolchildren Uganda 2007



Hat woven from papyrus, Jinja 2007



Plaited mats in craft shop, Jinja 2007



Strip of plain, plaited braid in the witchdoctor's garden, April 2007



Mats from the witchdoctor's shrine, that I was advised not to buy.
April 2007



Patterned length of palm braid, with prepared strips for further plaiting. April 2007

Local demand for a project of this nature

Bushfire were very happy that I wanted to teach weaving to the local people and set up a project in the area. They are happy for anything that may be useful to be taught. I had emailed details of what I was hoping to do to Sam Kitalya (the founder) prior to the visit. On Easter Sunday he gave a notice in church, inviting women to come to learn plaiting with me from Tuesday to Friday the following week. He did much to facilitate the project: on Monday I was taken into Jinja, a fine, old, crumbling, colonial style of town, with some beautiful art-deco houses on the outskirts from the 1940's. First we went to Sam and Eva's house for breakfast, a mile or so outside the town in Waireka, with views down to Lake Victoria. Then Eva took me around all the craft shops and interpreted for me.

I met two people out at Bushfire who were involved in NGOs that worked with people to make and sell crafts. Emma (a male schoolteacher) works with a small organisation marketing products made by young people orphaned by the war in the north of Uganda. Their base is now in Kampala and they sell through craft shops there. Another person I met was from an organisation called Africa 2000, an NGO involved in development. There was a lot of interest in and enthusiasm about what I was trying to do.

Local market

Much of what is on sale in Jinja is very similar and doesn't feel particularly special to the area. I believe that there would be a demand for something different, but compatible. There are white faces in Jinja - tourists and people from the local YWAM base. The relatively recent development of the nearby Bujagali falls as a tourist site and centre for white water rafting is bringing more overseas visitors to the area. These could be customers as well as some local people. Joseph said that there was a lot of money in Uganda. Oil had been discovered too. Kampala could be a sales point, or Iganga - smaller than Jinja, but a vibrant trading centre.



Main Street, Jinja 2007



Side of the market, Jinja, 2007



Tourists at Bujagali Falls, April 2007



Bujagali Falls, with luxury resort of hill in the background, 2007



Tourists and performers, Bujagali Falls April 2007

Potentially useful plant materials

Eva and I found a shop where they agreed to sell me what I had thought was elephant grass, but which they identified as palm. It seems that I was previously misinformed. I bought two large bundles for 2,000 UGX each, (about 60 pence each).

Other materials that may be useful are banana fibre, spear grass, elephant grass, sugar cane leaves and papyrus. It was the rainy season, so papyrus was difficult to harvest due to the toughness of its stem at this time of the year.

The women told me that palm (*esansa*) is apparently not abundant from February to May. More is available in September. It was easy enough to purchase some though, so perhaps they were referring to harvesting their own. I was given a lot of banana fibre by the women, and some spear grass to use in my experiments.

I was told that it normally rained heavily for a while every day from March to May in the rainy season, but that this was getting later and later and less and less wet each year. This may have implications for the future of my project, although probably wouldn't in the short term. When we arrived on 4th April they had not had any rain for two weeks and there was some anxiety about that.

Eva showed me some jewellery made from seedpods and then showed me the bush that the seeds came from, growing in their garden. The seeds were triangular in shape - almost heart-shaped and came out of fruit-shaped seed pods, like small, green apples. The milky, white sap from the stems is used as glue for lightweight paper. Potential use as stiffener? Eva wanted me to think about jewellery possibilities too.



Palm tree in Bubutya, Uganda 2007



Palm growing at Bushfire, 2007



Milkweed in Eva's garden, Waireka, 2007



Grass near Bubutya – species unknown 2007



Papyrus swamps between Iganga and Jinja



Local grasses- species unknown, Bubutya



Speargrass near Bulange, 2007



Maize and *matooke*, Bubutya 2007



Girl in a banana garden, Bubutya 2007

I felt that there must be some potential for using some of the local grasses or perhaps some fibres from the stems of papyrus, for plaiting. The leaves or stalks of some food crops are used extensively for craft activities, for example banana bark and maize. The elephant grass is usually fed to livestock.



Pastor Apollo with elephant grass, April 2007

The willingness of potential participants/makers

Thirty-five women turned up on the first day of teaching and were profuse in their thanks for what I taught them. Some of the older ladies - such as Tolofisa and Ruth - swore that they hadn't done it before but grasped the technique quickly. Those that found it difficult at first were willing to persevere and learn, finding pleasure in their newfound skills. Some of the women said that they had done 'crafts' in school, but hadn't realised that it might be useful at the time. Crafts and sewing were perceived as something that their parents might make them do if they wanted them to get into the workplace quickly, rather than continuing their education, so had thus been devalued. It was not clear where they had got to in their education but they were now open to learning 'craft'.

They were happy to be able to do something that might help them earn some extra money.

They were concerned about local supplies and customers, but then thought about selling things in local towns such as Jinja and Iganga. They asked me about potential markets in the West. We discussed websites too. They have agreed to work together and enjoy the fellowship.



Local women, from Bubutya and Bulange and beyond, who came to learn some 'crafts'
April 2007



Tolofisa, with red headscarf, and the group.



Plaiting under the big tree. April 2007

The dexterity of potential makers

Dexterity is very good, although the wider, quicker to produce plait is preferred their work is firmer and stronger than mine.

Tolofisa had plaited before, although not this type of plaiting: she had made the wide borders for sleeping mats (15-20cm) and was expert at joining in new lengths of palm seamlessly. The workmanship was generally very good, and spontaneously the women started to prepare the palm for plaiting by splitting it and cutting off the tougher ends, so there was more uniformity. This was something the more experienced weavers did and it quickly spread to the others. They then had bundles of pliable strips ready to work with.

Some of the older ladies were particularly good - Tolofisa and Ruth flew ahead. A woman called Lobina really struggled and was very disheartened. I spent a lot of time going through it with her one-to-one and eventually she managed a few centimetres. By the next day she had mastered it and had obviously been practising at home. She was so happy to be able to do it.



Lydia juggling learning to plait 2007



Three young girls learning 4-strand rustic April 2007



Plaiting at Bushfire, April 2007



Tolofisa learning 4-strand rustic plait, April 2007

How much time the makers are willing to expend on making

They have decided to continue the work after I return to the U.K. and will come in the morning on 'good days' and Fridays. Evenings are busy (and dark) so they can't weave then. I think they will coincide their workshops with days that Bushfire offers afternoon Bible study, so they will stay on, having lunch provided. It is currently unclear how big a factor the free meal is in their choice to come to the group and to continue it.

Teach some basic plaiting and hat construction techniques to local people

Diary of Classes- 10th-13th April, 2007:

Day 1: Tolofisa, Elisabeth, Lobina, Elisabeth, Irene, Damali, Flavia, Eva, Ayesha, Sarah, Stephanie (UK), then I lost count and it was too busy to get names. 35 in total - not counting children. Some of the women had come from quite a long way away: "Far". Most from a radius of about 1 mile or so. They walked with babies strapped to their backs.

I had a mental blank on how to begin the plait, so perhaps it was not the best start. However, all but two were plaiting well by the end of the day. The women were very good-humoured about it and really enjoyed this chance to do something together as women. The workmanship was generally very good. It felt like the start of something good. I read Proverbs 31 and Sarah translated it sentence by sentence.



First day of teaching the group. None of them had done this particular plait before. April 2007



Some of the Bushfire staff joined in and interpreted April 2007

We kept the palm wet in a washbowl with a small amount of water. The women had not brought any water to drink and we were told by staff that they could go a long time without it. One woman had three small children with her, each a scaled up version of the other. Others had babies hanging from their breasts as they plaited or had them strapped to their backs.

Some women made about half a meter of plait, while others managed three or more. We started at 10-ish, although some came as late as 12. We stopped for lunch at 2.00, then did an hour more from 3-4.00. When I returned after lunch, all the women had sensibly moved around under the tree, following the shade. The atmosphere was great: very friendly, lots of laughter and they really appreciated being shown the technique. Some had done 'crafts' in school, but hadn't seen the value of it at the time. They were happy to be able to do something that might help them earn some extra money. The women were fed by Bushfire at lunchtime, which may have been part of the attraction.

A woman who lived across the road from Bushfire came. She had been working in her field in the morning then came later on, smartened up. Some of the women had come from Bubutya.



Palm leaves soaking in bowl of water. April 2007



Plait group at work, April 2007

There was some debate about how day 2 should pan out:

I wanted to have a finished 'hat' shape at the end so that they could see the whole process, but no one had enough plait for a whole hat. If they pooled their bits of plait, then Bushfire could hold the big hat as a reference for them in the future. I was concerned that they might not want to surrender their work in this way but Sarah told me that they would do it. At the end, some of them asked to take some palm away as 'homework'. Sarah was worried that they might not return the next day.

I was not so worried about them not returning - I think we had enough plait being produced to make something. On Day 2, I planned to continue plaiting for a while and then would start to sew it up. Ideally a very small hat each could be made, so that they all have a sample to take home as reference.

I decided to leave the Swiss Straw book behind at Bushfire so that people could refer to it and then I would see what they have made when I next returned.

We nearly finished two bundles of palm leaves on the first day, so I had to get a message to Uncle Sam to bring more. Moses called him and it was arranged. Paul brought some back from Jinja that very evening. The women were asked to bring in anything that they thought might be suitable to weave with.

Can leaves from sugar cane be used? Are they discarded after being stripped from the stem?



Girls plaiting. Swiss Strawcraft book (Main 2003) in foreground. 2007

Day 2:

Overnight there was rain. Not as much as hoped for, but a bit. Some of the women were quite late, having taken advantage of the softer earth to plant. Sarah's baby Eva had malaria and lay shivering on her lap in the hot sun, covered by a blanket. They had decided to call a meeting of women after church on Sunday, where they would talk about how to continue the group. My team would have to leave straight after the service, so I would have to find out later what happened. No time yet to read Robert Chambers.....

Monica, Tolofisa, Joyce, Sarah, Chopista, Secovia, Farida, Flavia, Elizabeth, Elizabeth Damal, Lovisa, Sarah, Ruth, Lobina, Alice, Elizabeth, Amina, Florence, Zeulens, Irene, Gloria, Rehema, Livia. Paradise

Today I learned that palm is not abundant from February to May - more around in September.

Papyrus is only available in the dry season (May- Feb)

Tosanyuse okulaba - you're most welcome (singular)

Tosanyuse okulabalaba - you're most welcome (plural)

The Basoga are from east Uganda.

Lots of the women are doing very well now. Some have spontaneously introduced other colours or materials to their plaits to give pattern.

Many of them brought in banana fibre to use and some spear grass and elephant grass - both apparently quite weak when dry, so maybe not an option. Their spines are quite tough though.



Banana bark and some grasses brought in by the women for experiments. April 2007



Stripping the pith off the back of the banana bark with a knife, before cutting into strips for plaiting. 2007

At first (10.25ish) there were about three women, then more and more came - many of them from the previous day. Lobina is now doing well, after nearly giving up several times the day before. Ruth and Tolofisa are the stars and have been so happy to learn, thanking me profusely. It is very humbling. Lots of the women carried on weaving during the afternoon Bible study, led by Willy and one of the UK team. They should be ready to sew up tomorrow. I will supply needles and thread for them.

They were so thankful for what they were learning. I was very relieved that so many had returned - the group numbered at least 25, including some new faces brought by others too.

They told me that they knew of plants in the area that were used for dyeing.

I asked if any of them could spare me a bit of their banana fibre to take back to the UK and most of them got up and gave me their bundles - it was quite moving. I have more than I need now and can experiment. I watched them cut it into strips and then scrape the backing off with their lethal, little, rusty knives. Very deft work!

There was a debate about how much time they would have to spend on making, to be clarified the next day.

Dexterity is very good, but there is a preference for a slightly wider plait; the very fine takes longer.



Elizabeth and Tolofisa. April 2007



Ruth in burnt orange gomesi- the best plaiter in the group. April 2007



Young pregnant girl in foreground. Ayesha behind her with curlers in hair. April 2007

Not sure if there will be a product after this trip, but the ball is rolling. The women want to keep it going as a group activity. Bushfire staff (Sarah) thought that maybe they could meet twice a week there to do it. It would work best if it were days they were coming anyway for afternoon Bible Study.

Day 3

Tolofisa, Paradise, Elizabeth, Shara, Irena, Mary, Zeulens, Ruth, Ellen, Elisabeth, Lovinas, Kecolina, Margaret, Justine, Lobina, Florence, Gatu, Winnie, Rehema + 5 or so more.

They have decided to come on the mornings of 'good days' and Fridays, and told me that they were unable to work in the evenings as they were busy and it was too dark to plait. They expressed concern about potential markets for the plait or plaited goods, but thought Iganga and Jinja might be worth trying. They enjoyed the fellowship of meeting and working together

The colours are bought in the market. They don't use natural dyes, but pre-dyed palm. Some of them have produced several meters of plait already and I started several off in sewing up their hats.

Pastor Apollo was my translator and recounted the stories the women were telling each other (with glee) about husbands who don't share meat with their wives and children and make them eat greens instead. "You should leave him!" shouted the others and they all laughed.

After lunch it poured with rain for a while, and we had to move into the church to continue.



Teaching how to sew up the plait to make hat basic hat shape. April 2007



The crown of the hat is nearly finished. Some of the group are sewing up their plait too, April 2007

Day 4

Tolofisa, Paradise, Lovinas, Shara, Elizabeth, Ruth, Sarah, Mary, Farida, Winnie, Gatu, Rehema, Ida, Margaret, Justine, Elizabeth, Ellen, Zeulens, Lobina, Assa + more

Apollo was interpreting again today. The women were all laughing and joking and complaining about their husbands. Meat is a recurring theme - there was a story about a man who bought meat and wrapped the biggest piece in banana leaves and said that it was only for him. Another seven or so were ready to sew up their plaits today - even Lobina. Tolofisa and Ruth will show the rest how to do them. They will try to meet regularly for longish mornings. If the morning goes on long enough, I suppose they hope that Bushfire will feed them. I will look into marketing when I get back, but we need a product.

Fascinating storytelling! A woman lived next door to a very thin woman who had a fat husband. He used to make her carry him to his bath/shower (probably a shallow bowl of water) and wash him. She got fed up, so tied him on loosely after his bath and he slipped off with a big thud. They were in fits of laughter about this! When people passed they knelt before Apollo as a mark of respect – particularly younger girls. Some did before me too. We would do the elaborate handshake and ask how each other was doing. They complained that there was less greeting these days than in the past.



Tolofisa with partially sewn up crown. April 2007

Apollo very good-naturedly joined in the weaving on both days - something I don't think men normally do. Before the start of the class he took me to meet their neighbour who had a plaited strip/belt hanging from a tree - apparently in the process of being made by her daughter who was then at school. She agreed to sell it to me for 6,000 UGX when it was finished, which should be by Sunday morning. We agreed to meet after church. She also brought out some mats from the shrine to show me and it transpired that she was married to the local witchdoctor. Apollo advised me not to buy anything from the shrine.

She let me photograph the elephant grass, maize, yams and sugar cane in her garden. Tolofisa brought me spear grass. Apollo dried out the banana fibre in his house for me, so I could pack it. I think the group will continue - they love the fellowship. I have planted a seed that will need a lot of pruning and watering as it grows. It will need to be trained in the right directions, but this is the start of something.

I have lots of *matooke* fibre to experiment with, some more palm leaves and some spear grass. I would like some sugar cane leaves....



Some group members advising one another. The group spontaneously supported one another – the more adept would help the slower learners to master the techniques. April 2007



Bushfire group April 2007

Conclusions

The trip was an extremely encouraging start to the project. Bushfire is very supportive of what I am hoping to do and this has given me credibility in the local area that I may not otherwise have had. There are several factors I had not previously considered that may have contributed to the easy acceptance of this project: I was initially introduced to the local people on stage in church - by respected Bushfire pastors; I had my son with me (motherhood is held in high esteem), although having less than four children is considered more or less barren; I am white, and there may be some residual colonial assumptions. My weaving classes attracted many more people than I imagined and they intend - at the moment - to continue to meet. The women rarely get together as a group of women and thoroughly enjoyed this experience. The dexterity of the group was better than I had expected and they were able to initiate ways of working with the materials, such as spontaneously introducing colour they have sourced or other fibres such as *matooke*. Several potentially useful plant fibres grow abundantly in the area, as well as the readily available palm fibre that I feel has still more potential.

Bushfire is setting up a website in the U.K. that may provide a selling point for work produced by the group. On my next visit, I will see how they have progressed the work - if they have progressed it - as well as sharing ideas that I will have developed from my experiments in London. I must consider ways to support and encourage the group in my absence.



Drawing water with the pump is an everyday job for the children. April 2007



Sports day organised by the team for the children. April 2007



'The Carlsberg Hut', Bulange, 2007

Field Trip Journal 2

31st October - 14th November 2007

Introduction

I visited Uganda from 31st October to 14th November, 2007. The first two days were spent in Kampala, where I explored the city and tried - with limited success - to see some local crafts on sale. A large, modern shopping centre - Garden City - housed one of a small chain of well laid out craft shops called Banana Boat. On sale were a range of baskets and woven bowls, tablemats, fabric wraps, jewellery and wood-carvings of figures from the Congo. I spoke to the woman at the sales desk, who told me that their merchandise came from several different African countries, including Mozambique, Ghana, Congo, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. I told her about the work I was doing in Uganda and the hats we were making. She said they would definitely be interested to see them, that delivery times were pretty flexible and gave me the contact details of the person in charge. This was encouraging: a much more positive first response than one would expect in London. Exchange rate UGX 3,350 = £1.

Thursday 1st November

On 1st November, I visited Professor John Munene at Makerere University, Professor of Psychology whose book "Escaping from Behavioural Poverty in Uganda: the role of culture and social capital" had given me some useful insights into Ugandan culture and some of the issues around rural poverty.

My questions were as follows:

- **You have identified social capital as a key factor in the success or potential success of development projects. Does the church have a role in the building of social capital? Is a development project in collaboration with or under the umbrella of the church more likely to succeed than one that is not? What is the role of faith in the building of social capital?**



Central Kampala. November 2007

My definition of social capital in that book was contextualised and functional. There are regional differences in social capital. The church has a level of coherence and encourages it.

- **What are the factors involved in this?**

Does the church have or create acceptable values that can allow social capital to grow or is it more interested in the growth of the church rather than the growth of the community? It can help to be working with a church, but it depends on the church.



Makerere University campus- gallery in background, November 2007

- **What are local attitudes to creativity and design? Is freedom of expression in the design/making of an artefact difficult? Is intellectual autonomy frightening in a hierarchical society such as Uganda? Do people prefer to be told exactly what to do?**

It may be a hierarchical society but the people distrust hierarchies - positions are exploited. Top down authority doesn't work. Authority monopolises. People must be trained to manage properly. There is government money available for development projects but it can be a corrupting influence: Bonna Bagaggawale means 'Let all become rich' but this is misleading. Not everyone can be rich. The women will want to make something different but anything new will be copied. They don't normally have the means to be creative. A combination of being told what to do and some freedom to do what they want will work best. Tell them that they're in charge.

- **How likely is it that the women involved in the project will be allowed, by their husbands, to keep the money they make? Would giving their money to their husbands act as a disincentive?**

The husbands will probably take any money the women earn, but this will not be a disincentive. Women believe that they endear themselves to their husbands by earning for them- "an active woman makes a man come with shield to the table", i.e. to fend off the profusion of food. If the money goes to another wife though, the project is over. An NGO - V.E.C.O. in Kampala did a project in Kasanga and work in eastern Uganda to promote rights-based approaches, training men and women to respect each other and their contributions. They managed to get the chief of a village in the east to demarcate what men and women would earn from a project.

- **Is regional identity expressed in design? Tribal: Baganda, Basoga, Acholi?**

Materials are less regionally specific, but drum-makers' designs are regional and can be very creative. Mat makers have their own designs.

- **Do men normally take over control and decision-making?**

If a woman becomes important as a result of a project - more influential - the men will want to get more involved. When the man supports the woman, you get better results. Married couples supporting each other do best, then single women or widows, last of all fighting married couples.

- **There is a perceived spiritual dimension by Africans to much of what happens in life. Is that true?**

This is true but not helpful.

- **From your book, it seems that a development project might have more chance of success if there is a clear organisational structure and hierarchy rather than a democracy. Is that true? What kind of business structure is likely to be most successful?**

Tell them that they're in charge.

Initial selection of key people essential.

Women are not supposed to get together, gossip etc. Men might feel threatened by it.

It would be good to find an 'ongoing group' e.g. a 'burial group' that gets together when a neighbour loses a loved one to pay for costs.

They learn to work together, are then trusted by their husbands. This might have another name in the villages.

People go to church for different reasons: misled, lonely, think they won't get AIDS. It is a good starting point but what already exists is better - born of existing needs.

People become jealous of those who succeed more. Those who do less will want as much as those who do more. This has to be taken account of. You should get out what you put in.

Friday 2nd November

On Friday 2nd November I took the Post Bus to Jinja. It took about 2 ½ hours. I was met from the bus by Eva Kitanya, her driver Ben and an English nurse called Fishy who was doing training on HIV prevention in the local community with YWAM. We stopped at Jinja market to buy *esansa* and Eva led me through a maze of small stalls selling everything from pots and pans to rope, nails and hardware. At one stall she asked where we could find *esansa* and we were sent further into the market. The passages between stalls were very narrow and it was very muddy underfoot, with everyone veering sideways towards the same drier patches. We found a stall where women were plaiting *esansa* for sleeping mats.



Palm leaf stall in Jinja market. November 2007



Stall in Jinja market selling palm leaves, raffia, coiled pots, plaited bags, sisal plaited rope, brooms, paraffin lamps, earthenware etc.



Plait bag of bundles of palm leaves (*esansa*) for plaiting

The bundles were only 150 UGX each. Although they were smaller than the ones I had previously bought from the craft shop, they were still considerably cheaper. We bought 10 bundles of each colour, more of natural, and then some bundles of matching raffia which they told us was the best thing for stitching up the plait. This was 500 UGX per bundle. It was hard to calculate how much I was spending, as the amounts were so low by UK standards.

We then dropped Fishy off and drove back to Sam and Eva's house. Sam was speaking at a conference in Namutumba that day and the Bushfire staff would all be there. I was to travel with him to the conference and then get a lift from there to Bushfire. Travel plans never go exactly as anticipated here but they always seem to work out in the end.

After the conference I met up with many of the Bushfire team and we drove back to Bushfire, arriving at about 6.30pm. It seems that - in spite of emails and conversations arranging my visit - they weren't entirely sure when I was coming. They knew that it was in November some time but not when. Moses was away at a training event in Nairobi and had not communicated the details of my visit to the rest of the staff. In spite of this I was shown to one of the visitor's huts, which was spacious and cool with a freshly made up bed, towel, soap and jerry can and bowl for washing.



Rear guest hut at Bushfire. November 2007



Bedroom of hut. November 2007



Bushfire, November 2007

Saturday 3rd November

I wasn't sure if this was one of the prayer and fasting Saturdays. None of the local women were coming that day but it was arranged that we would meet after the service on Sunday and decide on the program. Sarah told me that the women carried on meeting for a while after I had gone back last to the UK. They made a few things and sold them but haven't been meeting much lately. Apparently they were discouraged in some way. Then I was told that they lost heart because they didn't find it easy to sew up the plait. That would be easily solved.



Children doing their chores. Bushfire 2007



Cattle that wander around at Bushfire Nov.2007



Communal dining hall, in process of being built. November 2007

Sunday 4th November

After church the women were asked to stay behind to talk about their issues with the plaiting group and what they wanted to do. Other issues were being discussed too, such as a spinach-growing project that was going on, and a family planning conference.

Catherine led the meeting and interpreted for me. The issues were:

- After I had returned to the UK they continued to meet for a while and it was good, but Bushfire stopped providing lunch for them (understandably) and it was too long a day to go without food. Many stayed for Bible Study in the afternoons and became very hungry.



Sunday service at Bushfire Community Church November 2007

- Some had to go home at lunchtime to feed their children who came home from school for lunch.
- They wanted to know where it could go from here. I said that I would take some things to Jinja to show the craft shops there and see what the interest is. I mentioned the forthcoming Bushfire web site, but it was hard to describe to people who don't know what the web is.

One quite large lady seemed quite cross and was gesticulating at some of the others, making her point quite strongly. I assumed that she was one of the ones demanding food but it later turned out that she had been admonishing those who expected to be fed and was telling them that that was not the point of the project, that they were coming to learn something to help them. Catherine had suggested that maybe Bushfire could provide the ingredients and the women could cook it, but they wanted Bushfire to prepare it.

- Eventually, it was decided that they would come on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and Saturday and that no food would be provided - they would bring their own.

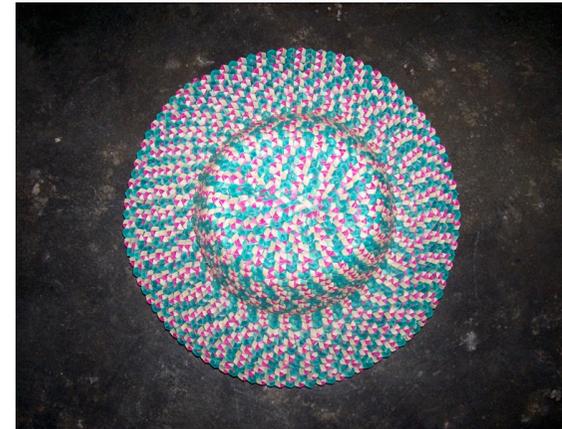
Tuesday was to be a baptism day, with full immersions happening in a river about 10k from Bubutya for about 100 of the congregation. Thursday was to be a Family Planning conference with a guest speaker coming from Jinja. I decided to go to Jinja on Tuesday, although I would have loved to see the baptisms. I agreed to teach the women a new plait on Monday and help solve any technical problems they have experienced. Ruth had 6 hats with her that she had made in mixed, bright colours using the 4 strand rustic plait. They were quite good and a very encouraging start. The crowns were a bit tight and some of the stitching needed to be neater and more even.



Amina with Ruth's hats, November 2007



One of Ruth's hats, combining pink, purple and natural in 4 strand rustic plait. November 2007



One of Ruth's hats, combining pink, green and natural, in 4 strand rustic plait, November 2007

I spent the evening sewing with Catherine. We were making her a dress from a pattern I had brought. Willy had converted one of the electric sewing machines into a treadle machine by disconnecting the electric from it and making a fan-belt from strips of fabric. It worked perfectly.

Monday 5th November

Tolofisa, Ruth, Robina, Fatima, Janet, Yebatakikobye, Beatrice, Nulu, Apofya

Objectives:

- To see what the women have made

Ruth had made 8 hats and sold 2 of them to muzungu tourists for 4,000 UGX.

She would have liked a bit more for them but was happy to have sold them.

Apofya had made a long length of plait in natural esansa and incorporated silver wrapping paper. It was quite effective - not sure if it was mounted on the esansa or just by itself, as it could tear.

- See what problems they have experienced in making

Stitching neatly and evenly is an area that needs more work. The last hats Ruth had made were better than the first, so she is getting there. Tension on the plait needs to be controlled more effectively to create even shapes. They expressed an interest in making different shapes but didn't know what shapes they could do. I sketched some shapes and they liked them. They hadn't realised that the same plait would do so many things and seem to have trouble visualising what might be possible, which is hardly surprising if they have never seen anything other than a capeline shape before. I tried to explain about how to control the tension to create different forms. Difficult to know how much got through via Sarah, who was interpreting. They were nodding and grunting appreciatively though. A grunt can mean a whole range of things depending on intonation. I am finding it useful.



Apofya's plait in natural palm with silver wrapping paper incorporated. November 2007



Group at Bushfire. November 2007

- Decide on a group leader for the project

It is clear that Ruth and Tolofisa are the most committed and able. They are mature women with strong personalities and would be natural leaders of the project.

- Find out how easy it would be for them to get to Jinja

They would be able to get a lift to Jinja with the Bushfire vehicle when it goes to do the shopping - once or twice a week.



Nulu, gathering dyed palm leaves together ready to plait. November 2007



Lobina on finely plaited mat, with a hat shape she had been stitching up, November, 2007

- Supply of raw materials? Does the palm used grow nearby or do they have to buy it in the market?

The esansa is hard to get for some of the women. It grows locally in the marshes, but Tolofisa said she wasn't strong enough to cut it herself and it was too expensive in the market so she couldn't always afford to buy it.

- How readily available is it? Seasonal?

It is available all year round from the market, but it has two growing seasons: January and then mid-year.

- What other fibres do they think could be used?

The group were uncertain about this.

I showed the women some of the samples I had produced, how to make the spirals of esansa and then how to thread them into a plain 6-strand plait. I talked about alternative applications, such as jewellery: necklaces and earrings, or table mats and sketched some options.

Some of them grasped the spiral technique very quickly and started to make lengths of plait with them incorporated.

I talked about my trip to Jinja the next day and arranged to take Ruth's hats to the craft shops and see what the interest might be.



Ruth plaiting. November 2007



Tolofisa plaiting. November 2007



Woman with some of the new plait samples. November 2007



Plait Ruth started to make that integrated the spiral I had taught them with pattern in the plait. November 2007

Tuesday 6th November

Ben drove Sam Kigwele and I into Jinja. Sam went off to do a few things. Ben and I went to the market for more esansa. I went to the same stall as before first and got a range of colours again. There was no black, unfortunately, which I had wanted for my own work. The woman on the stall asked me what I was using it all for so I told her about the project. She said she would be very interested in seeing what the women made and maybe selling some hats. However, I thought that the hats would not reach high enough prices in the market where everything was so cheap. It was worth mentioning to the women though.



