



MUKO, UGANDA • MICHIGAN, USA • *An ecumenical program for community transformation*

January 2011 Newsletter

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ACT Muko Office purchased

Using a grant from St. John's Episcopal Church in Midland, the office in Muko has been purchased. Additional funds are being requested to replace the roof, expand the work areas and provide solar power for computers and cell phones.

ACT IN ACTION: AN ORPHAN'S STORY

As the roster of sponsored orphans continues to grow, their individual stories remain compelling. Sue Wachter tells one young girl's story:

"I think we were all stunned to learn the story of Caroline, one of our Muko HOPE orphans and her life history. Her Dad died and her Mom fled the village where they were living. For some reason the villagers were chasing her out of the village. She was pregnant with Caroline. She fled to a banana field and hid there while they were pursuing her. She gave birth to Caroline and decided to bury the child since she would be captured herself.



"Caroline was buried alive.

"The Mom's sister saw this happen and came and rescued Caroline and is still raising her. Caroline is 9 years old. Her mother is no longer living and she still lives with her aunt."

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MISSION TEAM HAS REAFFIRMED AND EXPANDED MUKO TIES

Each of the four ACT-Michigan mission trips to Uganda has had its own identity, but, says ACT-Michigan Director Sue Wachter, one focus remains constant.



"Building relationships is probably the most significant thing we can do in successful mission.

It's all about relationships," Sue says. "To be

with them and sup with them and worship with them is of paramount importance. It also helps

us not impose our standards on their lives but better understand how they live and how we can make their lives better meeting their standards, not ours."

The latest mission team returned January 9 from a 14-day visit. Their goals were ambitious, and **their schedule daunting. But that's what they wanted, because this team literally meant business.**

Alma College students Bill McHenry and Holly Oemke, brought their expertise as members of **Students In Free Enterprise (SIFE). As part of ACT's continuing effort to build up the Muko Empowerment Program as a business, with increasing villager participation and revenue, the SIFE Students met with key individuals and helped organize the business. Bill and Holly met with Alexander Gumoshabe, ACT Muko Empowerment Program Manager (MEP), to build the handcraft program and learn how SIFE can continue to support it.**



Bill (left) and Holly (right) working with the villagers

Mission Trip (*continued*)

"Some of their actions included quality assurance of the products, product development, marketing, training of the women making the handcrafts, organization of the business itself in Muko, [guidance on how to maintain] sustainable inventory both in Uganda and in the U.S. for sales, and developing additional sales venues here in the U.S.," Sue explained. "They came home with actions to complete to help our Ugandan partners in building the business."

Master gardener and sewing expert Dale Anderson met with the MEP women, helping them learn quilting techniques and design. She also spent time with Tito Tugame, ACT Mobilization and Agricultural Officer, to discuss improvements and growth of ACT's Agricultural program in Muko.



Dale with the women



Tito and the gardens

Ashley Bair, a student at Michigan State University and a member of ACT's new partner church in Holt, worked under the direction of Charles Tuhaise, Chair of the ACT-Muko Board and the President of the National Association of Social Workers in Uganda. Ashley worked alongside Alex Twikirize, the ACT Operations manager who oversees the other employees as well as the Muko HOPE orphan sponsorship program.

The team also took further steps toward purchase of the ACT Office and land acquisition, as well as checking in on the clinic solar power and water systems.



Fiona Kyampeire with Ashley

Most importantly, according to Sue, "We were there for fellowship with and worship with our Ugandan partners in ACT. As an outcome, we will all be re-energized to continue God's work in Muko and the U.S."

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ACT Strategic Plan 2010 - 2015

During the last year, our ACT Uganda Board members worked diligently to arrive at a five-year strategic plan for the organization. Listed below are the areas they decided would be their focus.

- Create improved economic opportunities in Muko especially for destitute and low income individuals and families. (e.g. MEP)
- Provide for quality education and care for the children of Muko.
- Use networking and partnering with other organizations to increase our effectiveness. (e.g. the government, SIFE, other churches, corporate, civic organizations)
- Build the best representative boards and organizational infrastructure in both countries to sustain the programs.
- Design ways to increase spiritual fellowship with each other.
- Develop and implement the ACT Muko Centre.



Some of the MEP Women, and their Stories

TUGUMI SIRI ZE LOVINA

She is one of the basket weavers from Karengyere parish. She is lame and has been engaged in basket weaving even before joining MEP.

She says "It was a matter of good luck that I was identified as an experienced basket maker. The ACT office invited me for a one week training in April 2010 where I learned more skills relevant to basket weaving".



Lovina is proud of MEP because after receiving wages, she uses that money to hire workers to work in her Irish potato gardens and she feels recognized as a member of the society.

She faces challenges like inability to move up and down the hills in searching papyrus material and herbs for preparing natural dyes as well as failure to travel to the office due to disability. ACT has acquired a donated wheelchair for her use.

MAGDALEN RWABWERA

Aged 47, a widow and a resident of Butare parish, she says " I joined MEP by the time when a Muzungu (Sue Waechter) trained us how to make quilts at the office". She says that after seeing how other women were receiving money, she came to know that basket weaving had become lucrative and started to practice how to make baskets. In April 2010 she attended a one week training where she was taught the weaving techniques used in order to produce neat baskets.



Magdalene has been receiving low wages for her handcrafts due to poor quality, but she hopes to improve for better quality. The little money she has been receiving is used to buy scholastic materials for her children.

She faces challenges like overworking in order to care for her children, hence low income earnig.

Finally she expressed desire of working very hard and having her baskets selected for shipping to USA and also thanked the ACT stake holders for thinking about women in Muko.

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MEP Women, and their Stories (*continued*)

TWI NOBUSI NGYE HOPE

She is a widow aged 48 and a resident of Kabere parish. She became a member of MEP in January 2010 after being identified by Tito (mobilisation officer) as an experienced basket weaver.



She says, " I became more interested in MEP after having my baskets bought by the Bazungus (ACT- Michigan team) when they visited us in **February". She loves development and she is proud of MEP because it has provided an available market for her products unlike in the past where she used to exchange her baskets for sorghum and beans.**

Hope has been receiving wages which has helped her to supplement on the little income she earns from agricultural produce.

She faces challenges like poverty because of being a widow, as well as moving for long distances to and from the office while attending meetings and training.

She concludes by saying "Hangaara ACT" which means "Long live ACT".

JANE NYAGYI RI RE

She is aged 47 years and a resident of Kabere parish. She joined MEP in July 2010 after hearing the message from one of the volunteers of Kabere parish. She joined the training centre in their parish where she acquired more knowledge.



Jane says " I couldn't believe that my baskets could be acceptable because it was my first time to engage myself in such a business, but fortunately some of them were accepted which gave **me more motivation". Although she has recently joined, Jane has started receiving wages and she vows to continue participating because MEP acted as a unifying factor among women from all corners of Muko sub-county.**

She faces a challenge of having a large family which at times brings about limited food supply as well as low income earning. She also says that she has not reached the level of weaving good quality baskets which has earned her low wages.

Finally, she thanked the ACT Organisation for remembering women in Muko through the MEP project.

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