



QSA Notes

people, places & projects

Jalamba Organic Processors and Training Centre (JOP)

Jalamba Organic Processors and Training Centre (JOP) became a QSA project partner around 18 months ago. During this relatively short period of co-operation the project has been affecting great benefits in farming communities of Uganda's Mpigi district, approximately 70kms south of Kampala City.

The project is currently supporting 60 female farmers on the islands of Bunjakko and Busso through one year's intensive training and one year of follow up support; so to increase household food production via sustainable, organic agricultural practice. In the longer term, subsistence farmers will find support to maintain a more generalised food security and increase household income in a region struggling with the effects of land degradation, poverty, high population growth, increasing rates of HIV/Aids infection and the effects of climate change.

On his recent and first ever trip to Australia, the QSA office had the pleasure of meeting with Ignatius Kakembo Ntambi, JOP's executive director. After a day of seeing Sydney in the sunshine; a ride on the Manly ferry, a walk around circular Quay and a discussion of Australian football, Ignatius offered QSA the opportunity of an interview to learn about the scope of the project and to hear about their latest progress.

Ignatius spoke earnestly about his own journey of approaching retirement and recognising that much positive work needed to be done in struggling communities such as Bunjakko and

Busso. His decision to become involved with JOP's work in order to 'give-back' to the communities, where from his own family finds its roots, has been a profound and positive one.

Traditionally fishing communities, the islands on Lake Victoria are home to many rural female farmers who are struggling with no reliable sources of income and inadequate food production. Fishing is culturally a male only occupation and as such the responsibility for feeding families and growing fruit and vegetables is borne by women.

Despite being located in the fertile crescent of Lake Victoria, damaging agricultural practice has led to significantly depleted soil quality and ever smaller agricultural yields. This, coupled with unreliable weather patterns, generalised poor farming practice and an increased occurrence of pest and disease outbreak, has meant that the island communities are living in what Ignatius termed "absolute poverty" which in turn has led to increased rates of malnutrition, particularly among children aged 2-5 years.

Ignatius spoke of a further imperative to assist farmers in becoming self sufficient, "when 60 -70% of the population earns below \$1USD per day", that produce which is available to purchase, is almost invariably unaffordable and of a substandard quality as it is transported from the main land meaning additional transport times and costs.

Water quality has also long been a concern to JOP as the primary source of water for farmers, for food and cash crops as well as drinking and cooking

is the Lake itself which, though fresh water, is contaminated through misuse and mismanagement. Ignatius referred to the Lake being used to discard the waste from fishing hauls and other rubbish, as well as being contaminated with human waste and without any established irrigation schemes. Add to this the rapidly increasing population, and the need for an alternative water source is vital.

It is from these imperatives that the QSA partnership came about and the project has since been enthusiastically underway. The basis of the course has been running training in integrated organic agriculture, in fact, part of the scheme has also involved a period of residential training with QSA's project partner St Jude Family Projects and Rural Training Centre, where the farmers have learnt to make compost and harvest water, make organic pesticides and re-establish nutrients into much depleted soils.

In conjunction to this, the project is also providing farmers with local varieties of good quality fruit and vegetable seeds which would otherwise be out of reach, in order to boost yield but also for farmers to be able to harvest and store seeds that will remain robust and productive, until the next planting season. Indeed, JOP has also been instrumental in supporting farmers in establishing safe and effective granaries for storing their harvest and seeds for longer periods of inclement climate.

An additional focus of the training will be that of environmental protection, in particular for re-planting and reinvigorating woodlands on the islands and providing sustainable alternatives



to burning wood for cooking etc. Not only do many women and children travel over 5 Km s to collect firewood, forests on the islands are ever shrinking due to an unsustainable rate of use. Indeed, timber resources are generally acknowledged to be in unsustainable decline the world over and this remains the underpinning for QSA's ambition that reforestation be at the fore front of sustainable development practice in partner projects.

Pitchandikulam Forest project, Tamil Nadu, South India

Another project partner has recently sent some good news to QSA, which illustrates the impact of QSA's support. From Lourde Epinal we learned that

Nadukuppam High School '10th Standard students received the marks for their final examinations. There was a substantial increase in the number of students receiving pass grades. When we began working at the School in 2003, the pass rate was one of the lowest in Tamil Nadu at only 10%; the following year this mark increased to a 42% pass rate. Now this year the pass rate has improved further into 68%. As usual the girls have scored higher marks than the boys. This is a remarkably good academic result for a local village school' and help has come in several ways from special classes conducted on Saturdays and during the evening, to help children with individual learning difficulties.

But there was more good news. The Nadukuppam High School was announced as a Higher Secondary School by the State Government Education Department. Now the children can study till 12th standard, and they can expect more support from the government for buildings and other resources needed to upgrade the school. Our school was chosen due to Pitchandikulam involvement and continued QSA support, as the school shows not only the infrastructure development but also academic achievement.

Anna Abbot and Jackie Perkins, New South Wales Regional Meeting

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QSA is a member of the Australian Council for International Development (ACFID), and is a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct. The purpose of QSA is to express in a practical way the concern of Australian Quakers for the building of a more peaceful, equitable, just and compassionate world. To this end QSA works with communities in need to improve their quality of life with projects which are economically and environmentally appropriate and sustainable.

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