Banana fibre football. Faith N. Crafts. 2007

Ben then took me to a craft shop on Main Street called Faith N. Craft Centre. He knew the owner, who was there. I showed her Ruth's - she liked them and said she would be interested if the brims were a bit bigger. Faith also said that the stitching would be better in raffia rather than thread. She told me that, in general, tourists prefer natural colours so it would be better to make anything in natural shades and they could even get more money for the items. She would pay 2,000 UGX for the coloured hats and up to 3,000 in natural. She also said that caps were desirable. This would work well for the women as they would take less time and less esansa to make and would earn the same amount as for a hat with a brim.

Faith saw a sample I had made of a plait and thought it was a bookmark. She would be interested in bookmarks and although she didn't know how much to pay for one (she was going to ring a friend in Kampala) they would be very quick to make. She showed me around the shop and told me how much she would pay the women for various items:

Balls made of bundled up matooke bound with sisal rope -
250 UGX

Larger bowls - 2,000

Smaller bowls - 1,000 both using a twining technique in raffia

Matooke nativity scene - 2,500

Angels made from matooke and maize - 400 UGX - very quick to make and she gave me a sample.

Set of 6 table mats - 8,000

Matooke briefcase/portfolio - 6,000

Sleeping mats- 8,500 fine weave, from 2,500 for coarser weave



Banana fibre placemat. Faith N.Crafts. 2007



Woven banana and palm placemat edged with 4-strand rustic plait, Faith N Crafts 2007



Oval banana and palm woven placemat, edged with 4-strand rustic plait. Faith N Crafts 2007



Place-mat in contrasting tones of banana, edges bound in raffia



Purse made with banana and palm 4 strand rustic plait. Faith N. Crafts 2007



Banana folder in contrasting tones, with edges bound in raffia. Faith N. Crafts 2007

I was able to take photos of many items to take back and show the women. Ben suggested afterwards that he talk to Sam about getting her out to Bushfire to teach them some techniques and so that she could see what they are doing.

In light of Faith's comments about tourists preferring natural colours, we returned to the market for more esansa in natural. I also managed to find some black and some packets of the local dyes.

We went back to Eva's house where I helped sort through some rice for grit and grubs for a couple of hours before taking Eva and Isaac to the clinic (he had mumps). We had to wait a while for some English girls who were coming back to Bushfire with us. They were doing 6 months of their gap year there and had Tuesdays in Jinja doing training with OASIS. I had a perfect cappuccino in a café called The Source, which gives all its profits to local schools. We all got back to Bushfire after 8.00pm - road works causing massive delays and impenetrable clouds of dust.

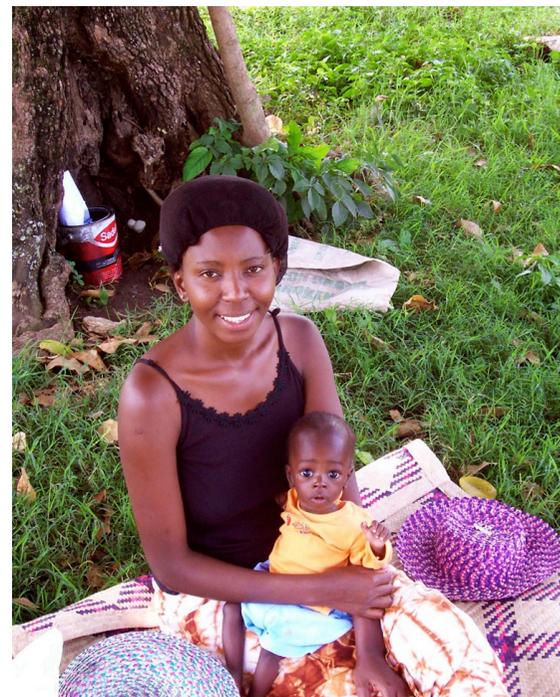
Wednesday 7th November

Objectives for the day:

- Demonstrate how to iron the tip of a crown flat, as for a pill box/boater
- Talk through findings from Jinja trip
- Try other ways of stitching plait
- Progress new plaits
- Discuss other things that could be made

Key areas: stitching methods, colours, size of hat/brim

There was a very slow start today with even Tolofisa turning up over an hour late. It was just Ayesha and I at first. When Tolofisa came she said that someone in the congregation had died that morning, having been run over by a bicycle. It was Paradise - who had come to the group in April and had been a regular member of the group since then. The burial was to be the next day and family and friends were with the body.



Ayesha with baby Sam. November 2007

I talked them through what had happened in Jinja and the feedback from Faith Namaganda, showing them the photos of the different items and how much she would pay for them. They were surprised about the tourists' preference for natural colours but quite happy to adjust what they were doing so that it would sell.

Ruth told me that if she were able to work solidly on it, it would take her 4 days to make enough plait for 1 hat and then maybe another 5 days to sew it up.

The women have to work around their chores though, so a solid making period is difficult. A sleeping mat takes about 2 weeks for a finer mat and uses more esansa. Therefore she thought the hats were quicker to make and used less material. Although they reached less money in the shop, she felt they were a better use of her time, but said she would make a natural mat and see what she could get for it. I talked to them about caps and sketched one so they could see. They liked it a lot and want to make one, as they would take less time to make for the same money as a full hat. It was agreed that I would show them how to do this on Friday.

I spoke to them about making the plait without sewing it up afterwards for the UK. They would get much more for it, although I don't know how much yet. They liked the idea a lot.

Ruth showed us all how to make some simple mats with whole esansa leaves. They were quite attractive - each one in a different bright colour. If they get the sizes more even I could imagine them selling in the UK. I wonder why the tourists - many of them British - only want natural colours in Uganda.



Ruth wearing a hat she made, November 2007

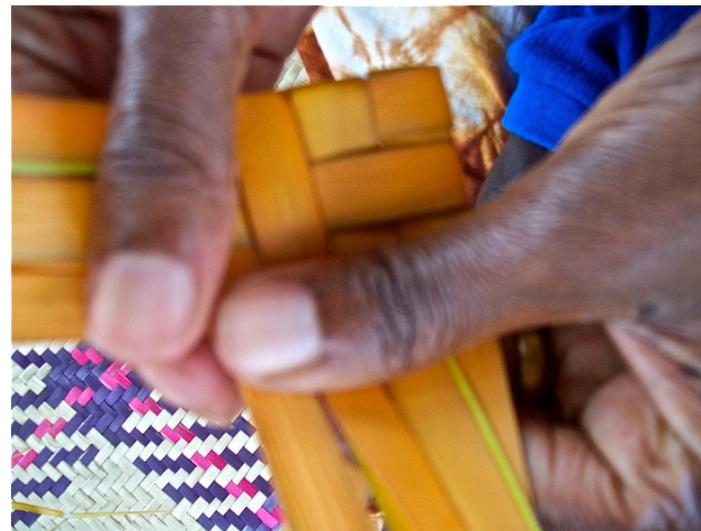


Ruth starting off the mat with two palm leaves, crossed and folded over one another, 2007

We discussed other options for table mats, made like smaller versions of the sleeping mats in esansa and matooke



Another two leaves are added and folded back



Leaves are added and folded back - over one, under one until a square shape is achieved



Small mat ready to be finished off



Ends are tucked and woven back into the mat

Some of the women think that their husbands will allow them to keep any money that they make from the project. Tolofisa said that Jesus was her husband. All the women present were the only wives their husbands had. After lunch a few more came, bringing us to 8 in total.

I am assuming, at this point, that small scale, irregular production will be more acceptable to them - at least to start with. Primarily items for the craft shops in Jinja, but I will try to get orders for plait from the UK.

I showed them how to flatten the tip of a crown that Tolofisa had made with a charcoal filled iron and a wet cloth on the flattest stone I could find. They were quite impressed with the difference it made. This was an introduction to the blocking process, in effect.

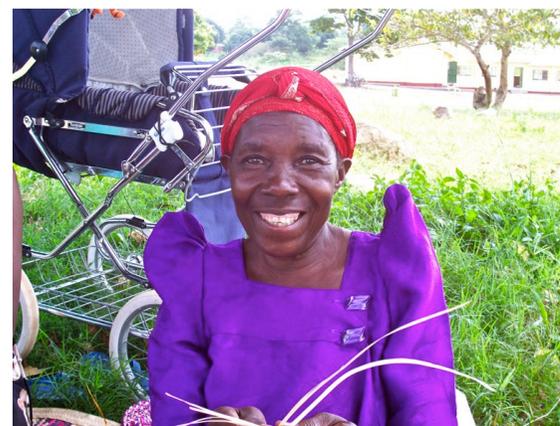
I also had a sample of a loofah that I had bought in the market. I thought it might have potential for something, so pressed it flat too and plaited up strips of it. The natural pattern of the plant fibre was too busy to show off the plait, so nothing was gained from that. However, it did look a bit like a pale bark cloth when pressed, so could perhaps be used on the underside of the drinks mats. I later tried to wash one, using washing powder. It softened a bit and became more workable. Many of the women have loofahs growing in their gardens, so liked the idea of using them for something.



Apofya with some drinks mats she made, Nov 2007



Apofya's mats, November 2007



Tolofisa plaiting, November 2007

I asked them whether they could think of any other plants that could be used but they couldn't. They were adamant that elephant grass and sugar cane leaves would be too weak to plait. They are used as cattle fodder.

Ugandan names for some plants:

English name	Luganda name	Lusoga name
Spear grass	olusenke	olubembe
Elephant grass	emuli	engada
Sugar cane	ekikadye	ekikado
Maize	kasoli	doma
Raffia	obuso	obuso

Thursday 8th November

There was the Family Planning conference in the morning, where the audience of mostly women was recommended to wait 3 years between children rather than having one after another. Various questions were asked about things like why were they conceiving while still breast-feeding - didn't that make them less fertile for a while?

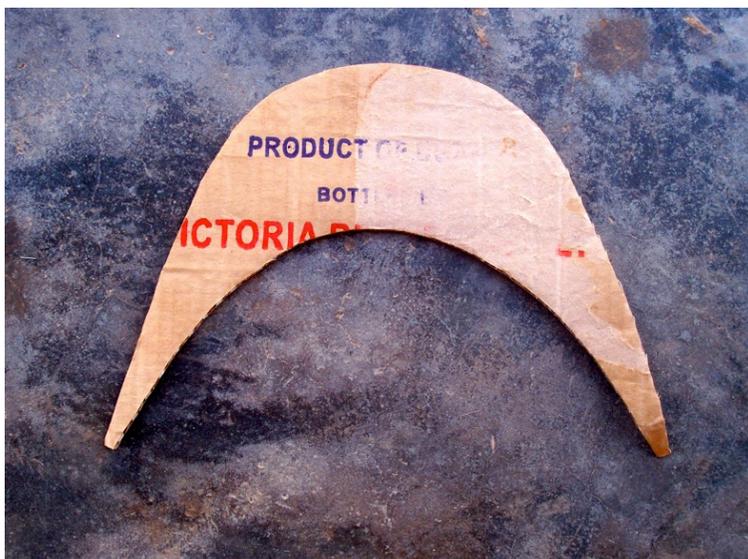


Yebatakikobye, Bushfire 2007

Late morning, I went to visit the body of Paradise with Catherine and Susan. She was in a hut owned by her husband (who had neglected her and her children for the last 10 years in favour of his second wife), lying on a mattress in a darkened room with relatives grieving around her. She looked remarkably well and very peaceful. Susan prayed over the body and for the family, giving them words of encouragement.

We went back in the afternoon for the burial service, under a giant mango tree. About 200 or so people turned up, including professional mourners sent by a local rich man who couldn't make the burial. Almost everything stops for a burial as the local community is obliged to attend.

I plaited up more esansa for the cap demonstration when I returned, sitting on my porch in the shade. I made enough for a peak and a pattern for a peak out of newspaper.



Cardboard peak template. November 2007



Peak stitched up in twist plait. November 2007

Friday 9th November

I took photos of the women for my records- Monika, Ruth, Tolofisa, Joyce, Apofya, Ayesha

Only Tolofisa and Ruth came at first, then Monika. Others came after lunch. Ayesha was there pretty much all day, interpreting and plaiting.

I gave out some card peak templates that I had made for them and showed them how to sew up the plait to make a peak. We agreed to concentrate on this on Monday, when I would show them how to attach it to a crown. This meant that I would have to make a crown from scratch over the weekend.

The women who came after lunch had made some angels in matooke, using the sample as a pattern. They hadn't had any maize for the baby's dress so had cut up a plastic sandwich bag instead. It did not look good. I pointed out that the inside of the matooke was quite pearlized and shiny in places and would make a better substitute. They liked it and will try.

Monika had made several rings of esansa and sewn them up to try and make a necklace. The sewing was untidy but the general idea was there. They may need a template for a necklace to get a good shape and size.

I talked to them about the importance of even stitching, using the same point in the plait to stitch through each time. We talked about thread again: Tolofisa found the raffia broke too much. I told her about some stronger, natural thread that I had seen on some hats in Jinja and found a thicker version to help describe it. She knew straight away what I meant and said that it was easy to get and very strong. Ruth started to practise the new plait I had developed with the twist and others joined in. Ruth and Tolofisa mastered it pretty well, doing small samples before continuing with their other pieces.



Twist plait made by Ruth. November 2007



Monika with the rings of palm she had made and joined. November 2007

Saturday 10th November

It was supposed to be a day of prayer and fasting but Elsie brought me breakfast and lunch. Oh well. I spent the day plaiting for the demo on Monday. Lots of the staff had been ill with malaria and Susan had typhoid too.

Sunday 11th November

Church was 5 hours long! Visitors came and performed as well as two sermons from Uncle Sam. Afterwards, I chatted, plaited and stitched up the crown.



Desire, plaiting on my porch, November 2007

I made two templates of a standard head fitting to give the women as a guide when sewing up plait. I finished the crown at about tea-time. I then made a bookmark.



Crown for peaked cap stitched up in twist plait
November 2007



Cardboard template for standard headfitting
November 2007



Plaited bookmark. November 2007

Monday 12th November

Tolofisa, Ruth, Robina, Yebatakikobye, Monika, Joyce, Apoffia, Ayesha

Tolofisa came first, followed an hour or so later by Ruth. Sometimes Ruth makes pancakes in the mornings and sells them at a local school at break time. Ayesha told me that what they are doing with me will enable them to have a bit of extra money for things like soap and paraffin which are expensive. I hope they will earn much more than that though.

Ruth brought me a bag of bananas, sim-sim (a sesame sauce) and popcorn- very kind of her! The sauce smelled delicious and could be used as a spread or a dip too.

Monika and Joyce came with several angels each that they had made. They were quite good - a bit elongated but ok. Joyce had used some corrugated cardboard for the angel's wings though. They had misunderstood and thought that I was going to buy them, but were good-natured about it. Monika had also made a sleeping mat in natural with purple. It wasn't my favourite colour combination and was a bit coarsely woven, but I bought it off her for the 5000 UGX she was asking and later gave it to Ayesha, who had liked it, as a thank you for her help all week. I bought a hat off Ruth, some loose plait for 5000 and a larger hat from Tolofisa for 5000. I don't want them to think that I will always buy their things - they have to take a bit of responsibility for finding customers in Jinja. Ruth and Tolofisa understand this.

I demonstrated the peak being sewn onto the crown. The women loved it and all want to make one. Ruth had already done a fair length of plait. I explained that they should ask more in Jinja for the cap in the new plait as there is nothing else like it around. I talked about head size and even stitching again, as well as how to neaten off the inside where the peak is sewn on.



Ruth's bananas and *sim-sim*. November 2007



Banana fibre angels made by Monika 2007

I took photos of them all with the cap on. At the end of the day they thanked me profusely and prayed over me for a safe journey and that I would return soon.



Monika 2007



Joyce 2007



Ruth 2007

I asked Tolofisa and Ruth to stay behind after the group dispersed, then gave them all the left over esansa and a pair of scissors each. They divided it up between them in a very orderly way and are sure to use it. They have come every day and shown real commitment. I just hope that if the others know that I gave these two some things that it won't cause bad feeling and split the group.



Joyce's angels, November 2007



A less successful angel. November 2007



Monika's angel. Hers' were more elongated, but worked better somehow. 2007



Ruth and children looking at their photos November 2007



Ruth talking to the group about the importance of meeting regularly. November 2007

Questions from Field Trip:

- If it takes Ruth 4 solid days to make enough plait for 1 hat with a brim, with shipping time added, how long would it take from order to delivery?
- How would money reach the women from UK orders?
- How much would it cost to send the plait and how can it be arranged so that the postage costs are covered by the purchaser.
- Does there need to be someone at the Ugandan end to handle the money and postage etc.?
- What about tax/duty/declarations of fibre content etc.?
- Is it better for someone to bring it over in a suitcase. Is that practical?
- Would the better price they would earn for goods in the UK be cancelled out by transport costs and red tape?
- Will they be able to make to order?
- Could Bushfire act as a conduit for this exchange?
- How can quality be ensured?
- Is the fact that the women can't think of any other plants to use for plaiting due to lack of vision or are they right?
- How will orders get through to the women? Sam and Eva (now pregnant)? Willy and Catherine? Sarah? Ayesha?



Baby Sam in one of Ruth's hats. November 2007



Two women doing some washing for some English girls doing gap year work at Bushfire



Bethel House celebrating evening devotions- praising God with singing, dancing and drumming on jerry cans. November 2007



Evening devotions in Bethel House. Nov. 2007



The staff team - a meeting to say goodbye and pray for safe travel and blessing on the project. Nov 2007



A fruit and vegetable market at the side of the road between Jinja and Kampala, Nov. 2007



Tea plantation beyond Lugazi. November 2007



Mabira Forest. November 2007



A matatu with religious slogan on the back. Muslim and Christian slogans, or the names of British Premiership football teams, emblazon most matatus. November 2007

Field Trip 3 Journal

5th November - 19th November 2008

Introduction

I visited Uganda from 5th November to 19th November 2008. I had planned to spend two nights in Kampala, then travel to Jinja for a night, before heading out to Bushfire Children's Home in Bulange, Namutumba District. Exchange rate UGX 2,800-2,630 = £1.

Wednesday 5th November, 2008

My hotel in Kampala - the Tourist Hotel - was next to Nakasero Market, in a very bustling and hustling part of the city. The area was alive with enterprise. Stalls sold everything from fruit, vegetables, pulses and grains to hardware, cooking utensils, clothes and fabrics. One stall sold some crafts, although I'm not sure who the customer would be - there were no tourists to be seen. The 'taxi parks' were nearby, so there was a mass of local human traffic on their way there or back, as well as shoppers.

I wandered around for a while, getting my bearings and changing money (the exchange rate was only around 2,800 UGX all through the trip), before heading off towards the big craft market in Buganda Road. Here there were many small shops selling a variety of homogenous crafts, including paper beads, fabrics, baskets, wood carvings of animals and people, leather sandals, toys made of African fabric and plaited bags and mats; many from Kenya or South Africa, rather than Uganda.



Tourist Hotel, William Street, Kampala



Buganda Road Crafts Market, Kampala

However, among these was a shop containing some very old-looking pieces from the Congo, including ancient ceremonial headpieces incorporating human hair and mud that I had previously only seen in books and which looked like they should be in a museum somewhere. Tempting to buy one, but the hair was somehow repellent. They also had carved wooden pieces - figures of various sorts - some quite sinister-looking that may have been used in various witchcraft ceremonies, or perhaps fakes that were 'aged'.

The man in the shop told me that they weren't used for witchcraft, but some were for a ceremony to celebrate a man who had defied local customs in the Congo (of killing twin babies) by taking his newborn twins away from his village and setting up a new village. The village prospered and others began to realise that twins did not have to mean bad luck to a village, so this was celebrated from time to time. They also had beautiful raffia Kuba cloths for about 130,000 UGX. They looked authentic and not made for the tourist market. I did not take photos - not sure why.

I was the only *muzungu* walking around there, so was subject to a lot of invitations to enter stores and view merchandise.

I explained that I was just looking at everything that day, but may return to buy the following day. This was accepted with polite resignation. This was the day that Obama won the US election and people stopped me everywhere to ask what I thought about it - surprised when I said I thought it was great and that so did many others in the UK. Was this a race thing? The Ugandan newspapers were full of it and there was dancing in the streets and amongst politicians on the TV news too.

I bought a mobile phone to use in Uganda as my UK one didn't work there. I called Sam Kitulya to tell him I'd arrived and remind him that I needed a lift to Bushfire on Saturday.



Embroidered and appliquéd Kuba cloth from the Buganda Road crafts market

I then visited the offices of Ataco, a freighting company recommended by The World of Good (an American Fairtrade organisation). They were helpful and told me that:

- The goods must be packed in boxes
- An invoice must accompany them with details of the items and their value for customs
- Destination must be clearly indicated
- They could collect them from Namutumba but this would add to the cost - better if delivered to their offices in Entebbe.
- You pay by weight or by bulk, whichever is greater
- The goods would probably go by air
- 3 flights per week to the UK from Entebbe
- It would take weeks by ship
- It would take 2-3 days to UK by air
- A rough estimate for the cost of shipping 50kg would be about \$250.
- No amount is too small

I guessed that 100 bundles might weigh about 50kg, which would add at least \$2.50 to the cost for transportation. This may be wrong and I must weigh some bundles.

My hotel was depressingly grim - not even a mosquito net. I considered my options: moving to the Fang Fang Hotel for the second night (if a room was free) or going to Jinja a day early if a room was free at Gately on the Nile. I rang Gately - a room would be available.



Building housing Ataco Offices, Colville Street, Kampala



Storks in the trees, Makerere campus, 2008



Makerere University campus, 2008



Dr Venny Nakazibwe, outside the School of Textiles at Makerere University, 2008

Thursday 6th November, 2008

I told the hotel that I was checking out a day early and asked for a refund of the money I had had to pay up front. They granted it, so I was able to check out. I left my case there while I went to the university. I had a meeting with Dr Venny Nakazibwe in the Textiles Department at 10.00am.

Questions for Venny:

- **What sort of textile work does your department produce?**

Woven and printed

- **Tell me about your own work.**

Venny told me about a project she had been involved with in collaboration with the Mildmay hospital and Northumbria University- 'Design, Health and Community'- where people with HIV and AIDS were taught crafts, coming together as a group to produce them, offer mutual support and receive health care and training. It also gave women an opportunity to reflect upon their lives, see counsellors and HIV specialists.

She showed me examples of the outcomes that had recently been exhibited in the Makerere Art Gallery, which were of a particularly good quality and which incorporated references to the illness in almost subliminal ways. I bought a copy of the programme that had

accompanied the exhibition. Some of the barkcloth panels were exhibited at the British Museum. She took a group of the women to the craft market in Kampala. They had been amazed to see where their goods ended up.

The money the women earned was then put into establishing a piggery - all contribute to the care of the pigs and breeding is planned to enable the piglets to be sold when school fees are due. School fees can be from 30-60,000 UGX for universal primary (lunch and books), better schools in towns - 100-150,000 UGX termly tuition, in Kampala 600-650,000 tuition, Art schools - 600-900,000 UGX termly.

- **What do you know about plaiting and basketry in Uganda?**

A plant fibre used for baskets- 'enjulu'. Fort Portal produces baskets in natural colours. Riubona?

- **Natural dyes?**

Salt or sometimes ginger is used as a fixative. Black dye is produced by a plant called 'muzukizi' - used in many villages to sweep their compounds. She mentioned Paul Mutongole, who works a lot with natural dyes in Uganda. There may be a book. She suggested asking the women how to get a particular colour rather than asking them about a plant first.

- **Chemical dyes used here - what do you think they are?**

??

- **Fabrics from the Congo - are they likely to be authentic?**

Yes, probably. The carvings may be 'aged'.

- **Any similar projects to my own that I should check out?**

Her own project dealt with this question.

- **Suggestions?**

She recommended the book: 'Messages of Tourist Art', by Bennetta Jules-Rosette.

She also mentioned Prof. Jackie Guille, who is working with Northumbria University.

- **Do you know anywhere to stay in Kampala next time I visit?**

Makarere University Guest House-

www.makuniguethouse.com- 0772-462311, 0414 53416

A good meeting with some interesting information about the project she had been involved in near Masaka and the benefits to the participants. I was also introduced to Bruce, a ceramics lecturer who had made vases for the film The Last King of Scotland, for Amin's apartment. Some beautiful work was on display.

Venny showed me examples of plait for sleeping mats that her group had made using letters in the weave, symbols, words and non-traditional designs. Some large dishes were displayed with different designs, baskets with words related to AIDS woven in discreetly. She told me that the Kasubi Tombs were worth visiting and would have taken me if she didn't have a meeting.

I left the university at about 13.00 and decided to go to Jinja that afternoon. I picked up my luggage then took a *matatu* from the chaotic taxi park that deposited me on Main Street, Jinja, less than 2 hours later. I checked into the very lovely Gately on the Nile guesthouse and called Sam Kitalya to let him know I'd come early. He had been in Kampala only that morning and would have given me a lift if he'd known. I should have called earlier!

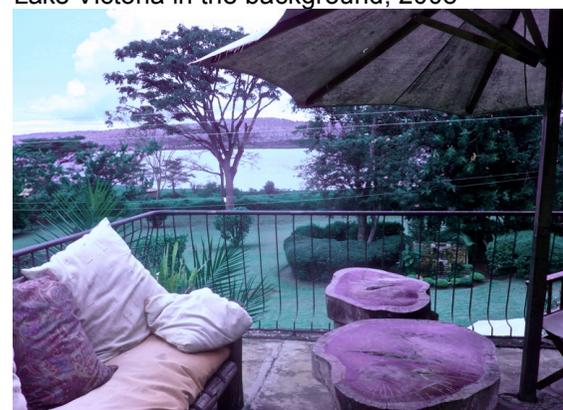
Sam joined me at Gately for a chat and updated me on news from Bushfire and his ministry.

In discussion about my project, some key information he gave me:

- The people of southern Uganda are very individual and do not like to work on something as a group. He had worked on various community projects in the past that had failed because of quarrelling amongst the participants and lack of reciprocity.
- Self help groups might not work for this reason and lack of willingness to share
- With the married women, the men will probably take most or all of the money off them. Women work hard, but men don't like to do so much.
- He thought the project had already helped the women in terms of building support structures for them. They talk, share information and counsel one another when they meet as a group.



Entrance to Gately on the Nile guesthouse, with Lake Victoria in the background, 2008



Settee on the balcony at Gately, 2008

- Many of the group have difficult lives. Some are probably HIV positive. When they make, they can forget about their problems for a while.
- Even if the men take most of the money, the women will still get a little bit from it, so it is better than nothing.
- Most of the group are widows anyway, so husbands may not be an issue.
- He thought it was a great idea to take them into Jinja for a day and would provide vehicles and food for the women as a treat.
- He thought that the staff at Bushfire could organise the sending of plait and taking orders etc. Catherine? Sarah?



A chalet in the grounds. Gately 2008

Questions arising from these points:

- Are the women making the plait in their own houses, or at Bushfire?
- How, then, do they come together?
- Will they have time to take a day to go into Jinja?



Dining area, Gately 2008



My desk in the chalet at Gately, 2008



Gardens at Gately, 2008

Friday 7th November, 2008

Objectives:

- Buy esansa ✓
- Envelope/card for wedding gift- Joseph ✓
- Change money for plait and hotel bill ✓
- Postcards ✓
- Ask about dyes in market ✓
- Work out remaining budget ✓
- Crafts ✓

I walked into Jinja, which took about 15 minutes. I missed the turning for Main Street, but ended up by the market and went in there first. Much more relaxed than Nakasero market! I found the woman I had bought esansa from previously and purchased 20 bundles, still at 200 UGX per bundle. I was pleased that the price had not gone up when I came by myself. I also bought a large bundle of *obuso* (raffia) at 2,000 for stitching. I asked the woman on the stall about the dyes: she buys the esansa ready-dyed from a man somewhere outside Jinja, but said that I could buy the dye in the market. I had done this on my last visit though. She had no idea what the dye was made of. I asked about natural dyes: she told me that many women in the villages knew about them, but she didn't. I tried to buy one of the bundles of wide plait for sleeping mats that she had on her stall, but she said that they were already sold: they plait to order for mats, in the colours people choose, charging 15,000 for a finished mat.

I walked up to Main Street looking for a Forex bureau. Someone called my name and I looked around to find Eva Kitanya. She said that when she saw a *muzungu* carrying a big bundle of esansa it could only be me. We will spend the day together tomorrow, as I will be sharing the car with her to Busembatia where she is to speak at a conference.



The road up to Main Street, Jinja 2008



Main Street, Jinja 2008

The exchange rate had dropped again and was now only 2,630 to £1. I changed money to pay for the plait and went to The Source cafe for an excellent coffee.

I visited several craft shops before ending up at Faith Namaganda's, where I bought a few items. She told me that there were still a few women left who knew about natural dyes but not many. The plant used to give the rich, dark brown colour is also used to sweep compounds and the women in the villages would know it. It grows all around the villages. She said that you soak the esansa in water, then boil it with the plant, then cover it with matooke leaves and leave it for a while - maybe overnight. Faith's mother used to do this.

It would be good to record the information about what plants gives what colour before this knowledge dyes out.



