

Karen Shepherd - Report on trip to Uganda - August 2016

Kabubbu is situated around 20 km (about a 2 hour drive) from Kampala, the capital of Uganda. It is spread over approximately four miles and is mostly accessed via mud roads, which is fine when the weather is hot and sunny but when it rains it is a very different story. The main way to get around the village is on Boda Boda.



Rain is exactly what we got on our first day in Uganda, biblical proportions of rain that brought the traffic in Kampala to a complete standstill. It rained non-stop for around two hours and the rain was so hard it was bouncing off the roads and cars and flooding the streets. Instead of the journey from the airport to Kabubbu taking around 4 hours it took 8! Most of it stuck in traffic trying to get in, around and out of Kampala and its suburbs.

We arrived in Kabubbu much later than planned but fortunately they had kept our dinner for us and we were able to tuck into the dinner that we had been so looking forward too. Tired and weary we went to bed with the prospect of getting up for breakfast at 7 am for our first full day in Kabubbu.



Our first experience was a joyful one as we had the pleasure of attending the primary school assembly. The children start school very early 7 am and beginning with registration and cleaning duties! Then assembly is at 8 am. The children gather in the school yard and they sing hymns to the accompaniment of drums and led by the older children. Then the head teacher or the preacher gives out news and then the volunteer groups have the opportunity to lead the assembly - we lead four assemblies in our time in Kabubbu. Once assembly has finished they all go to class. The school day finishes at 5 pm, with the last hour being taken up with sports or other hobby type activities and more cleaning!



On our first morning we were given a tour the facilities in Kabubbu. First was the health centre, which was opened in 2004. This is an amazing place and provides family planning advice, ante and post-natal care, an HIV/AIDS clinic opened in 2010 (all treatment for HIV/AIDS is free), a dentist, an optician and they now have an operating theatre and are awaiting the recruitment of a surgeon. Next we were given a quick tour of Trust High School which was opened in 2006. They are very proud of the achievements of the pupils who have attended both the primary school and the secondary school, the first of which graduated from university in 2014. Some students have returned to Kabubbu to work in the community. Next we were shown the Maize Mill which opened in 2015 enabling maize to be milled on site reducing costs for them.



Part of our visit was to take part in what is known as The Development Project. This is where as a small group we visit a local family that is living in poverty. Unbeknown to them we had £100 pound to spend in order to improve their lives in the short, medium and long term. We had to question the family about their lives and determine the best way to spend the money. We visited Florence, 24 and Dennis 32 and their two young children. They lived in a mud hut with no windows or any form of lighting. They had a mattress on the floor with a blanket and some scrappy bits of foam to sleep on. They did not have any mosquito nets. They had a few cooking pots but Florence's only ladle was broken making cooking difficult. Their roof, made of banana leaves with a bit of deteriorating plastic sheeting, leaked when it rained. They owned their house and small plot on which it stood but had no land for farming. There were a few chickens running around outside. They survived on one meal a day, mostly Posho which is ground maize cooked with water and looks a bit like mashed potato, sometimes served with beans. Ugandans rarely eat meat. Clearly we had some difficult decisions to make on how we could spend our £100.



Eventually, we decided on: a mattress; blanket; two mosquito nets; a solar lamp; new cooking pots and utensils; some soap, 10 sheets of tin to replace the roof and make it watertight; a bag of posho and a football – the girls discovered that that Dennis was a football fan! We also decided to forego our dinner that evening and donate it to the family, which meant that they could have a meal that they didn't have to cook and it contained meat. We felt that was we did was so little but the family were very grateful – it was a very humbling experience and we were all in tears!



During our time in Kabubbu we also helped out in the school during the afternoons assisting with literacy. One of the members of another volunteering group that was visiting at the same time as us was a primary school head teacher and had already worked out a week long lesson plan and we helped her deliver it. The schooling is a little like ours was back in the 1950s/1960s and children are taught mostly by rote – it was wonderful to see them develop their language skills over the week and become more creative in their use of language and to be able to use their own imagination.

We helped with building two houses for teachers – teachers are provided with a house, two meals a day and a pension scheme to encourage professionals to move to a rural area, rather than commute from the capital. We moved thousands of bricks around the site for the men building



We worked on the agricultural project and planted maize, over the time that we were there we planted enough maize to feed 36 families for a year. A very satisfying outcome from the hard work in blazing sun that we put in.

We did have fun whilst in Kabubbu and we took part in African dancing, drumming and basket making classes – as you can see from the photos, the girls really enjoyed themselves.



We also spent time with the Kabubbu Guides – the group from Girlguiding that visited Kabubbu in 2014 helped to get the Guides up and running. The membership of the Guides is high and the girls wear their neckers to school. They meet on Sunday mornings, at 5 am, and march around the village, followed by a meeting and then church. We spent time with them on Sunday afternoon and our girls had a go at the marching – they found it very difficult but they all had a great deal of fun.



Our two weeks in Kabubbu flew by – we said an emotional goodbye to the children and staff and set off on our R&R week. We were very lucky and were able to visit many of Uganda's tourist spots. We visited the source of the Nile at Jinja, a spring that flowed into Lake Victoria. We had a game drive in Murchison Game Park as well as visiting Murchison Falls and seeing them from both the top and, via a boat trip, the bottom. For two nights we stayed in lovely accommodation in Murchison Park and had to be escorted to and from our rooms by guards after dark and before



sunrise because animals wandered the site – we were warned not to leave anything on our patios as the monkey's would take them! We visited and stayed in Queen Elizabeth Park for three nights and from there we enjoyed another game drive and a wonderful boat trip allowing us to see all sorts of wildlife on both land and water. It is a truly magical experience to see such beautiful creatures in their natural habitat. We also went chimp trekking. We were up early and trekked through the jungle to find the chimps, which we could hear screeching high above us in the canopy of the trees. Eventually we found them and spent some time watching them swing through the trees. We set off again to find some more but, unfortunately, one of the girls tripped and injured her ankle. In true Girlguiding style, our guides chopped down a couple of sturdy branches with their machetes and we fashioned a stretcher using our jumpers and



started to carry her through the jungle. It was very difficult going and although everyone took turns, it was exhausting work and we made very slow progress. Eventually, the guides radioed through and a couple of Ugandans arrived to assist. In no time at all they had hoisted the stretcher onto their shoulders and marched off at a steady pace, making it look so easy! The good news was that the ankle was badly sprained and no lasting damage was caused and she's now walking on it without problem. Our last task on our trip was to visit the Equator and renew our promise, some of the girls made their promise as a Senior Section member for the first time, what a wonderful memory for them.

All too soon we were on our long journey home, all very tired after an exhausting three weeks, but enriched by our experience.

Huge thanks to all who provided grants, donations and bought my knitted owls making the trip possible.

Please encourage your girls to put themselves forward for any international trips, it is such a wonderful experience for them. Also, as a leader, don't be afraid to put yourself forward to lead a trip ... it is something I never thought I would be able to do but it just goes to show you, age is no barrier!