Typical Jinja house, with Indian influence, 2008



Main Street, Jinja, 2008



House in Jinja, 2008

I listed my objectives for the Bushfire visit, as they came to me at that time:

- Find out about plants used for natural dyes:
 - the processes
 - where they grow - take photos
 - produce experiments with dye
 - samples
 - find someone who uses natural dyes and film them doing it
- Teach the new plait to the women - do a refresher and samples first.
- Take the group to Jinja to see the craft shops and learn about potential local markets
- Learn more about the lives of the group:
 - marital status, number of children
 - ask about how they might spend the money they are earning
- Find out about how the making process went - pros and cons
- Have a follow-up meeting after the Jinja trip to get feedback
- Had the trip given them ideas for more products?
- Talk to the group about price - how it may have to go down when shipping costs are factored in
- Can they work to deadline? What would prevent this?
- Show them the shade card for the chemically-dyed plait.
- See if anyone knows where the dye comes from and what it is
- Film worship in church - music to form background of any film produced



Marabou storks roosting in the gardens at Gately. May be good for feather trimmings. 2008



Lake Victoria, outside Jinja, 2008

- Talk to Catherine, Sarah and Ayesha about managing the project:
 - collect orders
 - pass order on to group
 - gather in order and check quality
 - packing and documentation
 - send to Kampala/Entebbe to Ataco
 - payment to women - money transfer, Western Union, Bushfire? Set up charity? NGO?
- Demonstrate blocking and leave wooden block behind.
- Talk to the group about importance of consistency for overseas markets
- Find out what happened to the proto-type left on the last trip

Saturday 8th November, 2008

Objectives:

- Talk to Eva about the project:
- Who to run it locally ✓
- How to get payment to the women
- Packing
- Collecting orders ✓
- Point out that if it takes off, it may take up some time ✓
- Natural dyes? ✓
- Remuneration for Bushfire for managing orders? ✓



Main Street, Jinja 2008



Jinja, 2008



Outside Jinja, 2008

Talking to Eva in the car, she thought that it might be possible for someone at Bushfire to manage the project on some level. I suggested that it could become an income generator for Bushfire at some point, which she nodded at, but did not seem particularly bothered about.

She suggested that DHL might be better than ATACO as they had an office in Jinja and could deliver to London. She said she would take me to their office when I was next in Jinja. She remembered her mother using natural dyes, or her grandmother.

I had a lift from the conference (where Eva was to be guest of honour) with Solomon. He told me that his mother had been involved in a craft development project based at Mulago hospital in Kampala. His mother worked in the HIV and AIDS department, where they had collaborated with Makerere University (building upon their previous collaboration with Northumbria University) to deliver art therapy to a group of parents at the Infectious Diseases Unit. He said he would try to arrange a visit for me.

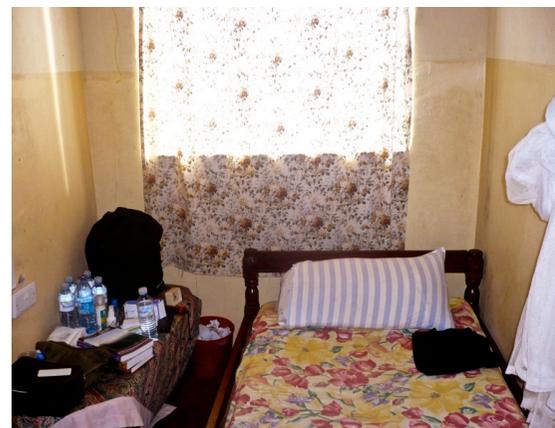
We arrived at Bushfire just before lunch. I was to stay with Catherine and Willy - some dear friends who I had kept in touch with via email - as the guest hut was occupied by a lady teaching literacy and English to the Bushfire children and local people. Catherine told me that the group had grown since the order I had placed in April and there are now 22 members. They have formalised the group and each has paid 1,000 membership fees. The older members - the original members - are being prioritised in terms of participating in the current order.



En route to Bushfire, 2008



The entrance to Bushfire, 2008



My bedroom at Catherine and Willy's house, 2008

I went to visit Sarah who told me that Ruth had been elected chairperson of the plait group, Tolofisa the treasurer and that there was a secretary and vice-chairperson. They are thinking about other potential money making ventures too, e.g. cooking. Ruth has already made about 10 lengths of plait, but is only putting 5 in for the order to give others a chance. She will offer me the rest if I have any money left. I met Ruth plaiting at the back of the church, doing some good work. Sarah told me that even if the amount I paid the women has to go down, it is still a good price - even if it went down to 15-20,000. Hopefully that will not be necessary.

No generator until 8.30 that evening, as it had been borrowed for the conference in Busembatia and the team was late back. We sat in the dark with candles and torches doing Bible study.



Some of the kids from Bethel House, 2008



Bushfire Community Church, 2008



The offering, Bushfire 2008

Sunday 9th November

I awoke several times in the night due to the heavy rain and thunder, then was properly awoken at 6.00 am by the family-I-was-staying-with's morning worship session - songs, prayers, discussion, drums! A great sound, if a little early. Everywhere is bustling with activity in the mornings: rooms are swept, floors, clothes and dishes washed, as well as breakfast and 'showering'. The children sing as they work. Church apparently now starts promptly at 9.00 am. Uncle Sam has been talking to the congregation about punctuality. It seems he has been talking about business practice and how Africans won't succeed if they don't adopt a more punctual, professional approach, using the many Asian-owned businesses in Jinja as a positive examples. The service lasted for 5 hours - great worship for at least 2 hours of that, with a strong emphasis on praising God in all circumstances. Towards the end I was called up on stage to greet everyone and arrange to meet the group after the service.

Quite a number stayed behind for the meeting. Sam photographed us all. I told them about their work having been chosen for use in the Hat Designer of the Year competition (through Sarah) and they all cheered and ululated. I wonder if they could really understand, but perhaps they understood enough to know that this may lead to more orders. We arranged to meet the next day. I told them that I had a new plait to show them which used some of the scraps from other plaits. They looked intrigued. I explained about my interest in natural dyes and how this could

be another selling point. Apparently some can show me what to use and how to use it. I also explained that I was trying to work out how to ship their goods to the UK in the future and arrange payment. One woman asked me if they would need a bank account.

After talking to Sarah, I was advised against taking the whole group to Jinja - the practicalities would be too difficult. We decided to take the committee and to talk to them about this when we meet the next day. She told me that some of the group are widows, some single mothers and others in polygamous marriages. The afternoon was spent chatting with Bushfire staff members and the children. Then I went over what I wanted to achieve with the group.

Monday 10th November

Objectives:

- Teach the new plait ✓
- Ask about their backgrounds:
- Married/single/widowed? ✓
- Children
- Ask about the making process:
- How they manage it with their lives
- Positives? ✓
- Negatives? ✓
- How is the group organised:
- At what point was it formalised? ✓
- Whose idea was it? ✓
- How will they spend the money they earn? ✓
- Will they save some or invest it?
- Talk about the price: it may come down a bit when transport is added
- Show the group the shade card and lighter colours ✓



Catherine sorting through soya beans, 2008

- Arrange a time to meet someone about natural dye ??
- Can they work to a deadline? What might stop them?
- Organise a group to go to Jinja on Thursday
- Order angels from Joyce- explain about no cardboard and longer length.



Clockwise from front left: Apofya, Lobina, Tapenansi, Scovia, Yebatakikobye, 2008

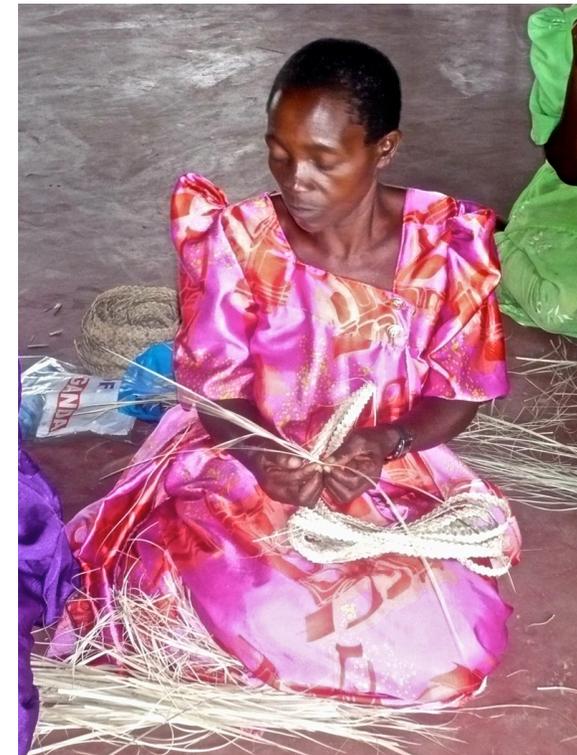


From left: Scovia and Zeulens. 2008



From left: Gertrude, Scovia and Joyce, 2008

I wanted to film the group and talk to them individually, via Sarah. I was concerned that this would make me seem more of an outsider and that the women might resent this in some way. Sam thought it would be OK when I asked him. He said that I was already "one of them" so it wasn't like I was starting off filming them. I felt that the very nature of picking up a camera makes you step outside the group, physically, as well as mentally to some degree, becoming a spectator. I decided that I would have to get over this for my research, but must try and make it as unintrusive as possible. I didn't want to objectify the women or break any trust we have between us. The camera could be attached to a tripod somewhere, discreetly, but that would be underhand unless I told them about it first. I decided to go with whatever felt right at the time; in the end, I had the camera balanced on my knee for much of the session, as I sat cross-legged on the floor. It was there for all to see but not prominent enough to make them shy.



Lovisa plaiting, 2008

Questions for the group:

- **When was the group formalized?**

It was formalized on 19th August 2008 - they have the minutes! At first, they didn't realise the benefits - when they heard about the order, they got together again and became more organised.



Jaqueline, a young single mother, with some plait she had made. 2008

- **How many of the group are married/ single/widowed?**

18 present 10/11/08:

- 7 married
- 7 single
- 6 widows

**Numbers don't add up, so they may be referring to people not present or some of the widows are putting their hands up as single too (22 in group altogether)*

- **What did they like most about the work?**

When they come together they learn from each other

It helps them to develop as women, not just to sit back and let men do everything

They build relationships with each other and gain friends- even international friends

It helps them to support each other in hard times

They get identity as women - able to support themselves and do things for themselves

- **Will those with husbands be allowed to keep the money?**

Some will reach an agreement with their husbands

They will show them the money to prove what they are doing is worthwhile

They will tell him what it is to be used for- agree

If they have an idea of how to spend it and their husbands have another idea, they will talk about it

- **What might the money they earn from this be used for?**

(I was worried that this question might be rude or intrusive - silence at first)

School fees

Necessities at home

Some are breadwinners at home (e.g. Robina - single with 6 children, Lovinas same)

Fees and to expand a grocery business

Clothing themselves and their children

- **How is the group organised?**

Chairperson - Ruth Kigenyi

Vice Chairperson - Joyce Nabwire

Treasurer - Tolofisa Namulondo

Secretary - Jacqueline Nakadame

The group had agreed that each person would leave a percentage of their earnings in the group, to facilitate the purchase of esansa.

Membership fees were 1,000 UGX

They must attend every Tuesday - if they miss too many sessions, they may be put out of the group, as they won't be able to keep up with what the others are learning

- **How do they know that the plait lengths are 20m long?**

They have tape measures (I saw some use lengths of string that had been cut to 1m as a guide)



Mama Ruth, group leader, with bundles of plait, bags and a hat she had made, November 2008

- **What do they like about the making process?**

'kwagela'

learning a skill

they enjoy doing it

knowing there will be a return on it

it doesn't involve much capital

no transport needed and can make it in their own homes

- **What don't they like about the making process?**

Backache

Sore fingers

- **Where do they get the esansa?**

They buy it in the market, or hawkers sell it when they come round to their homes and villages with it. These sellers pick it from the swamps.

- **What do they know about natural dyes?**

Edith found out that you could get maroon from a plant that they use when they have anaemia. She had been asking around since the day before.

Apparently the leaves of a tomato plant give yellow



Edith with her plait bundles, 2008



Tapenansi, with baby and Scovia. 2008



Robina with her plait bundles. 2008



From left: Yebatakikobye, Lydia. 2008

It was clear that the order I had sent by email had not been passed on to the group correctly as - instead of 24 bundles of plait requested (12 each of plait 1 and plait 2) - they had produced many more which they hoped I would take. I had only brought enough money for 24 bundles, plus a bit extra, and had to explain this via Sarah. She had been away when the order was passed on, so it may have gone via Catherine. Sarah helped to manage the situation.

The group still seemed quite happy but obviously not as ecstatic as they might otherwise have been. Ruth had made 5 bundles of the newer plait, so I took all of those plus one of the original plaits from each of the other group members. Next time I must give even more stress to quantity so they are not disappointed. At least the group now have some stock.

Edith gathered them up from each person, checking the quality and even changing the bundles offered for some that looked better to her. She was very good at this. She speaks English quite well, is an able plaiter and helpful to others. She could be a very useful member of the group - maybe handling orders.



From left: Zeulens and Tolofisa. 2008



Lovinas with her plait bundles. 2008



Apofya with her baby in foreground, 2008

Sarah asked me on behalf of the group whether I could take any more bundles and then send the money from the UK. I said "yes" in theory, but my case was already pretty full. I fetched it to show them and we packed another 16 on 'credit' but had to leave the rest. I hope this didn't discourage them too much. I ordered 10 angels from Joyce and Apofya, and found that they had already made some very nice, fairly elongated ones, but still with cardboard 'wings'. I told them that I would take them if they changed these to *doma* (maize), which is paler in colour

Ruth had also made some bags in the patterned sleeping mat plait and a hat in turquoise plait. The finish on the handles, where they were attached to the bag, and to the lining, was poor but the actual bags were quite well done. She was quite proud of them, so I didn't like to say anything, but will do another time.

The group seemed fairly well organised and democratic. Ruth addressed them with gentle authority. It was great to see her becoming a leader. Tolofisa was also impressive, taking careful notes. Willy told me that just a couple of years ago she couldn't walk: she used to have to crawl on the floor to her seat in church. She had got better after prayer and was now able to walk everywhere, although she looked a bit frail this time. Sarah thought she was in her 70s. She lives with her brother who is older, but all her children (9) live far away. Another lady in the group looked much older.

The group said that they were at my disposal while I was there (although this was before they knew I was taking less plait than expected) and would come at 3.00 the next day. I planned to do something with dye, or perhaps some stitching on the block.



From left: Gertrude and Scovia. 2008

How would an African fascinator be received? I must think of things to do with the excess plait.

Akatono enkofira - small hat

Okudhumuuka - elastic

Okusomesa - to teach

Okutonda - to make

Nsonigha - sorry

Tuesday 11th November

A very good day: Catherine, Willy, Sarah, and Ayesha had all gone to Jinja, so there were no dress-making activities. I had time to reflect on the project. I decided to come up with some ideas for things that could be made from the excess plait that the women had made which could be sold locally. I started to experiment, sitting in the shade on the back porch, enjoying playing with the materials. I decided to make a sort of Ugandan fascinator, stitching a small base, then making a looped trim of plait and finishing it with a pom-pom of raffia. I decided not to sew the components together, but to demonstrate blocking the crown later to show the before-and-after, then to sew on the trimmings. I also made a cross in the plait, then 2 other versions, trying to introduce some decoration but with limited resources. Some of Ayesha's beads would look good on one of them. These might sell to tourists in Jinja, perhaps with the central cross in *matooke*.

I thought about making flower corsages or clips in African fabrics and decided to ask Catherine for any small scraps she might have. They would work on a hair band too - must buy one in Jinja on Thursday.

At 3.00, we had a very good session even though it was of only 2 hours or so. I showed the group how to make the hat and took photos of them wearing it. Then we did pom-poms, loops, and how to block the fascinator base. They agreed that the block should be left at Bushfire for when they meet - not sure if they really will use it although they seemed impressed by what it could do.



Flower corsage ideas from left over scraps of fabric (some school uniform). 2008



Simple bow from plait, for use on band or as hat trim, 2008

We talked about the crosses and maybe using *matooke* as well, then developed the 4th design with a 'halo' of raffia (*obuso*) - the idea taken from making pom-poms. I thought the cross ideas might sell to tourists and missionaries in the area, could be used as Christmas decorations, bookmarks, wall hangings. It was a way of using up some of the excess plait that the group had made. Possibly could be sold to church groups visiting Bushfire. I thought about the children making a giant one to decorate the church - could be a fun project for them.



Plaited palm crosses, Bushfire 2008

Later, as I was sitting on the front porch, Susan came over to tell me that a woman had come in tears who had missed the group meeting the day before because of a sick child. She had also missed notification of the meeting in church for the same reason. She had brought some plait she had made and some from another woman in the same situation. Susan asked if I could afford to buy them. Luckily, Edith was passing as we discussed it. I wanted to take the plait, although this would leave me with less cash for anything else. I was concerned about

doing something behind the back of the group, as the woman needed to pay group fees and tithe and apparently still owed some membership money.

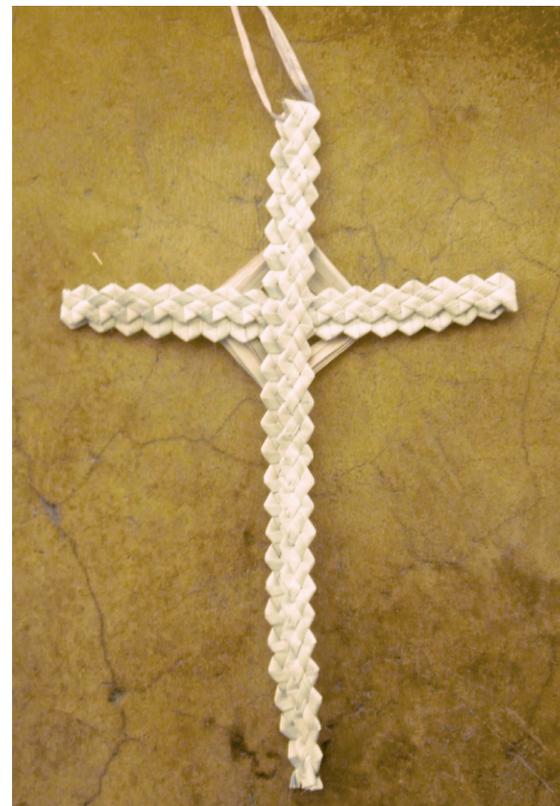
The quality of the plait was not very good - some quite wide and other parts of the same bundle quite thin. Edith told me to take two bundles but asked the woman to return the next day and replace them with two better bundles. She was very firm with the woman, but fair. I paid the woman and took the bundles, although fitting more in my case will be a challenge.

Willy gave me a Lusoga-English-English-Lusoga dictionary and a book on Lusoga grammar, so I sat and made notes of useful vocabulary.

Wednesday 12th November

A designated sewing day with Catherine. In the morning though, while she was doing some chores, I made 2 flowers out of fabric scraps to show the women. Then, we made 2 skirts and a top and cut out another skirt in the afternoon. The generator was running most of the day because of Leadership Training in the church, so we made good progress. The dressmaking was laborious though and took time away from my project - or some much needed downtime - but it was hard to say no - particularly to one's host - and I wanted to be helpful.

Ruth came to see me at lunchtime to show me some crosses she had made and to have another look at the samples. Hers' were a bit untidy - stitching and joins exposed - but the proportions were good. Zeulens came over with a cross too. The stitching needed a lot of improvement and the join was a bit loose.



Simple cross with God's Eye behind the central intersection. 2008

Reflecting on the plait that the group are making: the women have mastered the plaiting very well, although most prefer the 4-strand rustic (the first plait that I taught them). Work does need to be done on the stitching. I would like some of the wide plait they make for sleeping mats but don't want to pay 30,000 for it as it's just for me - not part of the project. Maybe photos are enough.



Desire, in hat sample, 2008



Simon, with his morning mug of porridge. 2008



Amina, sleeping. 2008

Thursday 13th November

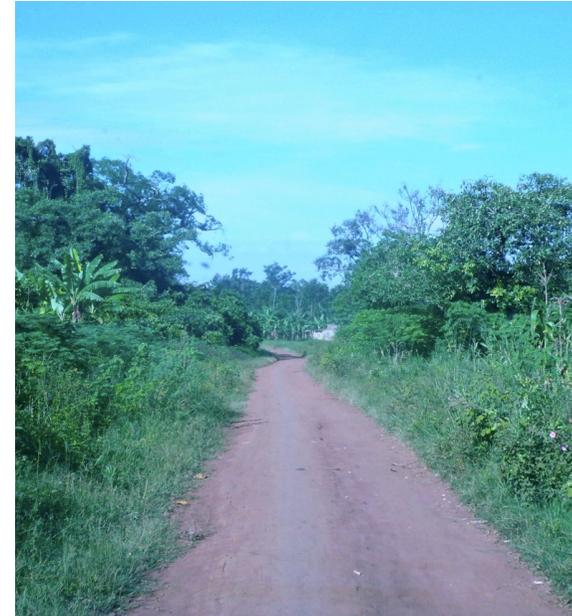
Objectives in Jinja:

- Show the women the craft shops ✓
- Talk to Faith Namuganda about the crosses, flowers and potential hair bands x
- Buy hair bands ✓
- Visit DHL office ✓
- Remind Sam/Eva/Ben about getting me to Entebbe on Tuesday ✓
- Talk to the women about their lives - get to know them better?
- Ask about the names of their villages ✓
- Ask them if they have given the group a name ✓

We set off at about 8.45 or so with Ben driving, me, Catherine, Edith, Ruth, Robina and Joyce. - committee members very dressed up in their best *gomesi* for the trip. We went to the place where Tolofisa was supposed to meet us at 8.00ish (under a certain mango tree), but there was no sign of her. Something must have delayed her and we hoped she was alright. Her hut was some way up a very narrow track where we couldn't take the vehicle. We waited for a bit, then went. I would have liked to wait longer - she had been looking forward to it so much.

We went straight to Main Street to visit some craft shops. The ladies looked around and some of the shopkeepers were very helpful. They bought a bag they liked, as a sample to show the rest of the group - it was in black nylon-ish fabric with side panels of patterned plait. I didn't like it very much with the introduction of the very western black nylon, but they loved it - perhaps for the same reason. We went to another shop that had some good, coiled bowls and other items. I bought a bowl they admired as another sample for the group - only 4,000 though, so not much money to be made for quite a lot of work.

Then we went to another craft shop. The owner had been extremely encouraging the year before when I had visited her and had told me how much she would pay for various items she sold and what she wanted more of. When I had been in her shop the previous week she had remembered me and I had mentioned to her that I was bringing the group into Jinja to see the crafts, but now she was very cool with us and dismissive, complaining about too many people being in her shop and not wanting to know about the group's crafts. Eva had arranged for us to meet a woman called Judith there, who made bags out of paper beads and other crafts. Eva wanted her to come to Bushfire to teach the women. She wasn't there yet and we were clearly not welcome to wait - especially as a group of American tourists had just pulled up in a minibus.



The road away from Bushfire. 2008



Village near Bushfire, 2008



The committee, in their best *gomesi*, ready for the Jinja trip. 2008



Inspecting goods in a Jinja craft shop, 2008



Close up of coiled bowl I bought for the group- some know how to do coiled basketry. 2008



Bowl with beaded leather bracelets sold in many craft shops in Jinja. 2008

We went and sat on a patch of grass in the shade while I called Eva and Ben. Judith arrived and we all went to a nearby café for a soda. I was discouraged by the shop owner's attitude as I had been hoping to establish her as a customer for any crafts the women might make so that they were not wholly dependent on me. I was very worried that this set-back would put the group off. Catherine was serene and positive, as always, and gave me a pep talk about the bigger picture and that something better was obviously in store for them. Of course, there are other craft shops in Jinja that could be approached, but my vision was always for the women to make a millinery material that would give them the best financial return – and the crafts idea was more of an after-thought.

I immediately started to think about alternatives:

A website

A page on the Bushfire website

The exhibition

Possible sponsors

UK customers

Other Jinja craft shops

Craft shop in the Gately Hotel in Entebbe



Beads, bags and bangles, Main Street, Jinja

Apparently Sam was considering setting up a small craft shop at Bushfire, as there are quite a few visitors from overseas each year who don't have time to shop in Jinja and would rather buy from local people anyway. That might be a good idea for a bit of extra income for the women.

I went to the DHL office to enquire about the cost of shipping 50kg of plait to the UK. They told me about 580,000 UGX. They didn't have a price list to take away, but let me borrow theirs' to photocopy across the road. Unfortunately, the power failed so it couldn't be done. I decided to look at their website when I got home. When I went back to join the ladies in the café they seemed in good spirits and were telling me not to be downhearted - quite touching. Ben drove us to the market where I bought 2 hair bands and the ladies looked around. Catherine bought a shirt for Willy after some impressive haggling and others bought shoes.

We had a good look around. Next time I must look at the second hand clothes and furnishing fabric, some of which looked vintage. I took everyone to the African Food and Snacks Café where we had enormous platefuls of delicious food, sitting at a table outside in the shade. Everyone was quite quiet over lunch - maybe it's not customary to talk when eating? The women warmed up as they finished. I asked whether they had a name for the group yet and they said they would put it to everyone the next day.

On the way back we picked up Pastor Apollo and his wife with their newborn baby, from the hospital, dropping them at Hope House in Waireka en route. We also stopped in Iganga to visit the market there. Robina knew it well and took us around. Joyce was looking for a new *gomesi*. I bought 2kg of passion fruit for Bethel House for about 2,000. Catherine and Edith bought shoes from a rather aggressive and loud young man. Catherine scolded him for his behaviour; he apologised before resuming it. We headed back to the car, but the others diverted to another *gomesi* shop. I chatted to Ben in the car, who told me that the day was a big treat for the women: "who knows when they will ever come to Jinja again - maybe never". That made it



Paper beads and paintings, Main Street, Jinja



Main Street, Jinja

even worse that Tolofisa missed the trip. He thought the shop owner had probably been co-operative before because I was spending money with her. I wondered whether the fact that some of the women had been on the trip might be a source of division in the group. When we returned, Loy told us that Tolofisa had come to Bushfire after we had left and was in tears when she heard that she had missed us. She had been all dressed up too! If only we had waited longer. Everyone's view was that Sam had been reminding people for weeks in church about the importance of being on time: that it was a hard lesson but one she had to learn.

Friday 14th November

Objectives:

- Get the women who went to Jinja to share the knowledge they had acquired ✓
(this happened naturally)
- Learn which plants can be used to dye the *esansa* ✓ (partly)
- Produce some samples from experiments with natural dyes ✓
- Photograph all stages ✓
- Make hair band sample ✓
- Assess effect of trip to Jinja on group ✓
- Ask them to give the group a name ✓
- See how Tolofisa is - will she come today? ✓
- Encourage the group about their work- particularly after Faith's attitude - not necessary: they seemed fine
- Photograph some of the plants growing wild - ✓ (some)
- Neatening products X
- Encourage the women to produce more of the newer plaits X - some were already working on them
- Joyce's angels ✓



From left, Ruth, and Robina hacking bark from the tree, 2008



Robina at the piggery, 2008

I was very worried that Tolofisa wouldn't come today and might drop out of the group. Catherine was ready to speak to her - she said that she has been dealing with these women, one way or another, for the last 5 years and had had to calm down many situations. She also said again that Sam had been preaching about the importance of good timekeeping at lot recently - for a month or so. The women have watches, clocks or radios, so they can hear the time.

Before the women arrived, I sat on the porch and made the hair band sample with the smaller flower in mixed African fabrics attached. Then wrote out the verb 'to be' in all its tenses in Lusoga, trying to identify any patterns in the grammar - thankfully, there were some.

The women started to arrive about 11.00ish (a bit late, considering that they had Bible Study at 2.00). We decided to go down to the farm to do the dye experiments, as we could set up two fires there and they had pots and lots of plants around to try. On the way there Robina hacked some pieces of inner bark from an old tree that had a rich, red-brown colour.

Herith managed it all. Her English was reasonably good. Edith joined us later. It was a smaller group of women today, but I was very pleased to see Tolofisa come. Catherine spoke to her and said that she had accepted that she was at fault for being so late. When she joined us I tried to say how sorry I was in Lusoga and gave her a big hug. She had tears in her eyes and said "kale mama" and hugged me back. She had recovered from the disappointment and was straight back into the group.



The fire being started, ready for the dye-pot



Herith examining some rock salt, 2008



Smashing up the rock salt, for a fixative

Herith and Robina, who work on the farm, got two fires going quickly and two pots of water bubbling. Only about 4-5 cms of water was used in each pot - perhaps this was to have the mixture as concentrated as possible or to conserve water.

Herith asked me to see if Sarah had any ash from *matooke* skins, which apparently acts as a fixative/mordant of some sort. I went up to Sarah's house and she came out with Paul. When I explained what we were doing, they told me that they only had the liquid from the ash, not the ash itself and that they could give me a bit of that if I wanted some. I wasn't sure, as Herith had asked for the ash specifically. Paul also offered some rock salt in a chunk which I accepted and took back down. Herith thought that it would do, but that the ash was better. She tried to break up the piece of salt with a stick, but it was so hard she had difficulty doing it, so put some water on it in a mug to try to make a solution from it. It was slow dissolving and I think it wasn't strong enough for what we were doing.

I mentioned the liquid to Herith and she said that it would be good to use, so I went back to get it from Sarah. They gave me about 5cms of it in a small plastic water bottle. It was murky/clear with no colour as such. Apparently, they use the ash from burned *matooke* skins, or its filtered liquid, to add to food they are cooking, to tenderise it, e.g. greens, or even meat, and make it cook faster. Sarah said that it was a bit like bicarbonate of soda. I know that bananas are high in potassium - is this potash that they're producing?



Countryside down by the farm, 2008



Tolofisa, 2008

Dye experiments:

Omusita - bark from a kind of tree (a ficus- possibly *albizzia coriacea*)

Chunks of bark were broken up and put in the pan of water over the fire. Then the *esansa* was added and pushed under the bark pieces.

Banana leaves were used to cover the mixture as it boiled. Rock salt was used as a fixative, but the ash (liquid) from *matooke* skins can also be used. This gave a blood red liquid and a light rust colour.

We left the mixture for about 1/2 hour, but with more time and more mordant (perhaps the liquid) I think the results would have been much stronger.



Omusita bark in dye pot. 2008



Upturned pot as lid for dye pot. 2008



Omusita bark turned a darker red and colour came out into the liquid. 2008



Lubobebobe. 2008



Omusita bark tipped out of the dye pot. 2008



Palm leaves dyed with *omusita*. 2008

A man working at the farm told us about the seeds from a particular tree that he knew gave a strong blue colour. He set off into the bush to find some, returning eventually with some leaves from the tree but saying that at that time the tree was in flower, with purple flowers, and had not yet produced seeds. The leaf looked like jacaranda. I asked the name and there was much discussion before they agreed "*lubobebobe*"

Kinenes - yellow flowers

These gave a very pale, olive colour when the *esansa* was still wet, but this didn't really show when dry. No mordant was used. '*Kinenes*' literally means 'big' or 'extensive' in Lusoga. These flowers had yellow centres and grew at the roadside locally.



Yellow flowers called *kinenes*. 2008



Kinenes in the dye pot, 2008



Colour comes out of the flowers. 2008



Palm dyed with *kinenes* drying in the sun, 2008

Ekirama - orange, rusty coloured bark from a tree with roundish leaves, very fibrous and hairy in texture. This looked promising, but gave such a pale colour that they threw away the results before I could stop them. A bit impatient...



Ekirama fibrous bark

Tomato leaves and other bits, including watermelon skins - Too many different things in the pot too quickly to assess what was working here. Herith was getting carried away. The *esansa* went a sort of yellowish green.



Dye pot of assorted ingredients, including tomato leaves and watermelon skin. 2008



Colour coming out of the *ekirama*



Close up of palm leaves dyed in the mixture. 2008

Omukunu - the bark from another tree

This tree had creamy coloured bark with orange speckles. The liquid produced was rust red, even before the mordant was added. It seemed to make little difference. The leaves looked untouched, but after the mordant was added they turned a slightly deeper green – olive - not much change.

The tree is a kind of sycamore fig - *ficus sycomorus*.



Omukunu left, *Ensuega* right. 2008



Omukunu. 2008



Not much colour from the *omukunu* taking to the palm. 2008

We tried another plant that had small green berries that look like tiny peppers.

The stem apparently gives a pale blue colour, but we couldn't cut any as the plant belonged to someone so we used the leaves, stalks and berries. Nothing really happened.

Pans are cleaned with sand to scour them, then rinsed out. The liquid that is left over is just chucked on the grass, although there was not much liquid left from any of our samples.



Plant with small, green berries (didn't work)

Fuula - green leaves that apparently give a red dye

The *esansa* was added and a few drops of mordant. This was one of our more dramatic outcomes, as the colour made was quite a strong rust. This plant had potential.



Fuula. 2008



Fuula. 2008



Palm dyed with *fuula*, 2008

Yellow Flower- no one knew the name

They told me that young people grow these flowers around their huts.

The flowers were put in the liquid and brought to the boil, then the *esansa* added and the magic liquid. As soon as the *matooke* liquid was added the colour of the water changed and the *esansa* started to go quite a bright yellow after only 5 minutes. Although the dye tinted the *esansa* yellowish, but it didn't look as strong when it was dry. I do feel that this plant has potential though and that we needed to leave the *esansa* in for much longer.



Yellow flowers that may be used for dyeing

The women still seemed very keen. It was a relief to see that they had not been discouraged by our visit to Faith's shop. The women from the trip spontaneously shared what they had seen with the rest of the group as they sat plaiting. Tolofisa was working on the newest plait, which looked very nice and even.

She asked me what length I would want it in, so I asked for 20m again. I thought I would buy it from her if she finished it before I left.

The women taught me some more words of Lusoga and we agreed to meet again on Monday, with everyone to bring some plant matter. They asked me to try and make some of the *matooke* skin liquid over the weekend to use on Monday as well as to get some paraffin, which also can be used. Not sure what its environmental impact might be, however....

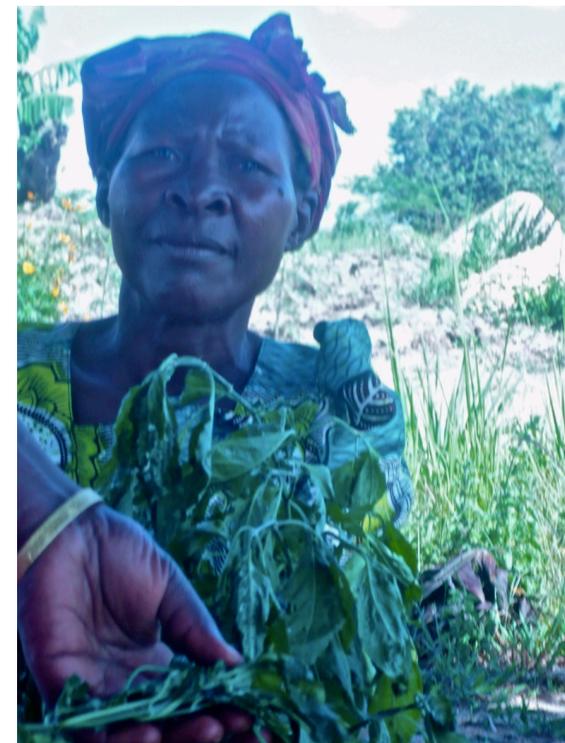
Catherine took me to the kitchen to get some discarded *matooke* skins. We took them to a concrete platform, on top of an empty septic tank, where I saw peanuts and cassava being dried. We spread the skins out to dry and left them. There had been some torrential rain showers, so I hoped we would have a dry night for a change. The weather needed to stay dry and hot.



Down by the farm, 2008



A tree that we use bark from, 2008



Getulida with *fuula*. 2008

Saturday 15th November

Everyone seemed to have a lie-in until 6.45 and there was no early morning praise session. It was my birthday - which I hadn't told anyone about - so I was keen to avoid the dressmaking if at all possible. Even when we had finished a garment, there was always another one waiting to be made. I was exhausted and feeling irritable about it - not enough time to reflect on what I was doing for the project and none at all to just relax. I tried to drop hints about it, but it was impossible to actually refuse to help. I wanted to be helpful - people had given up their time to help me and that has to be reciprocal. I didn't want to upset my host either and I like her so much. Cutting out patterns on the floor is backbreaking after a while though, and the light was poor.

I tried to label the samples we had made the day before but got a bit muddled. Next time I need to be more organised and have blank labels ready to sew to the small bundles of *esansa* as they come out of the dye pot, so there is no time to forget what dye did what. The sequence of photos helped identify most of the samples, but there were two that I wasn't sure about.

I visited Val in the morning. She had been at Bushfire for nearly 3 months and was leaving a few days after me. It was good to talk to another English person. She told me about a family of rats now living in the roof of her hut.

I thought about breaking up the *matooke* skins some more so that they would dry out faster, then went and had a look. They were already turning black and were drying out well.

I sat on the porch and looked through the Lusoga-English dictionary to see whether the names of the plants I'd been give were mentioned. Many of them were, although the women had added prefixes of 'o' or 'en' to their names.



Catherine in one of the many outfits we made, 2008

Must be a grammar thing. The dictionary was very helpful, as it gave the Latin names of many of the plants. I also wrote out the names of every plant I could find mentioned in Lusoga. Some of the entries said that certain plants were used to make dye:

Kasala bakeesi - *rubia cordiafolia* (gives red dye for mats)

Musansa-*euphorbiaceu: sapiom ellipticum* - leaves used to make mats (checked this out online and incorrect)

Nswiga- *solanum nigrum* - used to make dye



Dried matooke skins. 2008



Matooke skins drying in the sun. 2008



Catherine in her *gomesi*. 2008

Sunday 16th November

Church first thing - 4 1/2 hours. It was *gomesi* Sunday for some reason and all the Bushfire women in the choir wore traditional dress. They looked stunning.

I spoke to Eva after the service. She gave me some bag samples made with the paper beads, a purse and some belts, to try and gauge interest in the UK. When I told her about our dye experiments the previous day, she told me about a plant her mother knows of, that grows nearby – “beyond the second swamp”. It makes a dark, greyish dye when mixed with mud and the *esansa* is left in it for a while. She couldn't

remember the name though, but would ask her mother and let the women know about it. She loved the crosses and the idea of them being decorated with beads. She also said that it would be possible to pay the women from overseas via one of the Bushfire accounts, which is great news and will make things much easier. She told me to talk to Sam about which account to use.

In the evening, we burned the dried *matooke* skins- half of them on a metal sheet, then the embers were put into a clay pot, the remaining skins added and left to burn overnight. There was a lot of smoke.

I was unsure whether the ash was enough. Herith had asked for ash originally. Willy said that the pot used to burn the *matooke* in would now make whatever water was stored in it taste delicious.



Burning matooke skins. 2008



Dried matooke skins burning on a dish. 2008



The flames dye down. 2008



The matooke skins are placed in a pot to continue burning overnight. 2008



Matooke burning in the pot overnight. 2008



The next morning, the embers were out. 2008

Monday 17th November

The last day with the group. I got up at about 6.30ish to prepare smaller bundles of *esansa* ready for the dye pot and some blank labels that I could quickly attach, so that samples wouldn't get muddled this time. I hoped that the women would remember to bring plant material to use.

Herith came - she had to help in the kitchen though, as someone was off sick, She said that we would need the liquid from the burnt *matooke* skins, not the ash itself.

The ash was placed in an empty plastic water bottle with the top cut off and holes drilled in the base with a knife, then a heated screwdriver, balanced over a larger container on sticks. Water was then poured over the ash, draining through it into the bottom container, a murky dark grey brown. As the water filtered through the ash, the ash compacted and the progress of the liquid slowed. When a mug-full had drained through, it was poured through a second and then a third time, getting slightly paler each time, but still quite a strong colour. Willy said that you could filter it through filter paper if you wanted it to be really pure. He also said that it is corrosive and would eat through a metal tin in time. In the past it was filtered for the final time through sand to purify it. He suggested that the pods of legumes would have a similar effect. The technique was apparently very old and the liquid can be used as a preservative for meat if allowed to crystallise.



The matooke skin ashes. 2008



Willy cutting up a water bottle to filter the ash 2008



Jerry can of water ready to filter the ash



The ash is placed in bottle



Beaker with sticks on makes a stand



Water is poured over the ash to drain



Liquid draining through the ash



The liquid is filtered several times



Each time, it gets clearer

(o)lufu – the ash
magadi - the liquid

There was some discussion about the plants when the women came. They said that *kasala bakaasi* was "far" but that *nswiga* grew at Bushfire and they picked some from under a tree nearby. (This later turned out not to be *nswiga*, but another plant that's sap can be used to draw boils, according to Teacher Agnes).

The first thing we tried was *fuulu*, which looked like small, wilted greens. This time, no colour really came out of it. Ruth added some chemical dye to make a pink/magenta colour. I think it must have been a different variety to that which we used at the farm. The women seemed a little impatient with the natural dyes and reluctant to give them time to take

One of the women - Scovia Timojibwa - brought in some esansa that she had dyed with avocado leaves. It was a pleasant pale olive colour and has some potential. No mordant used.



Fuula



Nswiga? 2008



Nswiga? One of several plants given this name



Nswiga showing white, star-shaped flowers

It was disappointing that they hadn't brought more plant stuff and no one had brought the plant taken for anaemia that gives a red colour, even though I had been told that it grew locally and had mentioned it to them. Was this a problem with interpretation, apathy, or did the plants belong to someone they couldn't get any from, or were this difficult to reach?



Fuula, with some colour coming out. 2008



The *nswiga* with berries. Some rust colour came out, 2008



Some *magadi* was added to try to get the dye to take on the palm leaves, 2008



Bark experiments. 2008



Robina stirring the pot. 2008



Chemical dyes in little folded sachets. The group preferred them to the natural dyes we tried.



Plaiting while the dye experiments were going on. 2008



Ruth showing the group a bag she had purchased in Jinja.



Sitting in the shade. 2008



Hungry baby. 2008



Plant with pink flowers growing nearby. 2008



Medicinal plant used for treating boils, according to Teacher Agnes, 2008



Getulida in hairband sample, over her scarf, 2008

The women talked about a name for their group and decided upon: *Eyesiga Mukama* - meaning 'all things are possible through God'.

We all said goodbye and Ruth gave me a little bag she had made for me of plaited esansa. I had seen her working on it a couple of times but hadn't realised that it was to be a gift. Joyce gave me some eggs and I bought the 10 angels off her. Some do not have the *obuso* hanging loops needed, but I thought I would add them myself this time.

I took a couple of group photos and then Pastor Eddie took one of us all together. We prayed, then Ruth asked me (on behalf of the group) whether any future orders could come through Sam or Eva, as someone had insisted that they tithe 10% to the church when he had passed on the recent order. I was sure that the person was merely trying to enforce a biblical principle, but it was one that should be up to the individual and not enforced in any way. The women asked me to speak to Sam about it.

The dyeing was not particularly successful, but we had made a start and the women said that they would go on experimenting. Herith said that she had a friend in Mbale - where she is from - who is known as 'the Professor' because she knows everything. She was sure that she would know about plant dyeing, and her own mother also had some experience of it. She gave me two presents: cardboard pieces - a bit larger than postcard size - covered with maize skins, seed pods, small seeds and twigs, glued into place. I was very touched. I'm not sure there is a market for them though and wondered whether she was hoping that I could get some orders for her.

I went back to Catherine's afterwards and found Teacher Agnes there talking about the dress she wanted making. There was more pressure from Agnes to at least cut out the pieces for her - the worst part! On the floor. After laying the pieces out, it became clear that there wasn't



Eyesiga Mukama craft group, 2008
(some members not present)



Thrashing the dried soya harvest to release the beans, 2008

enough fabric. She asked if I had any other suggestions and I said "no". I was tired and irritated by the constant pressure to do dressmaking whenever I stopped work on the project and having no time to rest at all. I took my supper tray back to Elsie before heading off to Val's for a break, to be able to just sit and chat.

When I returned, feeling a bit guilty, Agnes has gone and there was no sign of Catherine. We still had Margaret's top to make, to go with her skirt, so I cut out the pieces and pinned them together ready for sewing. Then Catherine came back and suggested that I leave it for her to finish. I didn't take much persuading.

The children came in for their praise and worship session - "family devotions". Willy made each one say what their (positive) impressions of me were as part of a goodbye ceremony. They said things like: "she has been a good friend to us", "she took in our washing when it rained and we were at school", " she is a hard-working woman: you never see her just sitting and doing nothing, she is always busy." Very touching, although I would have loved to have some time doing nothing - just mulling things over - during the visit.

Willy and Catherine said some nice things, then Willy said that I may think that what I am doing with the women is small, but that I don't realise that it is having an impact in ways I can't imagine: it is strengthening marriages. Women are not having to ask their husbands for money and harassing them: they can get their own *gomesi* or things for their children without asking. Husbands are more likely to value a wife who has her own income or is self-sufficient, and will not abandon them. Children will be better cared for in families with two parents. He also said that it was an encouragement for other women to try and do something.



Herith with some plant matter for dye experiments, down on the farm, 2008

Tuesday 18th November

As I was getting ready in the morning, Robina came by with a plant called *masaai* in Lusoga that is used to give a red-brown dye. It was two entire plants, roots and all. I thanked her and debated whether to smuggle it back in my luggage for a while, then realised that it was covered in some sort of pest and decided to leave it there. Catherine said that she would plant it in a container so that there would be plenty to hand on my next visit.

There was a meeting with all the Bushfire staff to say formal goodbyes - a bit like the meeting with the children the previous evening. Then Susan prayed over me, prophesying in quite a powerful way about my work and the project. We all said goodbye, then I went to the school to take leave of all the children and wish them well.



Dark red plant from Robina, called *masaai*, 2008



Back row from left: Judith, Ayesha, Sarah, Paul, Serena, Olivia, Elsie, Susan Front row from left: Jospheh, Herith, Willy, Ben, Eddie, Moses



Ben, 2008



Kids from bethel House, 2008

Ben drove me, and Teacher Chris who was travelling as far as Kampala, to Hope House from where Solomon took us to Sam's to say goodbye. I spoke to Sam about the tithing issue and he was appalled that the women were being forced to tithe, saying that it was a matter

for the individual and that Bushfire's reputation in the villages would be badly affected if they were seen to be making money from the women's work. He and Eva will talk to the Bushfire staff about this. Sam and Eva had terrible colds and were feeling quite rough, so we didn't stay long before continuing on our journey.

Solomon had arranged to take me to Mulago Hospital on the way to Entebbe, to see the project that his grandmother was involved with. We stopped in Kampala for lunch on the way, eating some great African buffet food at Peace Restaurant and seeing a TV for the first time in ages.

Afterwards, we went to Mulago to the family HIV and AIDS unit. It was bright and clean and had a play area with cartoon characters drawn on the wall. The windows were open and monkeys kept trying to sneak in, fascinated by what was inside. We waited a while for Solomon's grandmother, who was the nurse managing the art therapy project in some way. We went to visit the container/pre-fab where the craft group of parents with HIV/AIDS were taught how to make a variety of things and given health care and counselling. The baskets and bowls they had woven were very good and even cheaper than the craft shop in Jinja where I had bought a similar bowl - only 2,000 UGX.

The makers weren't there then, but some of the organisers were. They were obviously hoping that I would solve their problems in finding customers for the work. I made some suggestions and gave them some web site addresses to contact, as well as telling them to try Banana Boat in Garden City mall. They told me that they had tried to get a stall at the Buganda Road Craft Market, but that they were all full and it was impossible. They gave me some leaflets about their project and I said I would pass them on to anyone I came across who might be of use to them in the UK.

After that, Solomon took me to the Entebbe Flight Motel and we said goodbye. I left the next morning.



Monkeys wandering through the window at Mulago Hospital, 2008



Kampala



Kampala



Kampala

Questions from previous Field Trip (Nov 2007) with answers:

- If it takes Ruth 4 solid days to make enough plait for 1 hat with a brim, with shipping time added how long would it take from order to delivery?
Potentially, just over a week
- How would money reach the women from UK orders?
Payment through Bushfire, at least initially
- How much would it cost to send the plait and how can it be arranged so that the purchaser covers the postage costs.
50 kg will cost about \$250- could be paid directly to shipping agent from UK, rather than costs being met by women.
- Does there need to be someone at the Uganda end to handle the money and postage etc.?
Yes - either Sarah, Catherine or Eva, through Bushfire, or perhaps Edith
- What about tax/duty/declarations of fibre content etc.?
I could prepare documentation online. Tax details tbc.
- Is it better for someone to bring it over in a suitcase. Is that practical?
Cheaper, but not very efficient if working to deadlines
- Would the better price they would earn for goods in the UK be cancelled out by transport costs and red tape?
No - there might be a reduction, but they would still get more than selling to the local market
- Will they be able to make to order?
Yes - but order must be explicit- nothing left to chance

- Could Bushfire act as a conduit for this exchange?
Yes
- How can quality be ensured?
Further training, plus a quality control nominee - Edith?
- Is that fact that the women can't think of any other plants to use for plaiting due to lack of vision or are they right?
Probably lack of vision - more experimentation to be done
- How will orders get through to the women? Sam and Eva (now pregnant)? Willy and Catherine? Sarah? Ayesha?
Ideally, through Eva, or Sarah

Conclusions and questions arising from Field Trip 3 (November 2007)

My original idea was to develop a material for production in Uganda that would offer a new medium for milliners and accessories designers in the West to use. While this is looking very promising, I had also considered what finished products the women could make - from crafts for the tourist market to items such as hats, that could be sold in the UK. This was to give the women as many skills as possible, so that they would have the most options for income generation in the future and were not wholly reliant on the UK millinery market or me.

They have been keen to learn as much as possible, especially so since I have been placing orders and they can see a return for their work. They have embraced the plaiting, which works well around their other commitments and with their lifestyles of planting, harvesting, childcare, fetching firewood, water etc. The church forms a meeting point and facilitates social networking.

Most are now clearly able to produce fairly consistent plait in 1, 2 or even 3 varieties - some women being able to learn new methods faster than others (as in the UK or anywhere else). Finished items: hats, bags, perhaps crosses and angels - if they are sold in the West - will probably need to conform to Western manufacturing standards, i.e. be of consistent quality and perhaps be ordered in colours that must be exactly the colour ordered. The impact of mass production has accustomed us to uniformity in the goods we buy. We expect to get exactly what we have asked for: what we have seen as a sample. Can the public tolerate some variation? Can the variance be designed around or even be a selling point?

Could a paragraph be put on any website for the items explaining that uniformity cannot be guaranteed, or can the women be trained to produce finished goods that are perfectly neat and uniform? Is it so important to us that the goods we receive conform exactly to what we order when it is small details based on the individual maker's aesthetic judgement that may be the cause of variation? How conscious are the group of their individual aesthetic judgements? Are they influenced by one another in the choices they make?

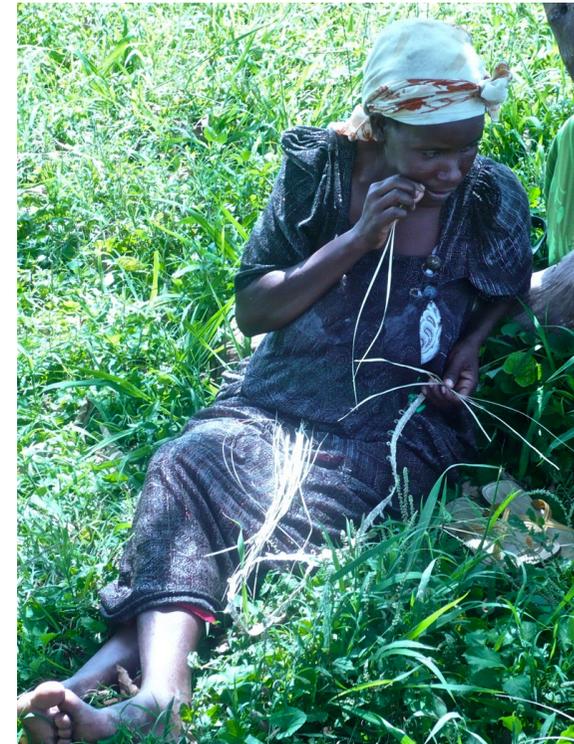
Further training is needed in making up items neatly, to equip the women as thoroughly as possible. This would benefit them locally as well as in overseas production.

I had considered what finished products the group might make for the local (tourist craft) market on previous visits. With further research and thought, I feel that production for the West will bring the women much better returns. Their profit margin would be so small if they sold locally, although better than nothing. If the women can sell directly to tourists, they will do better than if they sell through a craft shop owned by someone else, but their access to tourists/visitors is limited. If Bushfire set up a small craft shop for when visitors come, this would help although the stream of overseas visitors is not constant. How then would they monitor who made what in a collective shop and how the money would get to the maker?

The best way forward, at present, seems to be for me to set up a website to promote the women's work, selling directly to Western customers.

More thought must be given to the format of orders. I had thought the recent, emailed one to be very clear but must now look again at how I spell it out.

Should I use block capitals and large font for figures, as well as the photos? I didn't like to ask who had passed the order on to the women as this felt a bit accusatory under the circumstances. Sarah, and others I later spoke to, had realised that there had been a mix up around quantity of plait, so hopefully next time an order will be passed on more accurately.



Group member, 2008

Another area needing more thought is learning about the natural dyes. So many people said they knew someone who knew about them, but when it came down to it no very useful information was imparted. Next time, I must arrange a training session with someone who definitely knows about the plants and techniques.

So far, the project appears to be benefiting the women and their local community and feedback from Bushfire staff has been wholly positive. The women all commented favourably on its impact on their lives. If you have no - or very little - money, any extra income will probably appear to be a positive and remove some financial strain. The fact that this income is sporadic rather than regular may be a negative, or may make them think more carefully about how it is spent. It may make them less reliant upon it. Will it encourage saving or will it be spent immediately? What choices will these women make that they might not have made otherwise? Will the single or widowed women do better with it than those who are married and may have to give most of it to their husbands, or not? What will the long-term impact be on this community?



Edith



Getulida



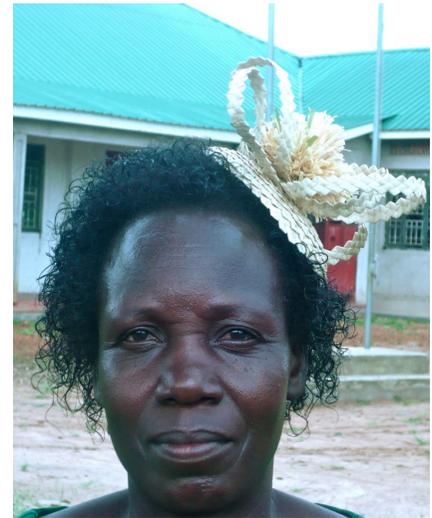
Joyce



Ruth



Scovia



Zeulens



Tolofisa



Robin

Field Trip 4 Journal

3rd November – 18th November 2009

On this trip I was accompanied by Eleanor Cain from IndigoLime Ltd, an accessories design firm that supply much of the UK High Street. IndigoLime were keen to develop an ethical line and were financially supporting my expenses in Uganda.

The flights we originally booked had their times changed by BA, so rather than arriving first thing in the morning, as was the norm, we arrived in Entebbe at 9.40pm. We were grateful to see a driver at the airport with a placard that said “Ellie and Kerstine”. He took us to ‘Laura’s’ Christian guesthouse in Entebbe, where we were made very welcome. In the morning, Laura made us African tea, to which she added fresh green lemon-grass leaves from the garden and some tinned milk. It was delicious and refreshing.

Wednesday 4th November

A taxi took us to Kampala, where we changed money to pay him before going on to the Fang Fang Hotel. The Exchange Rate was 3,050 UGX = £1.

The Fang Fang put us in some dark, unpleasant rooms at the front. We managed to get moved to some better ones - room 101 again for me. After unpacking a bit, we changed more money before heading to 1000 Cups of Coffee on the Buganda Road. Their in-house craft shop had some tufted-pile raffia cloth from the Congo for 38,000 UGX. Haggling didn’t work, so I went to look around the large crafts market across the road. Everyone tried to call us into their small shops. People were sitting inside in the shade, a few of them making some craft items, threading beads etc.

Some Nubian food containers were sold in several shops, with pointed, conical lids in bright patterns. Some fine, coiled earrings were on sale in many shops in a range of colours.



Kampala, 2008

A lot of the merchandise was very similar - a homogenised Africana. Some items were semi-industrially produced in Kenya and South Africa. Some of the shops had patched raffia cloth or some tufted pile Kuba cloth from the DRC. The patched strips were several meters long and very lovely, some embellished with cowrie shells or small pom-poms of frayed raffia. They cost between 100-180,000 UGX.

We had lunch at Kasalina's and then went to Nakasero market, where we each bought a large bag made of plaited palm leaf plait for 2,000 UGX, as well as some vanilla pods (a large bundle for 10,000 UGX). The guy selling them had been chewing too many coffee beans and was very hyper.

We went to find Garden City (an upmarket shopping mall) but ended up in a similar one called The Nakumatt Oasis - a bit sterile after downtown Kampala. There were quite a few expats and overseas visitors. We bought tea with lemongrass from a big supermarket there, then trudged back to the Fang Fang.

Thursday 5th November

I had a meeting with Venny Nakazibwe at 9.00am. Ellie accompanied me. Venny was leaving for Sweden the next day so was very busy, but was generous with her time. I showed her some photos from the Hat Designer of the Year Competition, which had taken place in September. She was interested to see photos of the hats made from the plait developed with the group at Bushfire and wished her students could see them. I left the spare copy with her.

We also discussed Margaret Trowell, her legacy of art education in Uganda and what an incredible life she must have had. Having graduated from the Slade School of Art in the UK, she started to give art classes in her home when she moved to Uganda with her husband in 1937,



Nakasero Market, Kampala
www.thisotherworld.co.uk



Nakumatt Oasis Shopping Mall

attracting some influential people. Eventually, she was able to realise her dream of setting up a school of art in Kampala, as well as travelling throughout Africa to collect traditional art and craft and curating the Museum of Uganda collections. Venny reflected on how hard it must have been for her then.

Ellie and I took a taxi to the Kasubi Tombs, the traditional resting place of the kings of Buganda. A guide took us on a tour of the fascinating, palatial structures. The main 'hut' was enormous, held up by pillars of wood and columns of reeds, with a large, domed, thatched roof.

Apparently, the first Arab traders arrived in 1844 and the first Europeans in 1870 (Stanley). The king at that time would not accept Islam, as he would have had to be circumcised and kings are not allowed to shed blood. He didn't accept Christianity either, as he would have had to give up all but one of his wives, but he invited missionaries to come to Uganda and encouraged his people - up to a point - to convert. In 1886 (?), the king was worried about God's kingdom coming, imagining a competing, earthly king. He ordered his people to deny God. Some refused and were martyred: the Ugandan martyrs.



The Kasubi Tombs, 2009



Structure on inside of main 'hut', 2009



Columns bound by finely plaited bands , 2009

Inside the main tomb the ceiling rose to a soft point, supported by wooden columns covered in barkcloth. Concentric rings of bound elephant grass stems formed coils supporting the roof. Each ring represented a clan of Buganda. The three central ones belonged to the king and were dipped in his enemies' blood, so were darker in shade than the others.



Inside the 'hut', 2009



Support structures around edges of hut, 2009



Mats at the Kasubi Tombs, 2009

Beautifully plaited mats covered the floor, apparently made by the kings' wives. The walls were hung with barkcloth. Against a sort of altar, or raised area, were photos of the kings of Buganda, spears and shields. Behind a high, barkcloth curtain lay the bodies of the former kings – "hiding in the forest."



Mats, shields and medals. Kasubi Tombs 2009



Kasubi Tombs 2009



Mats at the Kasubi tombs, 2009



Mats and barkcloth wall coverings. Kasubi Tombs 2009



Mats and barkcloth wall coverings at the Kasubi Tombs, 2009

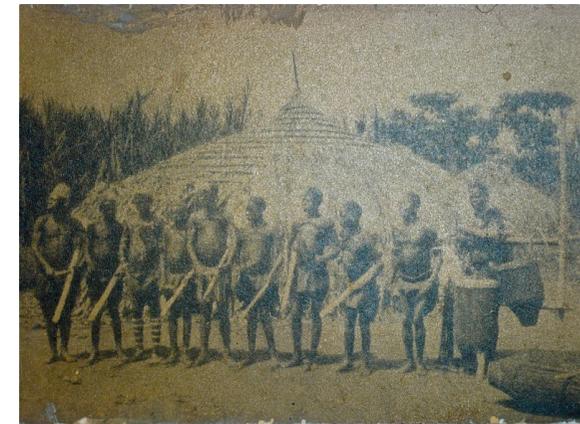
After the Kasubi Tombs we went to the Museum of Uganda, where there was an exhibition on global warning and its impact on Uganda, (such as increased drought). In the main collections there were some interesting tribal headpieces and hats - some made with human hair. Items of basketry such as fish traps and food containers were on display, and shields that incorporated woven plant fibres. There was also a range of musical instruments and weapons.



Drums at the Kasubi Tombs, 2009



Woven fish traps. Museum of Ugandan, 2009



Old photo at the Museum of Uganda, showing large, thatched hut in background, 2009



Basket, Museum of Uganda, 2009



Instrument with plaited strap, Museum of Uganda



Cowrie shells, Museum of Uganda, 2009



Tribal headdresses, Museum of Uganda, 2009

Feather, ivory and bead decoration



Cowrie-covered headdresses, Museum of Uganda, 2009



Wickerwork shield



Woven food containers

After the museum, we visited Uganda Crafts 2000 in the Bombo Road. It was a long way down the road and we nearly gave up before we found it. Uganda Crafts 2000 is a Fairtrade organisation. The crafts were better made than many we had seen elsewhere and more expensive. Each item had a label that gave the name of the maker and described their circumstances, e.g. 'widow' or 'HIV positive'. It was impossible to quibble about the prices after seeing that. I bought two large, coiled, basketry bowls at 40,000 UGX each and some horn earrings for 2,000 and a banana fibre hat for 8,000.

On our way back to the hotel, Sam called to say that he was sending Ben to get our big cases, so we could more easily catch the bus to Jinja the next day. Sam was having his car fixed in Kampala and was hanging around for it while Ben came on a *boda boda* for the cases.



Close up of a sleeping mat on the floor of Uganda Crafts 2000, 2009



Reverse side of basket, Uganda Crafts 2000



Banana fibre hat (over base of cardboard)

Friday 6th November

Ellie and I tried to get the Post Bus to Jinja but were told that it wasn't running today because "there was a problem". We got a *matatu* to Jinja instead, for 4,000 UGX. However it decided to terminate earlier, before the Owen's Falls Dam, so we were transferred to another one. After being dropped off in Jinja we walked down Main Street to meet Eva at The Source Café, to discuss our itinerary for the rest of the trip.

My aims were a bit undefined - apart from trying to address issues of quality in the plait, ordering and natural dye. Ellie was able to advise Eva about Fairtrade registration and certification.

We went to the shop in the new Craft Village in Iganga Road that a group called Mothers of Hope had rented. Mothers of Hope comprise seven groups from the surrounding area. Each group produced a mixture of crafts, although the Kamuli group we were to visit specialised in baskets. Apparently they make neatly because their group leader guides them. Eva was representing the Bushfire group. The crafts at their shop were very similar to others around – the same bags etc. Not all were well made or designed. We tried to make suggestions and these were well received. I was concerned that we might be being arrogant, but was convinced that if their goods weren't different, better or cheaper than those in other, more established craft shops, I couldn't see the incentive to buy them. There were many necklaces of paper beads on sale, some of which are sold to an Australian buyer who sells them for 8 Australian dollars each.

Other information shared was that it costs 700,000 UGX to send 10kg of goods via the Post Office and that donated equipment could be sent free via Tools With A Mission.



The Source Café, Main Street, Jinja, 2009



Plaited banana fibre bag, Mothers of Hope, 2009

Ellie helped them to cost their overheads:

Monthly:

Rent	150,000
Electric	5,000
Security	27,000
Water	5,000
Sub-total 1	187,000

Staff	150,000
Transport	2,000
Travel for shop attendant	26,000

Costs 366,000

Food for shop attendant 26,000

Monthly total – approximately 400,000 for shop and staff

After the meeting at Mothers of Hope, we went to the market to buy some *esansa*, *obuso* and chemical dyes, but had no time to look around thoroughly. Then we went to get some *kitenge* for Ellie's bag designs, looking in the many shops that sell it on Main Street.

Unfortunately most good patterns were made of polyester, when we really wanted cotton. We eventually found some in a shop run by Indian expats.



Plaited palm and banana fibre bags. MOH 2009



Plaited banana and palm purses, MOH 2009

Afterwards, Ellie and I were dropped at Gately on the Nile guesthouse, where we checked into our very nice rooms before having a drink overlooking the lake and watching the giant storks roost in the trees for the night.



Plaited purses, Mothers of Hope, 2009

Saturday 7th November

After breakfast, we were picked up by Ben, Eva and baby David at 9.00 to go to Kamuli – to a village about an hour and a half north of Jinja - collecting Rebecca and Molly en route. We bought some soap and sugar at a local supermarket to take as gifts for the group, who were going to show us how to dye palm leaves with plant dyes. On our way, we saw two large, dead snakes on the road.

At Kamuli, a group of eleven women sat on mats on the floor of a half-built brick structure, open at the side so the breeze could go through. *L* – who was their group leader - introduced everyone and explained their circumstances: some were widows, others had been abandoned by their husbands because they had refused to have more children after the first five or so. Apparently Ugandan men (in that district) want endless children and it is exhausting for the women. If they want to keep their husbands, they have to keep producing children or their husbands will find another wife. Some of the women were single parents too; some were HIV positive.

L was a strong personality and very well organised. She made her group keep un-picking work and re-doing it until they got it right. They seemed to be doing quite well and some travelled from long distances to be in the group. One woman had been asked to bring a particular plant for dyeing but had forgotten. *L* expressed her displeasure, as the woman had known about this for some time.



The Kamuli group, 2009



Kamuli women sharing techniques, 2009

We tried to dye with some other plants, including the berries from the 'colour plant' (small, orange berries from inside a spiky pod), which Eva rubbed over the palm of her hand. The waxy paste is apparently used as lipstick and even a sort of nail varnish in the villages.



Orange colour plant' (annatto) Kamuli, 2009



Molly hacking bark from a mango tree, Kamuli



Annatto dyeing raffia and palm, Kamuli, 2009



Palm leaves immersed in sweet potato leaf liquid



Pink colour plant and tea leaves, Kamuli, 2009



Palm and raffia soaking in a tomato leaf solution

The group got impatient when natural dyes did not take quickly and added some chemical dye. The resulting, slightly muted colour was not what they expected, but they loved it - "something new". It encouraged them to try more things. It was explained to them that naturally dyed products would be popular with western visitors.

Over lunch of beans and posho, I was told that sweet potato leaves were used to dye fabric green. Molly had learned this in school. The leaves were mashed up by hand in a bowl until a green liquid came out, then palm and raffia put in. This liquid was also used to clean babies in the villages as it had moisturising and anti-bacterial properties

Eva gave me some dried dark red flowers - like hibiscus - that were used to make a drink. It was known as 'pink-colour plant' or 'ribena plant' and some was used for dye experiments, with limited success.



Dye pots at Kamuli



Rebeka (right) advising one of the Kamuli women



Turquoise, chemically dyed palm, left, Raffia dyed with sweet potato leaves and a pinch of turquoise

Sunday 8th November

After an early breakfast at Gately we were collected by Sam Kitalya who was to take us to Bushfire in time for church. When we arrived, the service was already well underway - the women's voices were beautiful and moving. There were lots of familiar faces in the congregation. Tolofisa gave me a big hug. Ellie and I had to go up on stage to greet everyone and be formally welcomed.



Gately on the Nile, Jinja, 2009

After lunch we went around the different houses at Bushfire to greet everyone. Catherine asked if I could do some sewing, but I remained non-committal. Sarah was expecting a baby and had to rest a bit. Ayesha's son Sam looked much better after a heart operation in Germany. He could now walk and talk a little. We met the new babies - Joseph and Olivia's Holly and Ayesha and Sami's Shera. Later in the afternoon Ellie and I sampled and plaited, with a group of children as onlookers and participants. I made a plait that changed colour along the length as well as some pink/natural and all natural Plait No. 1. The electricity came on at about 6.30pm and went off at 9.30pm. Fireflies flew around the darkness of the guest hut.



Children plaiting at Bushfire, 2009

Monday 9th November

The group was to meet from 10am onwards and most were reasonably prompt. Sarah helped with translation and facilitated the session. Ellie was interested to know how keen they would be to make other things. The women said they were happy to, as long as there was a market for them. Eva called to tell us that Mothers of Hope had been invited to take part in an exhibition in the UK the following February. We needed to identify 3 items that the plait group could make for it - maybe decorations? - that were unlike anything the other groups would make.



Plait group session, November 2009



Tolofisa with Pastor Apollo's Shalom on her back



Sorting through plait for the order, 2009

We went through the order I had placed by email to Eva. It was not accurately fulfilled and the quality of some of the colours I had wanted was so poor that I couldn't take them. Some women brought pretty much any colours and some had been dyed after plaiting, so was patchy. The order for particular plaits in particular colours had not been followed.

Sudden torrential rain made us all run for shelter to the church, where we went through the order again. I paid for 22 bundles of plait and had a further 4-5 to come. I would need to ask Eva about how orders are communicated in future. We needed to establish a person on site to manage this process, giving clear instructions and monitoring progress/quality.

Some group members had not been attending regularly. There were 12 who were very committed and others less so. The regular attendees (Ruth, Tolofisa, Scovia, Edith, Joyce, Lovisa, Robina, Lovinansi, Tapenansi, Nuru, Getulida, Jacqueline) were not happy that I had taken plait from the others - although most was taken from regulars. Quality varied widely. It was generally clear who the regular people were by the better quality of their work. After some thought, I announced to the group that in future I would not buy plait from people who did not attend regularly. This seemed fair and pacified the regulars.

Ellie asked Scovia to make her a sleeping mat plait that changed pattern down the length. At first she said it was too hard, but that she would try. When Ellie said she would pay her anyway, she relaxed a bit and worked out how to do it - it was beautiful. We also discussed the width of the plait, establishing 3 widths - 1.2cm, 2cm and 2.5cm.



From left: Tolofisa, Damali, Joyce, Apofya, Close-up of sleeping mat plait and Plait 1

Tapenansi and Lydia with their braids

It was a good first session, although there was obviously a lot to do on dyeing-to-order and the communication of orders.



Ellie examining a mat she was buying from Lovisa, 2009

Ellie bought a mat from Lovisa. Then others asked if she would like to see their mats, so it was agreed that they would bring them in although no guarantees were made to purchase any.



Christmas decoration in banana fibre?



Christmas decoration in banana fibre

Ellie and I experimented with Christmas decorations out of palm and banana fibre. Apollo brought us lots of *matooke* fibre. After sampling, we thought that the angels that Joyce and Apofya make would be good for the exhibition, and maybe some *matooke* decorations, but they needed more thought. The small drinks mats could be good too, and the crosses I had developed previously.



Banana fibre. Bushfire 2009



Plait bundles, Bushfire 2009

Tuesday 10th November

Ellie and I got up at 6.00am to go to Jinja with Loy, Florence, Pauline, Elsie's husband William, Ayesha's Sami and baby Sam and Paul (the driver). The vehicle had been fixed. We took a circuitous route: the usual road was badly affected by recent rain. It took about an hour to reach the main road, then the same again to Hope House, where we dropped off Sami and Sam and picked up two girls. It was a long wait, so we didn't get to Jinja until 11.00.



Top of hat that is woven from a single palm, leaf purchased in Jinja 2009



Hat woven from single palm leaf. Jinja 2009



Plaited plastic bags made into a decoration- not very successful! Mothers of Hope 2009

In Jinja, we took Paul for tea and samosas at The Source Café and arranged to meet him later. We walked down Main Street to see the craft shops. One shop had some very good quality sleeping mats at 30,000 UGX. The workmanship was excellent. Ellie bought one but I hesitated, as the colours weren't right for me. Talking to the shop owner - a committed Christian - she told us that all the crafts were made by disadvantaged women in the Masaka area. The shop was a social enterprise. They sold bags and necklaces, as well as place mats and paper bead jewellery. They also sold children's clothes and stationery.



Rebeka plaiting plastic bags, 2009

We wandered down the road, visiting all the craft shops. Ellie bought lots of sample items. Then we went to the market and bought *esansa* in bright colours for making drinks mats. We also found an area where vintage furnishing fabric was sold: I bought a large 1970's curtain for 7,500 UGX and a pair for 15,000. I also bought a vintage dress for 10,000.

After this, we had a meeting with Eva and Mothers of Hope representatives- Rebeka and L. Mothers of Hope had recently registered as an import-export charity. They told us about school fees in Uganda:

80,000 per term for primary school

160,000 per term for secondary school

35,000 school uniform

28,000 per term lunch money

6,000 per term primary books

45,000 per term secondary books

1,000 per day transport

This gave me an idea of the financial needs of women with children in the area. Mothers of Hope calculated that a woman would need to sell 13 necklaces, to pay school fees and cover their costs, at 16,200 per necklace. This made them completely uncompetitive, as every other craft shop sold them for 3 or 4,000. Ellie helped with costings. The methods Mothers of Hope had applied were very generous, but unrealistic in that marketplace.

We returned to Bushfire after a long day, stopping at Iganga en route, and arriving after dark. The generator broke again so there was no electricity.



Rebeka with plaited plastic decorations. 2009



Plaited plastic. Mothers of Hope. 2009

Wednesday 11th November

The group came from 10.00 onwards. Before they arrived, Ellie and I went down to the farm to see some experiments that Robina had been doing with plant dyes. She had arranged her different trials methodically, on banana leaves, with the dye stuff and the resultant palm leaves on each.



1. *ekiyugeyuge* seed pods and flowers- palm leaves boiled, then the dye stuffs added, boiled for 3 minutes.



2. Leaves and stalks of *ekiyugeyuge*- 3 minutes



3. Tomato leaves (from small tomatoes)- 3 mins



4. *Fuula* leaves and stem with *magadi*- 3-4mins



5. Plant with purple leaves, with *magadi*- 3-4 mins



6. *Enanda* leaves and stem, with *magadi* – 3-4 mins



Robina and Herith, down on the farm, 2009

Some of the dyes looked promising - particularly *ekiyugeyuge* and the tomato leaves. I asked Robina to make me a bundle of plait in palm dyed by tomato leaves before I went back.

Then we went back to the group meeting point, under the big tree near the church. As the women arrived and greetings took place, I asked Ruth and Edith how long the different plait bundles took to make. They said that Plait No 1 took about 20 hours, No. 2 25 hours and No 3 30 hours. Tapenansi told me that sleeping mat plait took about 1 hour to make maybe 1 ½ metres, depending on the width and design



Robina's experiments. Bushfire 2009



Ekiyugeyuge, left, growing over a bush. 2009

They told me that blue, yellow and green dyes were combined to make black, which seemed wrong. I talked about yellow and purple and they looked surprised. Apparently about 10 bundles of plait were needed to make a mat. It could be made in one week if working solidly, but two weeks around other commitments. I bought more bundles from group members. Ruth had brought some hats she had made. The shapes were good. She had lined the brim of one of them, to hide where she had changed the colour of the thread used to sew up the plait.



Hat made by Ruth. 2009



Ruth's stitching with colour change, 2009



Ruth's lining. 2009

I actually like the colour change and advised against the lining, which had not been well executed anyway. The women brought various items that they had made, such as bags/baskets out of plait. Ellie showed them her samples and commissioned Ruth to make a bag like the palm shopper from Nakasero market, using sleeping mat plait instead.



Bag sample Ellie bought in Jinja to show group



Bag/basket made by Ruth, 2009



Group members with samples and produce, 2009



Mats made by group members. 2009



Plait bundles and a coiled pot made by Lovisa, 2009



Getulida discussing the hat sample from Jinja



Sarah with some plain traditional plait for binding sleeping mats, 2009



Ellie discussing making *matooke* mobiles with Edith



Scovia centre, making the mixed-pattern plait



Zeulens - left, Edith - right, 2009



Measuring Tapenansi's plait, 2009



The plait group, 2009



Eva with a bag sample brought by Ellie from the UK, 2009

Eva arrived for a meeting about the exhibition, stopping to talk to the group about the samples and various products Ellie had proposed to them.

The group left around 1.30. After lunch, Ellie and I attended the meeting in Ayesha's house with Eva and the Bushfire staff group: Loy, Eva, Sarah, Catherine, Ayesha, Rose, Z to discuss the exhibition, as well as the organisation/management of the group and communication.

Catherine had been working with the plait group - "mobilising them" - but they needed a clear leader who could organise the orders and check quality. Eva was proposing some Bushfire staff members but all had other commitments. We discussed making a 'book' for the group of quality specifications, with samples as guides. Also keeping records of allocation, when orders come in. Most of the staff seemed reluctant to be involved - some had good reasons: Sarah was pregnant again and had had difficulties in the past; Ayesha had a young baby. Eva proposed Rose, Sarah, Catherine and Ayesha: Rose and Sarah as regulars, with Catherine and Ayesha as cover. It seemed like too many people to me and could lead to conflicting messages.

The female staff were making paper beads and jewellery now, but had few customers. Their jewellery was expensive by local standards, at 10,000 UGX per necklace. Z was keen for Ellie and I to advise them on the necklaces, although this was not really our area of expertise.

A man called Fred joined us for a while. He had previously been manager of the Bank of Uganda in Jinja but had left to work with Bushfire. He was concerned about income generating activities, as they had 200 people to sustain. He and Eva were keen for the staff to become involved in their own income generating activities, to supplement their income from Bushfire, as they had many dependents and needed their skills developing.

They discussed the vocational training centre and how it might help with this. Skills would be taught there in tailoring, welding, making concrete blocks, brickwork, metalwork, woodwork and catering. They thought the vocational training centre could be a base for producing orders for IndigoLime. Fred said that over 1,000,000 trees had been planted on Bushfire land to provide timber. He suggested planting palms too, to prevent local supplies from being depleted by the plaiting. Apparently the local community comprises about 40,000 people. The plait group's other activities at Bushfire included serving in church, working at the farm, or gardening, for extra income. Torrential rain broke out while we were there; we could hardly hear each other over its noise of it on the corrugated metal roof.



Vocational Training Centre, 2009



Donated sewing machines, 2009



Concrete blocks made at the centre, 2009



Machinery in the VTC workshop, 2009



Engineering and joinery workshops at VTC



Vocational Training Centre, 2009

Thursday 12th November

I started the day down at the farm conducting experiments with plant dyes. I had to keep fighting Robina's urge to add other things to the dye pot, as she got impatient when results were not instant.

We started with the dried 'ribena' plant that Eva had given me. It seems to be some sort of hibiscus - a bit like that used to make the West Indian 'sorrel' drink. The deep red liquid from the dried flowers (soaked in water) was added to a dye pot, with a few extra dried flowers, and boiled for 15 minutes with palm leaves. The leaves were slow to change colour, although the surface began to take. We added some salt and the colour took more strongly, but became a much dirtier pink and eventually brownish. When left a bit longer, the foam turned black. After an hour, the palm looked like it was turning brown and the flowers had burned in the bottom of the pan.



Dye pot with palm in ribena flower solution 2009



Ribena flower experiment, after about 45 minutes



Palm leaves coated with a greyish powder after dyeing with ribena flowers, 2009

We also tried some pounded *omusita* bark that had previously been dried out, which gave some moderate results - a warm, light brown on the surface of the palm leaves.



Omusita bark with palm, 2009

Another experiment was done with some annatto berries I had brought from Kamuli, but there were not enough of them to produce as strong a result. They did give a nice, warm gold after 30-40 minutes though.



Robina with the pounded *omusita* bark



Stirring the dye pot, 2009



Omusita bark

We also tried tomato leaves. Robina had been successful with these previously and wanted to dye up enough palm for the order I had placed with her.



Palm leaves pressed into pot, 2009



Tomato leaves placed over the palm leaves



Banana leaf used as lid, over tomato leaves and palm



Palm leaves dyed with tomato leaves, 2009



'Henna' flowers, centre, 2009



Herith collecting soya husk ashes to make mordant



Herith preparing the soil for 'ribena' flower seeds

Another plant growing nearby is called 'henna' locally, although not related to the henna used to colour hair and pattern hands. The leaves are rubbed on nails and left for 3 hours to stain them orange. Herith said there was also a tree called 'henna'.



Raised mounds created for planting seeds in, near piggery 2009



Storm coming from behind the farm, 2009

Friday 13th November

The group met again today. Ruth had made a cap (following the template I had left) in purple and natural Plait No, 2. The slightly shallower crown was fine and overall the cap looked good. The peak was at a more acute angle.

I bought it from her. She asked 2,000 for it as it had taken less time than the brimmed hat. She had also brought a little vase/pot she had made, which Ellie bought as a sample for IndigoLime. She had also finished a bundle of mixed banded 'rainbow' plait in black, green, natural and blue.

Ruth had brought some grasses to try to plait. There was a lot of discussion about their name, but none was given. The group discussed the hat that had been woven from one palm leaf and agreed it was probably from a coconut palm

They taught me some Lusoga greetings:

A: Oly otya (How are you?)

B: Bulungi (Fine)

B: Oly otya (How are you?)

A: Bulungi (Fine)

B: Mwebale/Jebale (Well done/that is good)

A: Kale (OK)

B: Abaana (how are the children)

A: Balungi/Baliyo (They are well)

Tusangaire- (you are welcome [to join us])

Tunabonagana olundi/ tunayiramu (see you later)

Jacqueline was making small drinks mats. She said that in order to ensure that they were all the same size, the esansa must first be prepared to the right width. I ordered some from her for Monday. Edith had made small, matooke figures. I ordered 8 for Monday too. In



Clockwise from top: bag in progress (by Ruth to Ellie's commission), coiled bag with lid sample bought in Jinja, small vase/pot lined with gingham made by Ruth, bundle of rainbow plait by Ruth, pink Plait No 2 cap in progress by Ruth, 2009



Grasses brought by Ruth to try: too brittle. 2009

discussion with the group about what had gone wrong with the order, they told me that the easiest colours to buy for dyeing were green, purple, yellow, blue, red and pink. They said that black was the hardest. When I asked why the colours I had ordered hadn't been made, they said that when they bought the dye it turned out not to be the colour they wanted. They bought dye from the market in Bubutya, or elsewhere - any market would have some. They prefer to dye the palm it themselves as the pre-dyed is more expensive.

I told them about turmeric, which is available in Jinja and probably Iganga. They were interested to hear that it would dye palm.

Apparently, some local palms have been uprooted as the swampy ground where they grow was being converted to rice production. I would talk to Eva about planting more at Bushfire - it could even be a small means of income generation.

I taught the group a new plait I had developed with a sort of concertina loop coming out of one edge at intervals. It was fiddly and even I wasn't wholly convinced it was feasible, but I wanted to see how they found it. The new plait was tricky to master and when the outer two strips of palm were folded over each other to form the concertina effect, a light touch was needed or the palm would tear. Several of the women tried it but struggled more than with other new plaits. It did not seem viable at this point and I decided to re-think.



Sarah in Ruth's cap, 2009



Boys plaiting at Bushfire 2009



Some children's plait, 2009



The new plait with folded, concertina detail on one edge, 2009



Starting the new plait, 2009



Plaiting, 2009



The plait group under the smaller tree, 2009



Jaqueline's drinks mats, 2009



From left: Lovisa and Getulida, 2009



Ellie's sleeping mat from Jinja, 2009



Lovisa, 2009



Joyce's angel, 2009



Plait group, 2009



Teaching the new plait to the women, November 2009



Ruth sewing up sleeping mat plait into a bag, 2009



Ruth sewing up sleeping mat plait into a bag



Tolofisa, 2009

After the group left, Ellie and I just got back to our hut before a heavy thunderstorm started. We sat on the porch until the wind blew the rain inwards onto us, then moved inside to work and lit candles and drank tea while we sampled.

I made several bookmarks using bright colours to show the group. I thought they could be sold through Mothers of Hope and maybe at church bookshops in the UK.



Children doing their chores at Bushfire, 2009



Bookmark samples, 2009

Saturday 14th November

I woke up quite late at 6.50am. There was a lot of noise outside - the kids were weeding the path down to the piggery.

I made 4 bookmarks before breakfast and several more afterwards.

Elsie brought Ellie and I pancakes for breakfast. Two chickens were killed, so there was obviously going to be chicken stew and rice for lunch.

While I was plaiting on the porch of the hut, several children joined in, then started making their own lengths of plait. We later moved to a mat in a patch of shade and were joined by Blaze, Zak, Desire and some others. Blaze made a lovely looped palm garland that he had learned in school. Ellie tried to work out how it was made. Rose's baby Dorcas cried whenever she was near a *muzungu*. The Bushfire kids amused themselves by slowly and repeatedly bringing her closer to Ellie and I - watching her expression crumple as she got near to us, then relax as they moved further away. It was very, very funny, although a little unkind.

In the afternoon, Ellie arranged all the items she had selected for IndigoLime against a wall to photograph.

All the adults were at a leadership conference in the church all day. It was good to have a quiet day sitting, sampling and chatting. The power went off at 8.30pm.



Coiled bowl in black and white bin liner made by Bushfire house parent Serena, 2009



Underside of Serena's bowl, 2009



Items Ellie selected for IndigoLime, 2009

Sunday 15th November

Fantastic worship in church was followed by a great talk by Sam about how people needed to be prepared to work their way out of poverty - not to expect to be given things. He asked how many people in church didn't even have a chicken: about 8 people put up their hands. He called them to a meeting with him at 9.00am the following Thursday to discover why this was. He warned them that he was not going to give away chickens, but would advise them on how they could get themselves a chicken within the next month - then a goat by April - through work. (Ben thought about 4 or 5 would turn up).



Desire plaiting, 2009



Ellie plaiting on the porch of the guest hut

Ellie and I were called to the front and Sam prayed for us, telling the congregation that it was a sacrifice for us to come - it had cost a lot of money and time, and that they should not take it for granted and waste our time. We said goodbye to the congregation. I prayed for them. We said goodbye to Sam after the service, as we may not see him before our departure on Tuesday. We arranged to meet Eva on Tuesday, en route to Kampala. Ben agreed that he would stop in Jinja long enough for us to visit the mat shop again on Tuesday. The power went off at 8.00pm.

Catherine's friend Mary showed us a mat she had made. It was a nice pattern but worn (nibbled) around the edges. Ellie said she would buy it for 10,000 if she replaced the edging. It was agreed that she would bring it before we left. She showed us a small sample of a very beautiful sleeping mat plait with little crosses.



Mary's plait sample, 2009

Monday 16th November

I woke at 6.30am after 8 ½ hours' sleep. Elsie brought us omelettes for breakfast. This was the last day with the plait group. Lovinas was the first to arrive. She had finished a bundle of blue Plait No.3 that I had asked for. I showed her how to make a bookmark, then showed others as they arrived.

Ayesha came to interpret, then Sarah joined us. Her daughter was refusing to go to nursery school again and so also joined us. Eventually, all the regular group members came. We went through the bookmarks again: their uses, potential customers, the advantage of using leftover oddments of palm. Surely something they could sell to visitors. I left 3 samples with the group, but explained that they could make any pattern they wanted, just to keep them either bright or maybe in palm and matooke. We agreed 10" x 1" to be a good size.

Tapenansi had finished some sleeping mat plait for me - a beautiful blue and natural pattern. Tolofisa had finished the rainbow plait for me and Robina had made some plait dyed with tomato leaves without magadi.

I texted Eva to see whether she could get me some dried 'ribena' flowers to take back to the UK for experiments. She called back to say she had some in her house that I could have.

We worked all morning with the group. Zeulens and Jacqueline gave me a bundle of plait each as a thank you, which was very kind. Jacqueline's was particularly fine. Edith gave me an extra matooke figure after I bought 4 from her. Joyce had made 4 for me as well. I was tempted to buy more but packing was an issue. Ruth was ill with a cough and with backache. She went to the clinic to get some pills. Some group members had brought a few more bundles, hoping that I would take some. Before lunch, I took photos of all the individual group members present. We said our farewells and I promised to try to find customers for the bookmarks.



From left: Tapenansi, Lovisa, Jacqueline (rear) and Joyce, 2009



Brush made from left over scraps of palm leaf 2009



Tapenansi with her baby and her blue plait



Ruth with plait for binding mat edges, 2009



Edith with her *matooke* figures, 2009

We had rice and beans, followed by pineapple for lunch, then a lazy coffee, before Ellie went off to discuss the paper bead necklaces with the staff group.

There was drumming and cheering in the distance. Willy told me that it was marking 40 days since the death of an important local figure: mayor of Bubutya, businessman, ex-wrestler, traditional dancer and Obote supporter. After 40 days a widow could remarry if she wasn't pregnant. She could still remarry if she was, but the baby would be credited to the deceased husband. The man was 86 years old and had obviously had a very full life. I was fascinated to see what was going on but was warned that witchcraft rituals would be taking place and it was best to stay clear.

Tuesday 17th November

I woke at 6 to get ready to leave Bushfire. Ellie and I were summoned to a goodbye prayer session with the staff team led by Moses. He thanked us for our work and thanked me for my commitment to them, saying that I was their friend and their sister. He said, "Sometimes I go and stay with friends and find that once is enough, but you have been to us four times now so we are truly friends". Rose also thanked us. Moses prayed for us, then Apollo, then I thanked them and prayed for them too. As we were praying, the rain on the metal roof drowned out our words. Always sad to say goodbye to Bushfire.

Ellie and I ran for the hut where Ben was loading our cases into the vehicle. We all climbed in and he drove a few yards to Catherine and Willy's. Elsie was with us too - travelling to Jinja to be tested for malaria and typhoid. Catherine, Willy and their son Bonny joined us, as well as Loy and Florence. It rained heavily all the way to Hope House, where Willy and Bonny disembarked to collect a vehicle that needed a new back windscreen. We picked up Ben's daughter Melissa there.

After that we drove into Jinja, where Ellie needed to change money. I bought a mat from the shop we had liked. I also bought a Karamojong beaded collar from a craft shop for 30,000 UGX. We met the others back at The Source for a final coffee and banana bread. Catherine had a yoghurt drink and loved it. The man who was representing the Jinja area for the crafts exhibition joined us. Ellie gave him a list of questions that he would try to email an answer to.

We met Sam briefly in another café nearby to say goodbye. Then we headed on to Kampala, arriving at about 2.00pm. Eva had suggested that we visit the 'Container Village' district where there were lots of fabric shops, to show Catherine and Faith (a girl from Mothers of Hope) some *kitenge* that we thought would do well on the bags for the UK and tourists. I think this may have been Owino market. There were some great prints from 'Zaire' but Jinja had had nicer ones overall.



Bushfire 2009

We said goodbyes, then drove to Sam and Eva's, where she had made omelettes, bread and bananas for our breakfast. We talked about the future of the project, IndigoLime and Ellie's involvement. We also discussed the exhibition in February in the UK. Eva gave me some 'ribena' flowers to experiment with at home.

Ellie and I re-visited Uganda Crafts 2000 to show Catherine and Faith the quality and labelling there, then Faith left us and we dropped Catherine at the New Taxi Park to catch a matatu back to Jinja. She was very nervous and Ben teased her. We drove on to Entebbe, stopping for snacks at a supermarket. We were to rest at Laura's guesthouse before flying at midnight. It was lovely and calm there after the hustle of Kampala.



Kampala 2009



Storks and ibis on the shore of Lake Victoria



Lake Victoria, near Entebbe, 2009

Ellie and I strolled down to the banks of Lake Victoria and along the shoreline, watching storks and ibis feeding at the water's edge. The lake was so big it was like staring out to sea.

Ben had ordered a supper for us all of beef stew, matooke, rice and chapattis. We had jackfruit for desert and sat talking about UK television programmes that Ben remembered from his time there. He took us to the airport at 9pm where we said our goodbyes. The flight was delayed by 2 hours, then didn't have enough fuel and had to stop at Nairobi on the way, causing further delay. There was a problem with the landing gear too and several attempts had to be made to put down. We were glad to get back home.



The Bushfire plait group, 2009

Conclusions

I am thinking more about the use of colour and pattern now than previously. At the start of the trip, I had felt that the scope of the plait group was a bit limited and that they were safer just making bundles of braid. It has been encouraging to see how they have developed and how gracefully they have accepted advice and diplomatic criticism. In each session, someone turned up with new items they had made, such as coiled baskets and bowls, little figures in matooke and sleeping mats.

The range Ellie had defined for IndigoLime included coiled bowls, sleeping mats, baskets in my plait, bags in sleeping mat plait, book marks, restrung beads, bracelets, pots in my plait, hats and caps in my plait, shoppers in sleeping mat plait, coiled bowls in recycled materials (Serena's), drinks mats and table mats, mobiles and angels.

The challenges were ensuring quality, that orders are carefully met and that the group continue to practise between orders. I wondered if they were ready for wholesale orders though. I would place a test order and might send some plait to the dyers in Luton.

It seemed that the group are willing to try new things although they sometimes express doubt that they can be done. For example Scovia making the sleeping plait that changed patterns. When Ellie had asked them to try to make two bags she had brought they initially had said "no" - they didn't know how to. When she said she would ask Mothers of Hope instead, they changed their minds and had a go. They talked among themselves and decided that one of the designs was possible but not the other more structured one.

I have said that in the future I will only buy from people who have regularly attended groups meetings and that I will not buy things that I have ordered if the colour or plait is wrong. I hope this isn't too harsh but it may be necessary if the project is to be sustainable.

There is a tendency - particularly with the beads - to think that adding something western to an item such as little, glass seed-beads makes it better. Ellie and I encouraged the staff group to keep to local materials such as their own paper beads, and to have more confidence in them (although, of course, cost was an issue.)

We had told Rose about the Karamajong jewellery in Jinja. Catherine would have a look at it and report back. Returning to authentic designs or methods, but with a new twist might make their goods more attractive to tourists in Uganda and customers in the UK.



Paper bead necklaces, Bushfire, 2010

Field Trip 5 Journal

September 26th - October 11th 2010

Introduction

The main aims of this trip were to gather information about indigenous plaiting techniques, designs and their origin; to further investigate the local culture and to establish what - if any - impact the project had had to date. I also wanted to make contacts for developing customers within the home market.

Prior to the trip I had emailed Gloria Wavamunno - a rising star of African fashion and CEO of Kampala Fashion Week - and the owner of the three upmarket Banana Boat craft shops in Kampala. Both were interested in stocking dressy hats made to my design by the group in Uganda. I planned to teach as many styles as possible to the group from a small collection of hats that I had put together, so they could supply these directly to customers in Uganda, if this was feasible. I wanted to discover what the market there might be for these. I was accompanied by Eleanor Cain from IndigoLime, who was to develop accessory products with Mothers of Hope, Jinja. Richard Randall (general manager of IndigoLime) was to join us there for some of the trip. IndigoLime sponsored my expenses in Uganda. Exchange rate approx. 3,530 UGX to £1.

Monday 27th September

We arrived at Entebbe at about 7.30am – a bumpy landing after an otherwise smooth flight. The sun was breaking through early morning cloud and it was already quite warm. We got a taxi into Kampala, to the Fang Fang Hotel. The driving was a little scary but in spite of the speed we drove at in some parts - and a lot of overtaking - the journey still took over an hour because of gridlocked rush-hour traffic. I bought phone credit from a street hawker, but my Ugandan phone wasn't working; the driver thought the network had cancelled the registration, as it hadn't been used for a while. We would have to get it re-registered.



Kampala 2010

At the Fang Fang I had room 101 again. It wasn't to be free until the evening, so I shared Ellie's room for freshening up and getting changed. We then set off into town to get the phone sorted so I could make contact with Gloria and the person from Banana Boat. This took some time as we were passed from one store to another, eventually ending up in the MTN headquarters opposite the Post Office on Kampala Road. It was well organised, air-conditioned, and had a ticket system. I was seen after 10 minutes and a new Sim card purchased with number.

I purchased 10 small goatskin wallets as gifts from various street vendors for about 3,000 UGX each. They were not very well made - with random choices of materials for the inside - but this was part of their charm.



Ellie in 1000 Cups of Coffee, with their own craft shop behind, 2010



Settees at 1000 Cups of Coffe, with the craft market opposite, Buganda Road, Kampala 2010



Buganda Road crafts market



Buganda Road crafts market

Then we changed money at King Fahd's Plaza. The rates were very good, with 3,530 UGX to £1. We went on to the Buganda Road crafts market, firstly to 1000 Cups of Coffee for iced coffee with coconut cake for breakfast/lunch. The big sofas on the platform outside were a great vantage point from which to people-watch and see the crafts market. The weather was gorgeous - warm and sunny. We sat and reviewed our objectives for the day: the crafts market opposite, then Uganda Crafts 2000, and then the National Theatre crafts market if we had any energy left.

We crossed the road to the crafts market and moved around each stall. All the vendors called out "You are welcome! Come inside" as we passed, but they didn't really pressurise us to buy. Several times we asked for a price for something, were given a price that was way too high, then walked away; there was no attempt by the vendors to reduce the price to make a sale. Ellie said that this was so different in China, where a vendor would come running down the street after you, lowering the price - even using tears in pleas to make a sale. Here it was possible to bargain - if you initiated it - with most people though. I bought a long strip of appliquéd Kuba cloth for 85,000. Ellie bought some items as samples, I bought some earrings made from recycled tin cans. We eyed the goatskin rugs but didn't buy any at that time.

After this we went to Uganda Crafts 2000, stopping to buy needles from a haberdashery shop en route. There appeared to be less stock than previously at Uganda Crafts and less variety, although the quality was still good. Ellie bought a couple more things as samples. Walking back we just made it to 1000 Cups of Coffee before the heavens opened and it rained heavily for the next hour or so. We sat outside under the awning at first, but when the wind started to blow the rain diagonally we had to move inside. Then the power went. The noise on the roof was so loud that it was hard to hear one another. We read the local papers for a while. When the rain finally stopped we went over the road for Ellie to buy a goatskin rug she had been obsessing about: a beautiful patchwork black and white rug. The length of the fur varied in the patches as different animals - and different parts of the animals - were employed.



Torrential rainfall, Kampala 2010



National Theatre crafts market



National Theatre crafts market



National Theatre crafts market

Then we walked down to the National Theatre to find the craft market. This was my third attempt to find this market, which has a good reputation, and Ellie's second. This time we were lucky and found it tucked away behind the theatre. There were plain Karamojong necklaces for 10,000, which I didn't buy, but did get a Barack Obama sarong for 10,000. I wished there were some *kitenge* fabrics available with African presidents' images on them, as I wanted to collect some.

Back at the hotel my room was still not ready. We had some Chinese food in the garden and I finally went to my room at 9.00pm, after the occupiers had checked out and the room had been cleaned.



Fang Fang Hotel, Kampala

Tuesday 28th September

We had breakfast at the Fang Fang, with stereotypical Russian mercenary types at the next table: shaved heads, tattooed all over, muscle bound and wearing wife-beaters. The toast tasted like onions and the coffee was poor.

We got a taxi to the Nakumatt, where we were to meet Gloria Wavamunno at 10.00 in a café called Javas. On the way, I got a text from her to say she was running late and could we meet at 10.30. We went to look around the Garden City Mall (which was next door), checking out Banana Boat and buying some knitted animal finger puppets.



Banana Boat craft shop in Garden City Mall



Banana Boat, Garden City Mall



Banana Boat, Garden City Mall

We looked in Sylvia Owori's shop. Her catwalk collections had seemed tasteful but the stock in the shop was very flashy. There were some very loud shoes - not real leather - at 30,000 (a worryingly low price for accessories). Adjoining her shop - and leading into it - was a small, expensive craft shop with a limited range of stock.

As we were heading back to meet Gloria I got another text to say she wouldn't be there until 11.30 as she was detained in a meeting. We decided to have a coffee anyway and sat in the outside area of Java's watching the traffic outside. It was a very western style café and could have been anywhere in the world.



Sylvia Owori's shop in Garden City Mall



Café Java's at the Oasis Nakumatt Mall



Garden City Mall, Kampala

Gloria arrived soon after 11.30. She was quite young - mid twenties - and spoke with a slight American accent, having been schooled around the world but most recently doing fashion at the American International College in London. After that, she worked for Oswald Boateng for a while. She had lots of energy and ideas, and a real vision for the future of Ugandan creative culture.

Before she had moved back to Uganda - about 2 years previously - she had made a point of training in various skills that she thought she would be unable access in Kampala, such as make-up, photography and styling. She had thought that she wouldn't be able to find people to work in a modern way. However, her return coincided with a wave of young Ugandans that had been educated overseas in creative fields, all keen to establish a hip, contemporary, arts culture in their home country. She had found a photographer, stylist and make-up artist who worked in the way she wanted and shared her vision. She hopes to develop a group of African designers with a strong, but modern, sense of style for Africa.

Gloria liked the hat samples I had taken to show her and felt that there was definitely a market for them amongst wealthier Ugandan women. The fact that they were designed by a western milliner and made by a group in Uganda would be a selling point and help to attract a higher

premium. She advised arranging small shows in peoples' houses, where their friends would come and all would buy the hats, but she was also keen to stock them in her shop. The hats would ideally be made to order in a customer's colours, to match an outfit - this could be problematic, as the group's attempts to dye to order had not been very successful so far.

Gloria suggested getting some editorial/article in African Woman Magazine - a glossy magazine where she had contacts. She would try to arrange that while we were in the country, although I wasn't sure how to get the hats back to Kampala from Namutumba quickly. Things seem able to move forward faster than I had anticipated. There appears to be lots of opportunity here.

Questions for Gloria Wavamunno:

- **Price range of her clothes?**
250,000 plus. All made to measure and basically one-offs or adaptations.
- **How did she get started?**
She made her own clothes from aged 13 and put a collection together when she came back to UG. It all happened quite quickly. Has team of 5 making up her clothes and needs more as they are very busy. Uses all African fabrics.
- **Who are her customers?**
Some mature women and their daughters. Wealthy, Ugandan.
- **Occasions when hats are worn?**
Kampala Fashion Week, Weddings and the Goat Race (Ugandan equivalent of Royal Ascot)
- **Current trends?**
More people wearing kitenge in modern designs; people appreciate the personal touch. Clients like colour charts and things made to match. There is a market for using fabric from the dresses for trimming. They like what they see abroad and don't want the same thing as someone else.



Craft shop in Nakumatt Oasis Mall, 2010

- **Popular colours?**
Bright colours
- **Sale or return?**
Definitely
- **Prices for accessories?** (not sure I got this right)
100,000-200,000 UGX

- **Communication?**
Call or email
- **Any suggestions?**
Get a look-book together - customers love them. GW would keep one as reference and for collecting orders. Have references for different trimmings and a colour list. I should think about how I want the label represented.
Get a group of women together - with the hats - at someone's house. Selling like that is very popular with wealthier clients.
- **Lead times?**
2 ½ weeks from order being placed to delivery at customer's house

Gloria gets craftspeople from the Buganda Road market to make items to her design - such as rings and bag handles out of bone or horn. She gets them to sign contracts, so they don't replicate them for other customers or to sell in the market. Apparently they are scared of signing things, so it works even if it's not legally binding.

We asked Gloria if she knew of any good drivers that might take us to Jinja that afternoon. She immediately called a guy called Vincent that she used a lot. He would charge 120,000; much more than a matatu of course, but so much better. We arranged for him to collect us from the Fang Fang at 2.30. When Gloria dropped us back at the hotel, she gave us some bottles of water: Wavah Water- her father's own brand. We agreed to keep in touch and hopefully meet again before we went back.



Street hawker with woven palm columns, 2010



The Nakumatt carpark with Garden City next door

Vincent arrived promptly. A small, softly-spoken man, he drove carefully, telling us about his daughter who had developed severe epilepsy at the age of 3. She was now 8 and has several fits each week. At first people thought it was caused by witchcraft. It is difficult to get medication for epilepsy in Uganda. He has tried to find it online to no avail or it was too expensive. I would definitely use him again - a good, safe driver and a decent car.

We arrived at Gately on the Nile at about 4.15. Some of the staff remembered us from previous trips and greeted us warmly. We were in the same annexe rooms as last time. After dropping our bags off in our rooms we met up on the balcony to have a beer, admiring the view over Lake Victoria and the lush gardens. Dinner was of Thai-style food on the terrace, listening to the cicada and frog chorus.



Gately on the Nile, 2010

Wednesday 29th September

Feeling very privileged to be there, I lay on a big sofa in the garden drinking my breakfast tea while waiting for Ellie to emerge.

After breakfast we headed for Jinja market to look around the second hand clothes and fabrics. I bought two vintage dresses for 25,000: one from the '70s and one from the 50s. Row upon row of stalls – maybe 40 or 50 stalls - were now devoted to altering second hand clothes and sewing them into some skirts with elasticated waists. Some were made from scratch in kitenge or in some sort of polyester. I couldn't help feeling that some valuable vintage couture was being chopped up into these garments - the narrow passages between stalls were filled with women on sewing machines. Some were making school uniforms – another big business. I suppose it's just like TRAIID, where old clothes are altered to make things that people might want to wear. We bought some vintage curtains for Mothers of Hope to use for bag making.

We checked out the price of kitenge lengths - 20,000 for good quality, 12,000 for less good - then went to The Source Café to write postcards. Devastated that the cappuccino machine was broken and wouldn't be fixed until the following Monday - must be a roving repairman.



Jinja Market, 2010



Shop with good *kitenge*, near market, Jinja



Synthetic fabric lengths, Main Street, Jinja

Richard texted Ellie to say that he had arrived at the hotel at about 11.30, so had made very good time. We headed back to the hotel to find him enjoying a drink on a sofa outside. After catching up and dropping our purchases off in our rooms we all went into Jinja - taking Richard to the market. Here I bought some palm leaves (300 per bundle), raffia (200 for a few strands) , and dye (300 per packet). Ellie and Richard bought a lot of used sugar and rice bags for Mothers of Hope to use @ 300 UGX and made some possible contacts for future supplies. It was interesting to see Richard thinking ahead of how to make things as simple as possible for the group and to ensure getting what they wanted design-wise. They also bought some lengths of kitenge for linings/straps etc., to add to the vintage options. Richard talked to a man in an Indian-owned fabric shop about supplying lengths of kitenge and discounts for quantity, then took his card. He could supply the group directly too.



Jinja Market, 2010

Back at Gately we freshened up before supper. Richard loved the peacefulness - the laid-backness - but was concerned about how willing the group might be to really drive things forward in the necessary way. I thought they were willing to do anything within reason that would bring in an income but that they couldn't afford to invest time or money in something that may not yield a return. The group members had responsibilities and chores to do that no one else could do for them. Richard planned to talk very frankly with them the next day at a meeting scheduled for 9.00am in The Source Café. I was looking forward to talking about the hats with Eva, and how best to proceed.

Thursday 30th September

Eagles nesting in a tree in the garden, protests from the storks, more eagles circling overhead. After breakfast, we went to the meeting at the Source Café: we arrived at 9,00, L soon afterwards, then Eva, H, Z and the others. Big greetings ensued.

Focuses:

- Interchange between IndigoLime and Mothers of Hope
- How do the groups feel about stepping up to production - move from charity to business- pros and cons.
- Organisational structure
- Contact/Manager

Mothers of Hope's aims are to help women and children. The craft shops in Jinja already had their own supplies and were not open to new people, so they had opened their own shop.



Iganga Road, Jinja, near Mothers of Hope.2010



Meeting between IndigoLime and Mothers of Hope, 2010 at café next to the craft village

Also: buy Doom, hot sauce and photos

Richard asked about rent, pointing out that it was a big expense if there were no customers. They had let the girl working in the shop go since last time and were staffing it on a rota, but it was still an expense from which there was little return. Rent for Mothers of Hope shop is 150,000 per month. Their pricing was similar to that along Main Street. They have tried to be selective and to do small runs of things. Richard asked how long it could be funded, while maintaining the morale of the groups? How to make it profitable: promote the craft centre better, use it as a workshop as well as a shop, so tourists can see how things are made. He brought up the importance of the brand - Mothers of Hope - and what they are doing as a group. Pictures could be put on the walls of the ladies in the groups, an info sheet/leaflet - like Uganda Crafts 2000 - and a flier to hotels.

They could sell bags of loose beads, as in bead shops in the west.

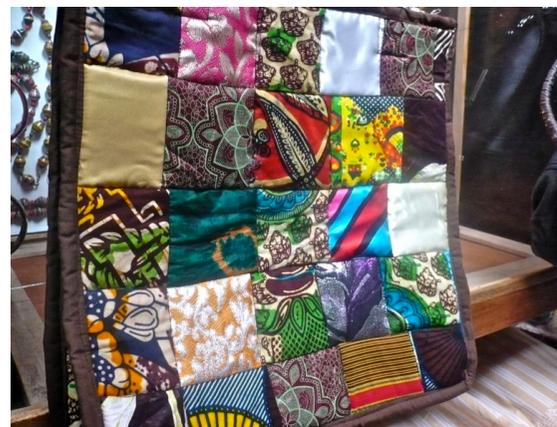
L had tried to re-negotiate the rent. There had been a meeting for all the shops that Tuesday about this, but only two had turned up so the meeting was postponed. Richard suggested that they form a tenants' association to ask the landlord for more support in promoting the craft centre.



Plant pot holders in plaited waste plastic. MOH



Merchandise in Mothers of Hope shop, Jinja



Patchwork, quilted bags in Mothers of Hope 2010

Apparently Jinja may become a city - Main Street changed to big, high shops and the crafts shops moved to Iganga Road, near Mothers of Hope. This has been delayed by politics. We later heard Gulu was in the running too. I was upset to hear that the very beautiful little Hindu buildings along Main Street might be bulldozed, but what right did I have if it meant more employment?

L had approached Banana Boat in Kampala with the recycled bags and paper baskets. She had seen the manager who had told her that the goods weren't right for them. She had also tried a shop in Entebbe that was still thinking about it.

Some support has come from YWAM and a woman from another charity. She had paid a very low price and sells the bags in the US. *L* had suggested that she buy the bags and fabric and just pay for the labour. *L* had paid 500 for the sugar sacks (more than Richard had), and 18,000-20,000 for the fabric. There was a larger selection of fabric in Kampala - worth going there if they needed a lot of things, otherwise travel made it too expensive.

Labour: 1,500 for the tailor. Someone else irons the bags, so altogether the labour cost is 2,000. There is now a workshop at Hope House where they can work as long as they want to. *L* had proposed that the American lady pay 5,500 for the labour and supply the materials, thread, zip herself. Each bag takes 1m of fabric and interlining. They are currently charging 12,000 wholesale to her.

Richard discussed wholesale orders for the UK to ensure consistency. Ellie suggested that they focus on the areas that have attracted the most interest, e.g. the bags and recycling. She has found that it is cheaper to organize shipping from the UK than at the Uganda end. She has devised order forms with specifications. All labeling and branding to be done in the UK. Ellie proposed sampling some roll-up beach mats out of sleeping mat plait with two sections, edged with kitenge showing them a sample she had brought.

For better communication, we discussed who should be appointed as first contact. The group leaders of the sub-groups forming Mothers of Hope are all employed and with other responsibilities, for example *H* is married to someone high in YWAM in Uganda and fosters some 30 children in her own home, including some disabled children. A woman called Grace was nominated by Mothers of Hope. She had been rather quiet and, having arrived quite late to the meeting, had not made the best impression. However, when she was invited to tell us a bit about herself I could see why she had been chosen.

Grace had lots of experience working with different charitable organisations - such as a project for building homes for vulnerable women and orphans - as well as organizing training for groups making paper beads. She had also worked for some time setting up micro-finance



A bag Ellie bought as a sample to show MO

schemes but felt that that was not what God wanted her to do. Her experience in training groups, until they set up their own structure was useful. She had worked with missionaries, arranged exports to the US for World of Craft, and also on a savings scheme where a box with three keys enabled shared responsibilities and which has now developed into a micro-finance scheme. Mothers of Hope had formed a committee to ensure that orders were distributed fairly between groups, although that could affect consistency.

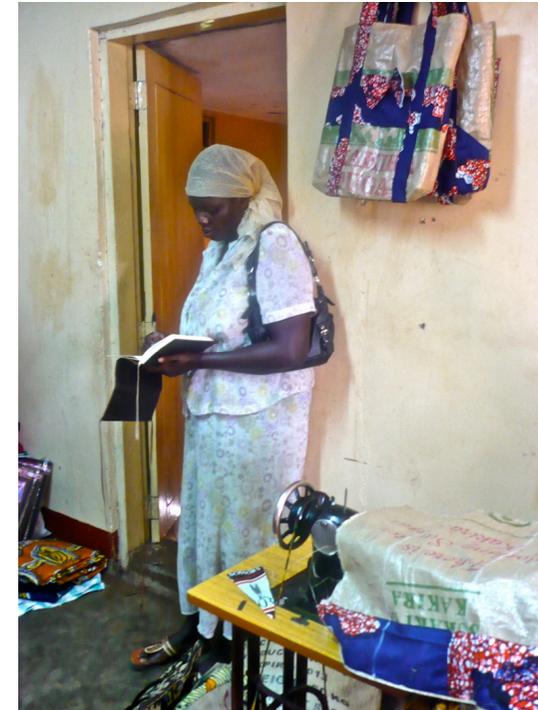


Mat made from coiled, glued brown paper, 2010



Bow detail of *L's* adaptation of *Ellie's* bag design, Mothers of Hope, 2010

Richard re-emphasized the need for consistency and quality control. Someone had to ensure that standards were met. Grace was to supervise. Z underlined his comments: not to split orders up to smaller groups as this could impact on quality. Roles are separated in the bag-making processes: some cutting out, some ironing, some interfacing etc. Ellie thought that they could eventually train women in the other groups, once things had got going.



Grace at Hope House. *L's* bag designs on wall to the right. 2010

Richard stressed the need for email contact and a bank account, which *H* assured us was in hand: they were in the process of registering as a group. Ellie said that emailed orders would need to be printed out, *Z* that they needed their own computer and printer and that, so far, Mothers of Hope had been using the Bushfire project account as a payment method. Richard decided to leave some money so that they could use an internet café to access emails and print off orders. Rebecca is the treasurer, Sarah the secretary, *L* the voice/quality and *H* the convener of meetings.

An Australian woman called O was sitting in on the meeting and was very forthright with her opinions about business organisation and fashion, although with no experience in these areas. Her ideas were not appropriate for what we were trying to establish and she was praising work that was not what we were looking for. The group seems to listen to anyone from 'outside' regardless of their ability and experience. O has been taking beads to sell to people in her church in Australia, and to all the churches she can in her area. She must have saturated the market: without the product changing or new markets opening up, sales would be unsustainable. She asked if she could use any logo or label Ellie devised for goods she imported into Australia - Ellie said she would organize this and correspond with her.

IndigoLime suggested that they fund the materials side and that the makers will be paid by the piece. There was some thought about how to use any off-cuts, so the groups could make a secondary product. Richard talked about the importance of talking to one group of people and of cutting out things that make problems or that are outside their control. A process was agreed:

Order - money sent to cover raw materials, the group to fund labour and get paid for it when the order is completed.

Shipping – organized by IndigoLime, some paperwork may need completing in Jinja. Ellie to give information and reference numbers etc. The importance of making deadlines with shipping was underlined, IndigoLime to contact a week before it was due, to double-check with the group that they are on course. 6 weeks' lead-time.

L told us that they had made 150 bags in two weeks for Australia but had only just covered costs - with no profit. There should have been a profit but the cost of the fabrics rose before the purchase. IndigoLime would add a bit more to Mothers of Hope's profit to help with training - this could even be a selling point. Richard pointed out that key to the sustainability of the project was the building of a business rather than a charity.



The simple shoppers Ellie had previously designed using recycled sugar sacks and kitenge.2010

Some investment had already been made in sewing machines (treadle and electric hybrids). The group leaders have already put in more than 3,000,000 UGX each of their own money, probably some of it to cover rent for the shop.

The group leaders also had their own passions for helping their communities that are not funded. Richard pointed out that the Fair Trade movement was growing, that 2-3 products done well would be good and that IndigoLime would contribute design and their knowledge of buyers and market. They would aim to agree the design specs on various items. *L* said that she wanted to be involved in the design process – that she had lots of ideas. Unfortunately, those that she showed us were over-elaborate and probably not quite right for the UK market. Ellie said later that market forces would decide this but she was welcome to contribute. Ellie would email *L* images of styles that are popular in the UK and *L* could suggest an African slant.

Grace would be the point of contact. Payment would initially be through the Bushfire project bank account. Someone in the group might focus on buying what they needed at a good price. They would agree a delivery date - Grace to be point of contact and to reassure them on schedules. Ellie would be the rep in the UK for quality, design, and timely orders. Richard said that goods from Africa had a reputation for being late and of poor quality; this was an opportunity to change this perceptions. Grace was to have two phones to ensure that the groups get the orders as they come in (!?). She would deal with order distribution and communication, book-keeping, shipping and would be paid for this job. *L*'s eye for quality and her experience with the groups would be harnessed. Rebecca and *L* to be paid a bit for their roles.

Some potential problems were identified: the electricity can go off for two weeks at a time, children's illnesses/childcare etc. Richard talked of the 'critical path' where each stage of the order/production was mapped out with dates. At each stage they can see whether they are on track and communicate any delays promptly so these can be accommodated where possible. Communication would be key. *H* suggested that they build in a time allowance for delays.



Bags waiting to be finished off, Hope House



Typical house in Jinja, 201

Rent for Hope House was 300,000 per month - formerly 200,000 but recently increased. People there pay for whatever water they use. Rent for Mothers of Hope was 150,000 per month. Security had been withdrawn as payments had not been made. Other activities at Hope House included some beading, but basically tailoring and accommodation. Lunch was provided, but the women there provide their own breakfast and supper. Z said that eventually the women will pay all their expenses, once they are earning enough.



One of the girls living and working at Hope House, 2010



One of the girls living and working at Hope House, with her baby, 2010

After the marathon meeting, which had lasted from 9.20am to 1.45pm, beginning at The Source Café then adjourning to another café with fibreglass, rock-clad walling, via Mothers of Hope, we went back to the hotel to gather some things together. We were to visit Hope House that afternoon to see what was being done there. A guy named Michael came to pick us up, before collecting L and Grace. The back seat then had four of us in it. We drove about 20 minutes to

Hope House to visit what had been set up as a 'tailoring' workroom. Bushfire had nearly moved out of Hope House and it was largely used by UFCS and as accommodation for the five girls who work at sewing, plus some families that had been there for a while.

The sewing room was set up with five machines, one of them industrial and new. One girl was cutting out fabric on the floor, her toddler nearby. The girls all looked very young, but turned out to be in the twenties. They slept upstairs in a shared room on mattresses on the floor, with mosquito nets. It looked pretty bleak but before they came here they didn't even own mattresses and had been basically homeless. The girl with the toddler was L's niece. She had been abandoned by her mother when she was 8 months old, so L had taken over her care. L had been devastated when she became pregnant, feeling that no man would want the girl as she was not widowed or divorced but had a child.

At least she could now earn some money from sewing and could live at Hope House. The tailor, Waiswa, was there too - a quiet, shy young man who worked out how to make things, produced samples and then taught the girls.

After staying for about an hour, we stopped off on the way back to visit a woman that *L* was trying to help. She lived with her husband - a security guard at the YWAM base - and their 3 children, in a tiny brick shed. One of her kids was severely handicapped so she couldn't leave him to work. Apparently he had been born healthy; the condition had developed later and may have been caused by violent epilepsy. *L* is trying to persuade them to move to Hope House where they would pay less rent, there would be work opportunities, and others could help with childcare. The woman's life was so hard.



Visiting the woman with the handicapped child, near Waireka, 2010



Other children who gathered around, 2010



Near Waireka, 2010

We returned to Jinja and bought some thread. Richard bought soap and sugar for groups we were to visit in Kangulumira the next day, sweets for the Bushfire kids, and some Doom spray that claimed to kill cockroaches and their eggs. Then we went to meet a man who tans and sells goatskin leather. Richard bought two skins for Ellie to sample with. The skins were dark brown, of medium weight and stiffness. Back at the hotel, we were told that Michael would lend us a car the next day to get to the villages. Over dinner we discussed the line between someone just starting off a sewing business with very little and a sweatshop. Hope House could be misrepresented, rather than seen as the raw start of a charitable business. After putting together some facts we realized that Michael had over-charged us for the day: I had paid him 10,000 and Richard had given him a further 50,000, when Michael had agreed only 30,000 altogether with Z. First time I'd encountered this here. Michael used to drive for Sam sometimes but was no longer used; perhaps this was why.

Friday 1st October

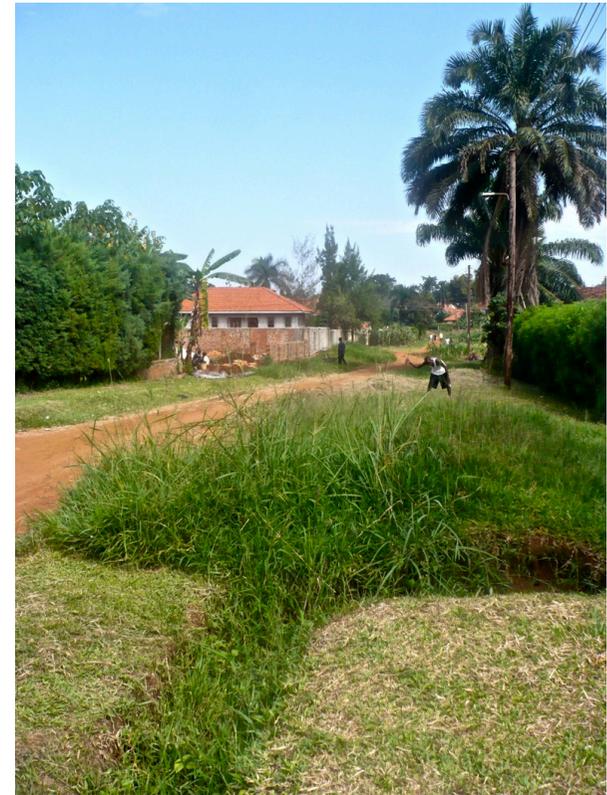
Today we were going to two villages where plaiting was done. The first was to be Kangulumira - about an hour north-west of Jinja in Buganda, on the other side of the Nile.

L came to the hotel as we were finishing breakfast. We asked again about the arrangements for the day and how much we were to pay Michael.

We told her what he had charged the day before and she was not pleased. She called *Z* to check what she had agreed with Michael and then spoke to him about it when he arrived. She spoke quietly, getting quieter the longer the discussion went on. Michael was louder, imploring her to be reasonable, with lots of hand gestures. One would not want to be on the other end of *L*'s disappointed look and Michael squirmed. We agreed 100,000 for the whole day, including petrol and his time. He was somewhat subdued after that. We picked up Grace and Rebecca in Jinja and *H* from her home in a very nice area near the lake. We were to visit *H*'s group first, then Molly's mother's group at Nkagwa., Thankfully we had a larger vehicle than before: one that Michael had borrowed from a friend.

We crossed the Nile and headed out into the countryside. In the middle of nowhere, we passed a white district nurse supplied to the community by YWAM. She was hitching a lift, so we stopped and took her some of the way. Everyone knew her and I remembered meeting her once before with Eva.

The countryside was lush and green, hillier than in Namutumba. We arrived at an idyllic spot where the plait group had set up under a tree, with a sofa for the visitors with lace cloths on it. The group sat on mats and cloths on the ground in the shade. Formal introductions took place and there was a formal welcoming. Meeting and greeting, as well as saying goodbye, are much more drawn out here than in the UK.



The road to *H*'s house in Jinja, 2010



Kangulumira craft group, 2010



Mats, hats, plait and baskets. Kangulumirs



Group members plaiting, Kangulumira 2010

The group appeared to be well organised and were selling mats and other items. There were 11 women present; some others were missing due to bereavement and the attendant chores. In the middle of the group was a pile of things they had made including mats, baskets, bags and some lengths of mat plait. I watched as a woman sewed up the mat plait into a long cylinder, to be split when big enough, then edges bound. This was a sensible way to reduce fraying. Two mats I liked were nearly finished, so I ordered them and it was agreed that it would be left at Hope House for me to collect the following week. Many of the group are HIV positive; meeting together, being productive helps to keep up their morale.

Questions:

- Do the patterns have any meaning to the makers?

Only the names:

Kitenge- pattern developed from a garment

Railroad tracks

Fish Bone

Kaisira (tents/small hats)

Box

Lukoba Mutesa- Mutesa's belt

Bulange- from tiles of the King's palace

Kepe- like 'V's on the epilettes of policemen

Kalanamy



Kangulumira group, making 4-strand rustic plait, 2010

- Are the mats commissioned? How?

For Mothers of Hope, tourists, people in the villages.

- Who taught the women how to plait? How did they learn?

Most of them learned from their grandmothers or mothers, or from Catholic nuns in school. It happened in the community, so it was easy to learn.

- Why is banana bark not used for sleeping mats?

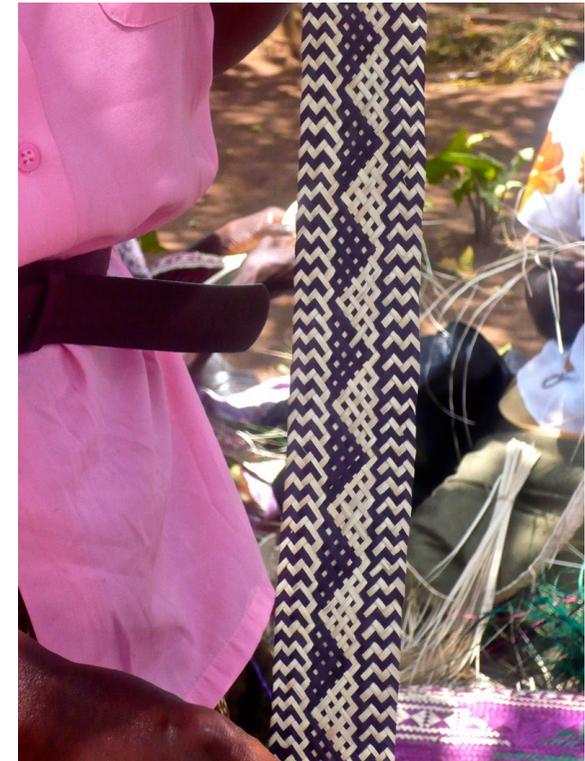
It is sometimes, but banana bark mats should not be left in the sun as it gets stiff and brittle. Banana is better for coarser weaves rather than fine ones.



Kitenge pattern



'Railroad tracks'



Kairsira (small tents)

- Who dyes the palm?

They do

- What dyes do they use?

Chemical dye, sometimes colour-plant.

Muzukizi makes magenta, as well as an iron-rich drink - you pick the leaves, put in hot water with the palm and boil until the colour changes: maybe 1 hour. Some other trees used too.

Luzibaziba - found in wetlands, used to make black.

** Pineapple cultivation affects availability of dye plants.*



'Box' pattern



'Kalanamy'e'



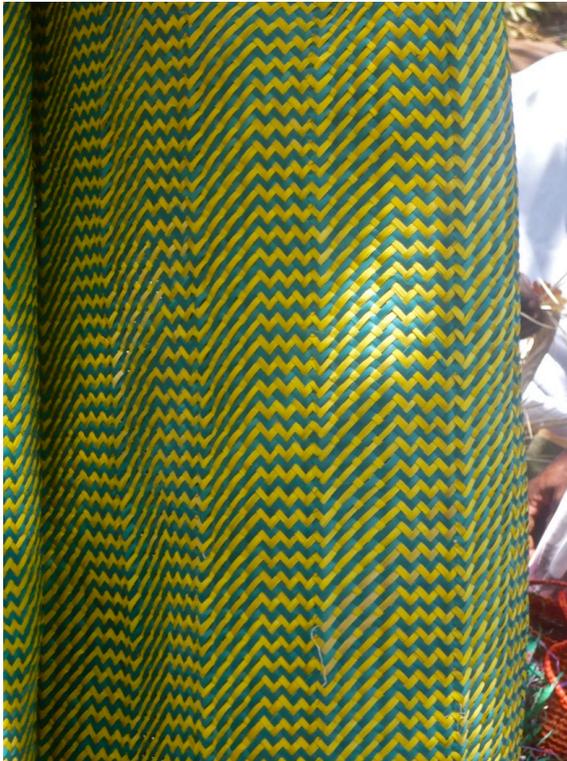
'Kepe' (policeman's epillettes)

- Where did the plaiting come from? Who first taught it to Ugandans?

Not known - they were taught by their parents or grandparents - some older people in school by Catholic nuns. They were brought up making mats with mamas and grandmothers for leisure so and learned from them. Zigzag (four strand rustic) plait is taught in schools in their region - they don't know where it came from though.

- Do they do the plait with writing in?

*That is more of a Buganda style- Masaka
Puzzling, as these ladies were Baganda



'Fish Bone' pattern



'Mutesa's belt'



'Bulange' (roof tiles of the King's palace)

- Who organizes what should be made and by whom?

The chairperson organizes this to ensure that people get money from what they do and don't get demoralized. She looks for markets and does the sales, she comes with new fashion ideas, shares them with the group and they discuss and decide about these.

- Designs specific to different groups/clans/tribal groups?

Different designs are developed by people- if you know how to plait you can do this- especially in the Baganda region.

The original plait was plain, in natural palm. Dye came from the missionaries- Catholic and Anglican. They used some natural dye before that. Different designs “birthed through creativity” are not necessarily tribal. Lots of designs come from the Masaka area.



Rolls of mekeka plait waiting to be stitched up, Kangulumira 2010



Sewing up plait into a cylinder before cutting to open out flat (minimizes fraying), Kangulumira



Place mats made with mekeka, Kangulumira



Molly with 'original plait' used to bind mekeka



Molly with a plant that is used to dye magenta



Mats in progress on chair, Kangulumira 2010

Ellie and Richard asked some questions too, then we watched the group for a while before Richard handed out the soap and sugar. This was very gladly received and they all clapped their pleasure. We said goodbyes and headed off to Molly's mother's village, dropping *H* off on the way to pick up a matatu back to Jinja.



Various plaits, with matooke balls and some paper beads, Kangulumira 2010



Plaited basket with loose plait, Kangulumira



The Kangulumira craft group, 2010



Mekeka, Kangulumira, 2010



Kangulumira group in front of pineapple fields



Discussing a new picnic mat design



Working out a folding picnic mat in mekeka



Coiled basket that the group were making for a local brewery, 2010



Banana beer, Kangulumira 2010

We drove for about half an hour or so back towards Jinja before heading off down a track through a series of small villages overlooking Lake Victoria. Eventually we pulled up in a clearing by a small cluster of huts. In one of them, Molly's elderly mother was plaiting. She was tiny and frail-looking, crouched on the ground. We were invited inside the small mud hut with open sides above chest height, so joined her and her friend. Polite greetings were exchanged- the Luganda ones going on for some time as Molly, Rebecca and Grace each went through the greetings and responses to each of the women present.

Molly explained her mother's enthusiasm for trying new things: when she wakes up in the morning she makes dye and tries to make enough for a whole mat. She likes to mix colours and uses colour-plant to make dye sometimes. She boils up the dye. The first batch she dyes is always darker, then other batches get paler. She leaves the palm leaves out in the evening, at 8-ish, for an hour or two, to moisten in the evening dew. Then she stores them in a plastic bag overnight so that they stay soft and supple.

She learned plaiting in school, taught by African Catholic nuns. She makes mats to give to people in the community and tries to arrange help for all their needs.

It takes her a week and several days to dye and make a full mat. Because her legs are crippled now, she can't work in the fields and can devote herself to plaiting. Otherwise it would take one month, working around chores. She enjoys it - she likes to work - it gives her something to do.



From left, Molly's mother, Molly, Grace



Structure of the hut roof, 2010



Molly's mother in her plaiting hut, 2010

When she gets tired of a pattern, she moves to another plait and usually has several mats on the go at one time.

Older people prefer to make wider plaits "because of their age" (!). She mostly plaits alone, as she doesn't have any other jobs to do, but others join her when they finish work. Her friends are concerned about her and spend time with her. One male friend joined us with a mat he had made out of a plait with the pattern of Christian crosses in it.



'Kawundo' (bat) pattern



'Railway tracks' pattern



'Mutima' (hearts) pattern

Names of Plaits: Kalanamyé, Mutima (heart), Kepe, Kawundo (bat). Chachi is the name given to wider plaits that are generally over 1, under 1- maybe going over 2 in the middle.



Mat made from plait that had been dip-dyed after plaiting, 2010



Mat, on top, with crosses and mat from 'kepe' plait, 2010



Coil of railroad tracks plait, 2010



Plaits and mats, 2010



Chachi pattern (over one, under one, over two in the middle) 2010



Mat with crosses by a local man, 2010



Kalanamye? 2010



One of Molly's mother's friends plaiting

We took our leave after about 40 minutes, leaving sugar and soap again. We got back to Jinja at about 3.00pm. After arriving back at Mothers of Hope, we said a cool goodbye to Michael (who still looked sheepish). We went into the shop to pay for various things we owed for.

I paid 10,000 each for the 5 necklaces I had kept back in the UK from a large batch sent over in April. Richard paid for many more, although he didn't really want them.

Then we went to Flavours for coffee and cake and sat in the back garden before Richard returned to the hotel. Ellie and I went fabric shopping. I bought some ebony bangles at 3,000 and horn bangles at 5,000. We dithered around Main Street a bit, then went back to the hotel in time to freshen up quickly before a pre-dinner drink on the terrace. We were a bit concerned about where we were going to stay at Bushfire, as it sounded like the guest huts were occupied. Eva had mentioned splitting us up but Richard had said that Ellie and I probably needed to be together as we were working together a lot. A huge cockroach was in my room when I got back after dinner. I killed it with a flip-flop. It took many attempts to flush its crushed body down the loo.

Saturday 2nd October

We checked out of the hotel in the morning. We were to be at Hope House at 11-ish and a contact of L's came to pick us up. We had so many large cases that it was going to be a struggle to fit us all in the car. Then Grace turned up - apparently she was to come in the car too. There was no room at all for her so she got a boda boda instead. Ben was to collect us from Hope House at about 2.30-3.00 to take us on to Bushfire. I spoke to him on the phone about buying some dried fish and matooke for everyone at Bushfire on the way. Rachel would be in the car from Hope House and would do the purchasing.



The girls working at Hope House, 2010

Hope House feels a bit depressing, but it must be very comfortable compared to normal living conditions for the majority of people in the countryside. The room where the girls sleep on mattresses on the floor is a lot better than the mud huts, but still bleak. There is no decoration - that is not a priority.

Aims today:

Ellie to check samples that were being made -
me to observe

Consider the line between charity and business

Buy fish and matooke for 100 people

Get to Bushfire



Work in progress at Hope House, 2010



Ellie writing down product specifications for the bags, Hope House 2010



Waiswa with bag samples at Hope House

The samples Waiswa had made of Ellie's bags were good: very encouraging, just a little bit of refining needed - such as the scale of some components and a stiffer interfacing. We stayed at Hope House for about 1½ hours while Ellie and Richard discussed the samples and changes that needed to be made. Then Rachel and Ben came to take us to Bushfire.

We stopped in Iganga on the way for Ben to buy some engine oil and battery acid - he took Richard off with him to show him around - and for Rachel to buy the fish. She said that the matooke would take up too much space in the car and they would send someone from Bushfire to Namutumba for it. Ellie looked after her baby while she went to do the shopping.

We arrived at Bushfire at about 3.45 and were greeted by all our friends. Ellie and I were to stay in Catherine and Willy's house: they had very kindly vacated their bedroom for us. Everyone seemed to be expecting my son to be with us - no idea where that came from, but a bed had been prepared for him. Hopefully he will come another time.

Richard was to stay in Moses house while Moses stayed in Catherine and Willy's spare room. Bushfire was full! Two people from YWAM were staying in Sarah and Paul's, as well as an Australian man who had been doing mission work there. He had also been involved in importing goods from Cambodia into Australia previously and knew a lot about Fairtrade.

Ellie and I showed Richard around Bushfire while some of the adults were in choir practice. There were lots of warm greetings. We saw some boys chasing a chicken - our supper, with rice - then we joined Bethel House for family devotions: praise, prayer and a presentation about self-help groups from the YWAM girls. This could encourage the children to talk about how they are feeling. After this we watched a practice session of traditional dance for the children. The power came on at about 7.00 and went off at 9.00. The stars were incredible - whole galaxies to be seen.



Chickens at Bushfire, 2010



Catherine and Willy's house (Bethel House)



Motorbike with 3 young passengers, Bushfire

Sunday 3rd October

A good night's sleep and a glorious bright morning. Actual showers have now been installed at Bushfire in the shower blocks. Cold water from the big water tank that collects rain - very bracing - followed by a delicious breakfast of pineapple and tea. Church began at 9.00am and the choir performed beautifully; it was always very moving. Willy led worship to start with, then Catherine and finally Olivia. O, from Australia, spoke about the Prodigal Son. I wanted to direct her to the artist Charlie Mackenzie's talks on this subject, but felt that would imply criticism.

Sam called Richard, Ellie and I up on stage for greetings. Good to see so many familiar faces in the congregation, smiling and waving. Some cheers and ululating when we said hello. We met with the craft group after church to see examples of some items that they had been making and to give feedback.

There were some lovely coiled bowls and baskets using recycled materials combined with palm - they had obviously built upon advice Ellie had given them on the last trip to good effect. They were also using a lot of foil to make coiled pots and baskets.



Meeting with the plait group after church, 2010

Sarah interpreted: it became apparent that they had never received the first order that I had sent - asking for the more experimental samples and some narrow mat plait that we could use for product development. I would have to quickly plait enough for my demos but had planned to buy it off them. Disappointing but not the end of the world. Communication is a real issue, especially now that Z has moved nearby and has a less reliable Internet connection or even phone signal. I must text Z and L, and maybe even Rose every time I email and order, so someone will actively look at the emails. The group said that they could come every day during the week and maybe Saturday too - all very keen. I may need to go back to Jinja for the day on Thursday though.

We met with Sam afterwards for a chat about Bushfire and supplying Gloria Wavamunno. He thought it could be very good but was concerned that the group might not be ready to complete hat orders in the very near future, which was a fair point. Maybe better to wait a bit to ensure that they know what they're doing than to blow a potentially good contact. Richard suggested that I leave the sample hats I've made with Gloria to sell and make some samples at Bushfire to leave with them. He also suggested that at the end of the week I issue certificates to the group members who had achieved a level of proficiency at plaiting. That seemed like a really good idea to incentivize them.

Only those with certificates would be able to make the hats, to start with. The others could practice until they improved enough. I could add photos to the certificates and get them laminated. Sam and Eva liked the idea too, thinking that it would really encourage the group. I was slightly worried about the tough love approach for those that would not yet get a certificate, but also saw the benefits. If they were not prepared to improve their work, then maybe their time would be better spent on something else and it was kinder in the long term. Some already expected me to buy anything (although this was my own fault).

Lunch was a delicious lentil stew with chapattis, and papaya for desert. Afterwards we walked to Bubutya so that Richard could see the neighbourhood. Lots of shouts of “How are you!” and “I am fine” followed us. We led a ragged procession of children up the track, Pied-Piper style, to Bubutya where Richard bought cokes from one of the ‘shops’. We had to stay to drink them there as the bottles belonged to the owner (?). Children gathered around us but leapt away scared if we turned to them. It became a game. Off the track, some of the little clusters of huts are so well arranged in small, idyllic pastures, that they look really pretty. They must be difficult to live in though.



The road to Bubutya

Back at Bushfire we saw Z studying under a tree for her counseling diploma. We went to the vocational training centre, which is going to be used to deliver qualifications now. The workshop parts were clearly being made use of. At Catherine’s, I showed Eva the hat samples. Others gathered around. They seemed to like them, but were baffled by them too. Eva knew about the Goat Race. She suggested that I train the group to make 3 of the styles and that L could be involved in the quality management side. That would be great, but I wondered whether she would have time, as Bushfire was nearly 2 hours from Jinja. I started to plait a length of patterned plait in pink and natural for demos.

Monday 4th October

Richard left at about 7.30am, sharing a car with the Australian guy to Entebbe. The craft group was coming at 11.00 to bring what they had made and to learn more skills. Ruth was the first to arrive, then the others. Lots of greetings were exchanged. Everyone seemed well and in good spirits. Sarah interpreted again.



Scovia in one of my hats, 2010



Scovia wearing another of my hats, 2010



Eva wearing one of the my small hats, 2010

The group had been producing a lot of items: coiled pots incorporating recycled plastics and foils, as well as the plaits and some bags. We went through orders 2 and 3, which were both on course for completion. Order 1 was never received. We tried to establish what could be made while I was there towards that order: Edith agreed to do a narrower sleeping mat plait with banana and natural palm.

It seems that *B* has told them to make the plait thicker, because she preferred that for the bags she had told them to make. They were presenting me with thicker plait than I really wanted for millinery - where a finer, more flexible plait is desirable. I talked about this for a bit, trying to emphasise that my requirements are different from *B*'s and that when I place an order I mean it to be for finer plait. I will underline this again. There was an issue with too many cooks here...

The group was shown the hats that I had brought with me. I explained to them about potential customers in Kampala and they were happy. I expressed the need for quality - everything must be perfect for those customers. I told them that at the end of the week I would decide who was to get a certificate for competence or excellence in plaiting. Maybe other certificates would be issued for making hats or a particular hat style.

One of the group offered her plait to be used for the sample. The women gathered around to watch what I was doing, before trying to do it themselves. Some of them had difficulty starting off, which reminded me of when I first taught them to plait and had to start each one for them.

Ruth quickly picked up what to do and made the centre just as I had shown them. They gathered around again as I gave more instructions; Ellie videoed



Teaching hat making to the group, 2010



Teaching the group to make hats from the plait, 2010



Teaching hat making to the group, 2010



Plait group members arriving, 2010



Some of the hat collection I took to Bushfire, 2010

I asked lots of questions via Sarah:

- Names of plaits?

Kalandama (meaning something that is straight)

Ziringiti no 3

Munyenye (star)

Kagilasi (meaning drinking glasses)

Chachi (plain over 1 under 1)

Zigzag

- Do the patterns have different associations with different communities?

Bitenge (colour mixture associated with Buganda): purple, turquoise/green, natural

Baganda people make finer mats

- Who taught them to plait?

Some learned from parents or grandparents

Some from school

Some from friends

- Any plaits from particular groups?

No, from all over

- Is the money earned spent in the community?

Lovisa invests in animals that she buys from the local community.

Lovinas tithes, some she uses for school fees for her children and for needs at home.

Edith plans for it, invests in chickens and chicks.

She tithes first and buys more materials.

Scovia sells mats in the community (although I think she did before too)



Kagilasi (drinking glasses)

- What impact has this group/activity had on their community and on themselves?

For Edith (with Ruth) many people had seen them with the esansa and banana fiber and used to laugh at them, saying they were lazy. Now they see that they have learned many things through the group and they are selling hats and bags to the local community - especially hats, to look smart.

- Busy times of the year?

Planting has two seasons - February to July, then August to November. Weeding and harvesting is also done. For childcare, when the kids are at home they are less busy because the children help with chores. November to February is the long school break.

- Who are the authority figures in the community?

Various people, but they are not the ones who decide things. Meetings are called - local councils - of the whole community, including women.

- Availability of esansa?

Easy to get hold of, as long as you have money to pay for it. Tolofisa said that sometimes it is hard for her to walk to the markets. Sarah told her: "Send some of these young ones!!" They all laughed.



Edith



Lovinas



Lovinas



Ziringite Number 3 pattern



Kalandama



Munyenyeye (star)

The plait group agreed to meet with me most days at 12.00. They would go on to Bible study afterwards at 3.00.

After lunch Ellie and I had to meet the staff craft group. When we arrived they were all present; it became clear that they had been told that we would be showing them some new techniques with beads. This was news to Ellie and I - neither of us are jewellery people. However, on the previous trip Ellie had shown them an alternative way of threading up beads, so that they were a bit different from the necklaces sold in every single craft shop in Uganda. We had made it clear - we thought - that we didn't think beadmaking was worthwhile as there was so much competition and it was time-consuming. Also, Jinja craft shops were full of paper bead necklaces at 4,000 UGX, while the Bushfire group was charging 10,000.

The group had also been told that we had ordered some necklaces, which was not true. They were expecting us to buy many necklaces from them and were clearly very disappointed. Ellie and I felt terrible for the misunderstanding - a bit angry too that we had been put in this position and that the women had worked



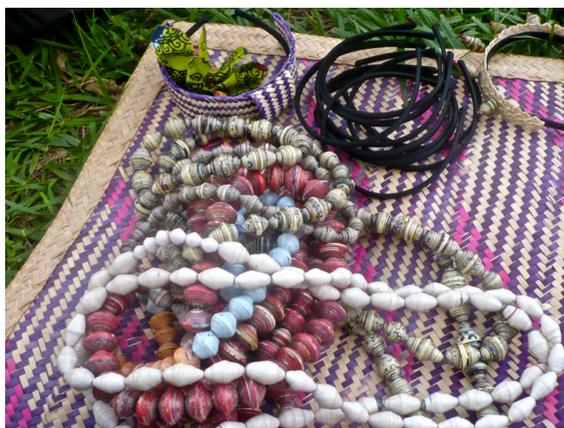
Bushfire staff group with their paper beads



Some necklaces made by the staff group

so hard for nothing. They could see that we were stunned. Sarah tried to make us feel better, which made us feel even guiltier. We explained that we had not ordered any beads, that I'm a hat person and Ellie works for an accessories company. We had met with them on the last trip and given some advice, but had not said we would buy any. The design that Ellie had previously suggested had been made by some of them but not very well - the beads bulged out at the joints. Ayesha had made the best versions.

Out of guilt and embarrassment we bought some necklaces from them for gifts for people, but not as many as they had expected. I bought 10 and Ellie bought about 25. Richard had already paid for a lot of necklaces that they had sent out in April - not because he wanted them but because he hadn't wanted to transport them back. A very uncomfortable and difficult situation for everyone. To diffuse things I showed them the hairclips and hairbands I had made and said I would teach them how to make them, if they wanted.



Necklaces with hairbands behind, 2010



Necklaces Ellie bought from the group, 2010



Paper bead necklaces

Catherine seemed really subdued and disappointed. They had obviously been promised a lot without any consultation with us. This is becoming an issue, as some of the bags that had been sent out were unasked for too and unsuitable for a contemporary UK market. Z had also asked the women to get Ellie to show them how to make keyrings - a technique she had already given to Mothers of Hope. I texted Z to see whether she would be at Bushfire the next day, then did some therapeutic plaiting in the evening.

Tuesday 5th October

We woke at 6.00 to the sound of drumming and singing: Bethel House morning devotions. I tried to drift back off again and finally surfaced at 6.30. The group were coming at 2.00 today. I had to finish enough patterned plait to demonstrate sewing up the fascinator style and a narrow band to finish the mini-beret. I also plaited up some zigzag to demonstrate a hairband if need be. Z texted back that she was coming later to do counseling training with the staff and that we would meet after that.

In the morning, before lunchtime Rose came over to show Ellie a copy of part of a text Ellie had sent to Z, apparently enthusing about the changes they had made to the beads on the previous visit. The text was out of context - as the majority of it had been in reference to the bags – but Z had just forwarded it to Rose. It was certainly not an order, but had somehow been taken as an order for an indefinite quantity. One has to be so careful that praising something - often out of politeness or the desire to encourage rather than genuine enthusiasm - is assumed to mean that the items can be sold to us. A lesson well-learned, but very hard for

everyone. Ellie was terribly upset and felt guilty, but could not have know that her text would be forwarded in that way and taken out of context - even then, reading it as an order was a stretch.

The group turned up fairly promptly. I began by showing them how to finish the beret with a plain band to reinforce the inside edge and make it more comfortable to wear. I had devised this technique as a replacement for a wire and headband and think it works well. I added elastic. We just needed a trim. I asked about quills and Getulida said she would bring some next time we met. Edith interpreted today, as Sarah was in the training. After this, all the women brought out the things they had made so we could gather in the orders.



The plait group setting out their wares, 2010



Ruth, right, setting out her 'shop', 2010



The plait group with their wares, 2010

Each group member set out their 'shop' under the big fig tree, arranging the items attractively. It was quite ceremonial. There were all sorts of plait bundles - many multi-coloured, most often in zigzag plait, which they found the easiest to make. It was so encouraging to see how they had improved over the years and what good quality work they are now producing. They seemed really happy and friendly with each other - bonded as a group.

I bought 31 bundles of plait from them - 6 to fulfill and order for Justin Smith. I prioritized his bundles - ensuring that the 6 were of a similar width and quality. I also had an order for 15 from my students, so did that next as they wouldn't mind variations in width as much. We measured the lengths to check that they were 20 meters long: most were slightly over, one about 50cm under.



The Bushfire plait group with their plait bundles and plaited goods, 2010



The Bushfire plait group with their plait bundles and plaited goods, 2010



Tapenansi with her plait, 2010



Lobina with her plait, 2010



Nuru with her plait, 2010



Plait group setting out their 'shops'

Suddenly the rains came - they had been threatening for a while. We had to gather everything up and run for shelter in the church. Arafat and some others were inside rehearsing some sort of play they were to perform in the service on Sunday, but we sat at the back. The noise of the rain on the corrugated iron roof was deafening. They laid their goods out again inside the church.

As well as plait bundles, I bought 2 baskets in the plait: from Ruth and Joyce at 7,000 and 3,000 respectively. Ruth's was nicely-made, Joyce's had a few gaps in the stitching but was not bad. I bought a brush for 1,000 from Tolofisa (made from the leftovers from plaiting) and a large, natural coiled bowl from Apofya. She asked for 3,000 - outrageously under-priced so I gave her 5,000. Edith had been selling baskets to the local community. She and Ruth were also making baskets out of plait for locals too. Their neighbours are not laughing at them any more.



Tapenansi's plait bundles, 2010



Plait bundles, 2010



Ruth is trying to learn more English, although she understands more than one would think. I worked on my Lusoga with them and was given some tips - some useful grammatical hints to turn singulars into plurals:

Mwebaale ino banyabo – ‘thank you very much ladies’ to the group, rather than *webaale ino nyabo* – to one person.

Some of the group had experimented with mixing bright colours in the plait - 4 different colours in each zigzag. The effect was stunning - really strong - not what I had ordered though and with more limited uses. The quality had improved overall apart from those who were making the wider plait as instructed by *B* (!). Getulida just made the thicker one; I felt bad that I only bought one bundle from her, as she'd been a faithful group member. She even gave me a brush as a gift. I bought 6 angels from Joyce, then one more to make up 10,000.

Tapenansi had made a sleeping mat that integrated silver paper with green and natural palm, also some plait with blue, natural and silver. She had made a lovely deep blue plait with irregular shading that I bought as part of my research on irregularity.

We paid for the things we were buying. The women were so happy: Lovisa got up and danced for us, everyone clapped and thanked us: a contrast to the bead group fiasco.



Ruth's plaited or coiled goods, 2010



Craft goods produced by the Bushfire plait group, 2010



From left, Ruth and Toloifisa measuring plait



Measuring plait, 2010



Bundles of Plait No 1 in natural, 2010

We met Z afterwards and tried to explain that when we say something is nice it doesn't mean we have ordered it. She agreed and will establish clearer communication on orders (hopefully!). Ellie said that an order from her would always be sent on an order form, not by text. A text would be sent to alert Z / L /Rose/Grace that an order had been sent by email.

The next day the group was to come at 12.00 to work until Bible Study. We arranged to meet with Z after that. Later, Ellie and I chatted with Catherine on her porch in the cool night air: she shared some background about the local community.

The day before, Ellie and I had watched as a local man had beaten his son of probably 6 or 7 years with a large stick and full force. He had kicked him repeatedly as he lay on the ground screaming, then whimpering. It was not just a beating but a full-on assault. We could do nothing. I had made a move to intervene but was warned not to interfere by one of the YWAM girls – who told me that it would cause trouble for Bushfire and that there was no law about this, (although the law could be involved if someone went to intervene and was also attacked). As we were debating this, an old lady went over to the man and started to berate him. He slowed his assault, then two other women came and joined her. He stopped and sat sulkily under a tree. The child lay on the ground and I didn't see him get up. If any of those blows had hit his head he would surely need hospital treatment. He probably would anyway, such was the force and frequency of the blows. Maybe he died. Catherine told us that the man was powerful in the area and could have brought trouble to Bushfire if we had intervened. He had power, was a drunk and a child-beater, apparently treating all his children like that. Many of the kids at Bushfire have come from similar circumstances but not from the immediate locality.



Tolofisa winding plait into a bundle, 2010

We were also told us a bit about a mentally handicapped girl who dances in church sometimes. I knew that she had been gang-raped and had lost the baby, but didn't realize that she was the daughter of a group member. The family neglected the girl because of her illness - this was apparently common - and didn't feed her. She and a boy (who is also mentally handicapped) come to Bushfire every day and are given free lunch - as their families refused to feed them (although they gave them some sort of shelter). This was so difficult to understand and it was hard not to judge.

There was an issue developing with the older girls at Bushfire: their families - who had previously given them up - are now wanting them back to marry off for bride price, even though they had had nothing to do with them for many years. Girls are often married off in this way as soon as they reach puberty: income generation for their parents. The families had been trying to pressurize Bushfire into releasing them, even trying to trick the girls to come home to claim an inheritance - for example, some land - only for them to find that a marriage had been arranged. All the older girls had had training on how to run away if this happens and are told that they would always have a safe place to come at Bushfire. They have had to become very careful about letting the girls out of the compound - only in groups with boys amongst them - when they need to fetch water.



Wooden vessel lying in the rubbish at Bushfire

Some in the local community are hostile to Bushfire, although the older of the two local witchdoctors now attends church quite regularly and has renounced Islam for Christianity, to the irritation of his family. He is an advocate for what Bushfire have done to help the community. Some locals however, are spreading rumours that Bushfire are selling off kids to muzungus.

Ellie and I had been invited to Sarah and Paul's for dinner that night. Pauline had some beef in a bowl, being prepared in our honour. There was a turkey wandering around too and I joked about it being for our supper that night as well - she told us that it was indeed to be slaughtered for us. I asked whether the feathers could be kept - maybe the group could use them.

Wednesday 6th October

Lots of rain in the night but not enough to make the showers work, sadly. I planned to demonstrate the patterned plait fascinator and see whether Getulida had brought the feathers/quills we needed.

I had everything ready to show the group. Ruth turned up about 12.00, the others a bit later in dribs and drabs. It was a cloudy day but warm and humid, with thunder rumbling in the distance. Ruth was working on a zigzag patterned, narrow sleeping mat plait in dark blue and natural. Joyce had started a beret. She had pulled the plait a bit too much, so it was more domed than the sample and slightly smaller. I explained about pushing in extra plait as you sew, to keep it flat at first, then putting a bit more tension on it when ready to curve it down. Her sewing was a little uneven - more tension was needed on the raffia to stop the plait pulling apart in places. It was a good start though. Getulida had a go too: her stitching was not great (even though I had shown them how to hide it) and needs more practice. She brought me several feathers - turkey, I think - and began stripping them down to quills.



Ruth plaiting the narrower version of mekeka plait I had commissioned, 2010



The plait group, 2010



Teaching the group to sew up a hat shape

Unfortunately, the quills looked very white against the natural plait colour. I could try to tint them yellower with some tea, but would try to get some cane in Jinja the next day. I demonstrated how to sew up the patterned plait for the fascinator. It took about half an hour.



Starting the spiral of plait at the centre of the crown



Teaching session 2010

I emphasized the importance of using the right colour of thread and of not splitting the palm with the needle, but couching the stitches in the places where strips of palm overlap: the positioning of the needle being key. The women all leaned in and watched.



Tolofisa with her pink plait, 2010



One of the Scovias making a plain plait for edging mekeka, 2010



"Black" plait no 1, 2010

Bible study was at 3.30. Ellie met with Z beforehand to sort out who does what with orders for Mothers of Hope. In the evening, we went to Sarah and Paul's where a lavish African feast had been prepared: slow-cooked beef, turkey pieces in a sauce, avocado, rice, matooke, Irish, cabbage, greens, pumpkin steamed in banana leaves, sweet potato. Even the beef was delicious, lean and tender, with an intense flavour.

Australian O was another guest, and Milcah, from the clinic. We chatted a bit; it was easy and relaxed. I was warming to O who is very friendly and obviously means well. She talked about her mission work in the Congo, but said that Nigeria had been the worst place she had spent time in - dangerous and corrupt. Sarah told us that since the craft group had been meeting, she had noticed that they seemed happier and better off: she sees them smiling more now, although many of them have difficult lives. A good evening and it was lovely to be invited.

Thursday 7th October

We rose at 5.45 to get ready to leave for Jinja at 6.30ish. Willy was supposed to go to Kampala with Moses, but there was a death in his family and he needed to go to Mbale for the day instead. We dropped Willy in Iganga to get a matatu to Mbale, and Moses in Jinja to get one to Kampala. Paul was driving us. We were to meet L at Hope House at 9.00 but reached Jinja by 08.10. We went to The Source for coffee and banana bread, samosas for Paul. He showed us where the house was that he grew up in - a house that had been taken over after the Indians had been evicted under Amin. Some years later they had had to move out when the owners returned, but Paul seemed quite peaceful about that.



Lavish dinner at Sarah and Paul's, 2010



The Mugagga family, 2010

We went on to Hope House to see the samples that were being made for Ellie. They were fantastic! Waiswa had sampled the satchel-like bag Ellie had given him in sugar sack and kitenge, piped with leather. There was also a toilet bag and a small make-up bag, as well as flowerpot covers in recycled sacking. All very exciting first samples with only some small changes needed. L was thrilled with them too. Ellie went through costings and extra details of finish for the bags. I collected the two mats I had ordered from Kangulumira at 35,000 each - more than some in Jinja, but they were nice quality and I knew who the money was going to.



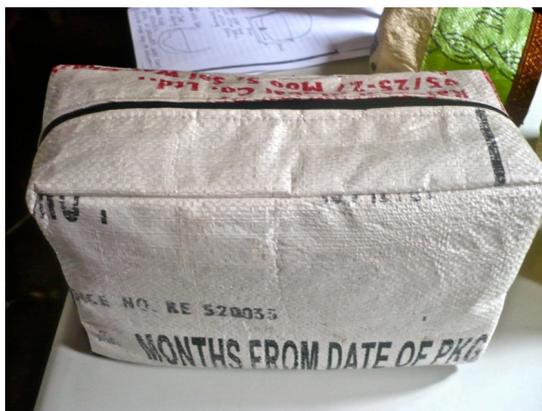
Make-up bag Ellie developed with Hope House



Make up bag lined with kitenge, 2010



Pot holders Ellie developed at Hope House



Toilet bag Ellie developed at Hope House, 2010



First sample of satchel style bag, 2010



Bowls by Kangulumira group



Sample with leather base of toilet bag



Work in progress – picnic mats in mekeka plait



Kitenge inside satchel bag, 2010



'Missionaries' tents' pattern, 2010



'Railway tracks' pattern, 2010

We were there for about an hour while Paul waited - then we returned to Jinja market with L, who helped us look for cane (to no avail), to buy an iron (11,000), strong thread and some more raffia. The brand of iron with a brass cockerel on top is the best, apparently.

On one stall there were antelope (?) hides, strings of cowries and strange black seedpods on strings that *L* said were used for witchcraft rituals. I hadn't seen that stall before - it was tucked back from the main passageways. Then we went to a haberdashery shop called 'Monica Fancy' to buy needles for the group. We couldn't find the keyrings we wanted there, so parted with *L* – saying big goodbyes as we wouldn't see her again this trip. Then we went back to the market where we found some keyrings, albeit a bit big.

We headed up Main Street looking for kitenge for the group, so that I could teach them to make some trimmings. I was wondering whether there would be time though - we were barely on course to finish two hat styles. I found some chicken print fabric and bought it for 20,000, down from 25,000. We sat in the garden of Flavours for while before Paul arrived to announce that Moses was already back from Kampala, so we all left. *Z* called to ask us to collect some paper beads from Hope House on the way.

We stopped in Iganga for a while too, where I asked Moses to photograph the matooke market through the car window. He took his time about it and was spotted by a man who didn't want to be photographed. He carried on taking a few shots but I was worried that the camera would be snatched.



Monica Fancy, Jinja, 2010



Ellie in Flavours' garden, 2010



Matooke market in Iganga, 2010

Friday 8th October

We rose at 6.30. The group was coming at 12.00. I was to decide on who got what certificate today. When enough of the group had come I asked them some more questions:

- What are the main economic activities in the area?

Agriculture and trade of produce: maize, rice, coffee, g-nuts, animals such as goats and chickens

- What plaiting did they do in the community before the group started?

Mekeka (mats) and baskets (coiled) for the community. People came to buy from others in their homes

- Has the plait they make for me changed what they like/their taste at all?

People have noticed the difference and asked them how they play around with the plait and designs, especially when they make hats and bags.



Joyce's mini-beret sample on the left, mine on the right



Small base prepared to show the group how to 'block' a domed shape, 2010



The group examining the shape on the block, 2010

I took photos of each of the group members for the certificates. Some weren't present though, like Tapanansi who had gone to visit her mother. Then I demonstrated blocking the fascinator, pressing it with an iron through a damp cloth over a dome crown block. It worked well - they were impressed by how smooth and even the shape became. I also showed how to curve the plain strip of plait for the 'headband' so it would sit nicely inside. Ellie did a pom-pom making workshop with them, handing out some cardboard rings she had prepared. I showed them how to make the looped trim for the fascinator, attach it, then add a pom-pom.



Lovisa discussing the blocking process with Ruth and Scovia, 2010



Apofya examining the blocked crown, 2010



Ellie demonstrating how to make pom-poms

Teaching proper hat making needed more time than I had on this trip though; I was becoming resigned to not getting as far as I had hoped and realized that I had been unrealistic in my aims. We had made a good start, but it was slow. The beret was being sampled by a few people, but even Edith used a wrong colour thread that was also much too thick, so that it showed. I stressed the importance of matching thread to the colour of the hat, but this is something I must plan for in the future and bring out what they might need. Edith was also pulling the plait too much too soon to make the shape, so I went through it again. Joyce had made a second attempt that wasn't too bad, just needing to be a bit bigger and flatter on top.

I collected another few bundles of plait that I had ordered from group members - a dark, mixed colour length (Scovia Ngudo) and 'black' (Scovia Timugibwa). Damali was to finish a length dyed with 'colour plant' and Ruth had nearly finished a length of patterned plait for me. The group tried to teach me more Lusoga, enjoying my attempts a little too much.



Ruth with bag sample she made, 2010



Scovia sewing with raffia, 2010



Apofya with a coiled pot she had made, 2010



Sample Edith made in palm and *matooke*



Coiled pot with lid, palm and green plastic

Ellie was called away to a meeting with Rose while I finished off with the group. In their meeting, they discussed costing and realized that their beads hadn't been costed correctly, having included in their price the 8 hours it took for the varnish to dry while they were making or doing other things. No wonder their beads are so much more expensive than other peoples'. The real cost - including a reasonable profit - was 4,200. Sarah asked Ellie to look at some beads that the girls in her house had made. She said it was ok if Ellie didn't want to buy anything. Not sure how many different ways there are to say "I don't like paper beads and I never want to buy any ever again". Ellie had underlined this in her meeting with Rose though, so hopefully it will get through. She had shown Rose and Catherine the bags she had developed with Mothers of Hope. Catherine wanted to try to make some, but I doubted whether the finish would be good enough.

It rained hard in the afternoon. We sheltered in the church again, the strong wind all but lifting the corrugated iron off the roof. The owner of Banana Boat texted me to try to arrange a meeting. I had contacted her before coming out to Uganda, but she was to be in the UK for the first part of my trip. She was now back and keen to meet.



Getulida



Lovinas



Tolofisa

We liaised with Sam: he thought that we could take the hat samples with us to Entebbe and leave them with Fred - a friend of his who works at the Entebbe Flight Motel - to be collected. That way we could show the samples and take it from there.

Random thoughts: I decided to put any delivery to Gloria on hold until the hats are good enough and to get feedback from Banana Boat even if we weren't ready to supply her. The cap might be good in the narrow sleeping mat plait too. *L* really needs to visit Bushfire to drive quality and consistency. I tried to think of names for a brand: Hope Hats, Weaverbird, Bushfire Lady...



The plait group, 2010



The charcoal iron from Jinja market, 2010



Orange colour plant (annatto) Bushfire

I sat in on a meeting between Ellie and some of the Bead group afterwards, where she showed them how to make the key rings for the bags. It had been decided that this group would make them; it felt a bit easier now.

Saturday 9th October

The mice (?) in our room were really active during the night, exploring all our stuff. Maybe they had been on previous nights too, but this time I woke and put my torch on only to see one running across my mosquito net, then across the top of my headboard. When it disappeared we thought we had scared it away, turning off our torches to go back to sleep. A few minutes later Ellie gasped and put her torch on. The mouse was under her mosquito net, sitting on the pillow next to her head. She yelped. We attempted to catch it, giggling somewhat hysterically while trying not to wake up the house, but the mouse was too fast for us. Finally we went back to bed, leaving our torches on for the rest of the night in the hope that the light would keep the mice away. Neither of us slept very well and I woke with a splitting headache.



Child fetching water, Bushfire

The group were coming at 11.00 for me to re-cap on the beret and fascinator.

Tusangaire - We are happy (to see you)

Tunabonna esangalo - let's see how happy/we shall see (how happy you are)

Piso - needle

Ndiwano - I am here

Olinawo - You are there

Ruth came first at about 12.30-ish. The majority of group members came for this last session. I checked their pom-poms and talked through the importance of doing the sort of plait I wanted for me and whatever *B* wants for *B* - that we were working separately - all via Edith as interpreter.

I showed Lovinas how to sew up some patterned plait she had prepared to make the fascinator I had demonstrated. She picked it up reasonably well. Her plait was wider than mine by about 3mm and a bit less neat, but it was a good beginning. Rose had told Ellie that *B* had made the group cry by telling them - presumably quite harshly - that the quality of their plaiting wasn't good enough. She hasn't actually bought anything from them yet, so I'm not sure why they are listening to her.

Tapenansi was still missing. When I asked the group if she was ok - concerned because she was quite pregnant - I was told that she had been on the way to her mother's home on the back of a boda boda when her bag had come untied and was lost. She was ok, but had lost a lot of her things and the length of plait she had been working on. I took the names of 3 more group members who hadn't been present the day before, as well as their photos

I showed the group how to block the small crown that Lovinas had made. It improved the hat shape and smoothness of the plait, but could still have been neater. I think they understand now though and they assured me that they will practice.

Then they asked me what my job was and whether I was married. I told them that I was single with one son. They asked if my parents were still alive and I told them that my father was, that my mother had died 3 years ago and he had remarried not long afterwards. I wondered about their circumstances with fathers, and indeed husbands, remarrying and the changes they had had to deal with. They seemed to relate

to my relatively minor circumstances very well. I wondered whether they had been wanted to ask these more personal questions all along and was glad they felt able to. We said our goodbyes - several of the women made speeches of thanks very movingly, through Edith interpreting. Lovisa danced and clapped. It was so nice to be with them all.

I wish I'd had more time to train them this trip, as they were grasping the basics and there was so much more to do. They are not yet ready to supply the finished hats but there are signs that they will be able to in due course. They have to be good enough for the customers or we could lose useful contacts. I need to plan the next trip carefully to allow more training but also more networking in Kampala. Banana Boat texted me again to finalise the meeting in Entebbe - the next day, at 4-ish.

After the group had left we were called to the dining hall, where a major prayer session was taking place with most of the children as well as the adults. Moses seated us at the front and everyone gathered around. He gave a speech of thanks and appreciation for our work, then I gave a speech to thank them and encourage them. Then they all prayed for us, for my son, for the craft group ministry. It was very powerful and a privilege to be prayed for in that way.

In the evening Ellie and I went to Sam and Eva's for dinner. Their car had broken down, so he wasn't able to collect us. Ben took us there instead and fixed the car. The house was lovely: not quite finished, but well designed with wide hallways. Sam was coming down with malaria and feeling quite unwell; Eva had a chest infection; and poor Isaac, their 8-year-old son, was lying in his room with a drip in his arm, seriously ill with malaria. He was crying in pain and misery, vomiting regularly, although there was nothing left in his stomach. His temperature was high and he was shivering with cold. It was very worrying and even stoical Eva looked tense and had decided to cancel a proposed trip to Masaka. Alternative arrangements were made to take Ellie, O and I back to Entebbe the next day. Joseph was to take us.

We didn't like to stay too long as they seemed so unwell and surely in need of rest. When we got back to Catherine and Willy's, we chatted to them for a bit. Willy is such a wise man and Catherine so gracious. They called all the children to come and pray for us. Each child said something: mostly thanking us for the things we had brought. Little Amina said "Come back!" (we had shared our food with her and glared at Blaze when he hurt her arm). We thanked them all before another rodenty, sleepless night.

Sunday 10th October

As we were getting ready to leave- supposedly at 7.15am - Joseph came at 6.30 to ask if we were ready to go. It was still dark and we were trying to wash and get dressed without light. We scrambled around to gather up our stuff, leaving some clothes on the table for Catherine/Bushfire. After some sad goodbyes (but without seeing Moses, whose photo I was supposed to take for his Facebook page) we set off for Sam's house to pick up O.

Sam still seemed unwell and had had a sleepless night. Isaac was still very ill. O didn't have too much luggage - most of what she had was paper bead necklaces to take back to Australia. She talked a lot about her preaching against child abuse and her work with rape victims in the Congo as well as the danger of kidnapping in Nigeria, where white people are assumed to be working for oil companies and therefore to be rich.

We stopped between Iganga and Jinja to pick up more paper beads, from a Mothers of Hope group leader for O. The quality of some of the bracelets was poor and even O rejected them. Then we called at Hope House for Ellie to see samples of the folding picnic mat. Two had been made: one with kitenge and mekeka and the other with sugar sack and mekeka. They had both been edged with a plain binding, rather than the kitenge requested. The sugar sack one just had a pocket rather than the whole of the back being covered with sacking. Not quite right, but not too bad as first samples



Tree outside Sarah and Paul's house



Typical Jinja house, 2010

They had also made many of the little flowerpot covers although Ellie had not ordered more. Most of them were wrong and had become almost rectangular rather than round. Ellie was frustrated as they were expecting her to take them and pay for them. She took a few, but not all: they have to learn not to do this. Ellie took a couple of bag samples with her and paid for the ordered samples.

Stopping at a petrol station outside Jinja (petrol prices are the same as the UK at the moment - a huge amount to pay on Ugandan wages) - I went inside and bought us all some coffee in a can, bottles of water, cake things and biscuits that turned out to be horrible. Joseph was fasting so only took juice..



Matatu on the way to Kampala, 2010



Market near Kampala, 2010



Driveway to the house near Entebbe, 2010



Side of a shed near Entebbe, with poster 2010

We made good progress after that, stopping between Kampala and Entebbe to visit an aunt of Joseph and Eva's and her husband Richard, whom O knew well. Richard was a pastor and a herbalist; he and his wife were treating their heart conditions with chilli. Some years ago he had been given 4 months to live by doctors but had treated himself ever since with chilli and seemed robust and healthy. He also took aloe and grew lots of herbal medicine plants in his garden. He said he would ask about natural dyes for me and email the information. They gave us bananas and watermelon.

We reached the Entebbe Flight Motel about 1.00pm. We said goodbye to O and Joseph as they continued on to the airport. It was great to check into our rooms off the ground floor courtyard. We took an hour to relax. I had a shower, washed my hair, and smartened up, then we headed into Entebbe town. This was small and undistinguished, unless we were missing something. Suni, the owner of Banana Boat, called to say she was running late and to ask whether we would like to visit a paper- making project that she was involved with. She arranged for the manager of the project to collect us from the hotel. Suni would meet us at the base.

Papercraft makes paper out of banana fibre, pineapple fibre and also out of recycled paper. They are based in a fair-sized house, 5 minutes up a track off the main Kampala-Entebbe road. Harriet showed us the various stages of the process. Big cauldrons of banana fibre were boiling away until the fibre softened, this was put in a tank with cold water, then screens covered with mosquito next were dipped in and pulled out flat, with the residue coating the mesh. They were left out to dry in the sun and peeled off as paper when dry. Very simple, very effective: fascinating to see the procedure. They also made beads out of recycled glass. Glass bottles and jars were pounded to dust, then the powder tipped into little trays of moulds, then put in a furnace for a couple of hours until liquid. When done, they were cooled a bit before a wire was inserted to make holes for thread while the glass was still soft. Inside the house items were being made with the paper and with beads. Notebooks were covered with handmade paper, as well as brochures for Suni's safari lodge. There were also some nice Christmas cards, the designs on them having been drawn by Suni. Necklaces and earrings were being made with the glass beads.

Suni arrived: an energetic, petite blond in her thirties. She was friendly and easy to talk to. We discussed HIV/AIDS in Uganda and she told us how one of the team jokes about how her AIDS is playing up so she needs more food. We went into another room and showed her the hats. She loved them and the hairbands too. She would like to stock them in Banana Boat. We talked about pricing: she said she doesn't make a huge profit, only about 2-5% but does pay herself a good salary and has 3 shops and their staff to support. Her mark up is at least double. She described the safari lodge that she and her husband recently finished building. It sounded amazing. The visitors' books and guides were all made by Papercraft.



Entebbe Flight Motel

We discussed 30,000 UGX for the hats, which she accepted although with some hesitation, saying that labelling would be important to show how the money was going to the group to help justify the price. I pointed out that the hats were pitched at a different market than tourists - wealthy Ugandan ladies who would like the western-designed aspect of these hats in collaboration with a Ugandan group, and that this helped to justify the price point. She seemed OK with that. I told her about Gloria; she was happy about me selling to her too but said their prices needed to be similar – so I must check Gloria’s mark up (not sure if she was even planning to mark up).

I really must plan the schedule carefully for the next trip to allow more time in Kampala, as this was where business could be done. I didn’t have time to follow up the African Woman article with Gloria this time, but the group was not yet ready for that.

Suni really liked the sugar sack and kitenge bags that Ellie and I were using, which Ellie had designed. She said that she had been wanting to do something with recycled sacks for ages and had not gotten around to it, but that if Mothers of Hope were already doing some she would be willing to stock them. This was great. *L* had been turned down by Suni’s store manager, although I wonder what else *L* had shown her. Suni gave us a lift back to the hotel, telling us about her life there, her children, about malarial mosquitos only being around between 8 and 11pm, so if children were put to bed earlier, under mosquito nets, they could avoid being bitten. She didn’t take any malaria preventatives and had not had malaria so far. She would take treatment if it developed. I arranged to email her after I got back to the UK. It was after 6.00pm when we returned to the hotel.

Ellie and I went to the supermarket across the road for beer, crisps and jackfruit for our last Ugandan supper and settled down to watch an outrageous Mexican soap opera on the television in my room. In the morning at the airport, we passed a stand of books - all Gloria’s father’s autobiography. A very productive trip with a lot of information to absorb, which gave me hope for the future of the various projects and craft groups I was involved with.



Jinja, 2010