

Preacher to Entrepreneur: a Ugandan Journey

From small beginnings as a visiting preacher and teacher in rural Uganda, Richard Smart moved into bibles and books and finally into holistic development. It's been a 20-year learning curve, from visitor to resident, from preacher to entrepreneur, from co-worker to fundraiser. Richard chronicles the latest stage in his and his Ugandan partners' mutual experience of change.

Making a difference to others can be a rich blessing in one's own life. To see others helped and their lives transformed brings joy to the donor as well as to the receiver. 2 Corinthians 9.11 (quoted by Stephanie Walker in her article 'Transforming Lives for Good' in this issue), illustrates both the need to give and the rejoicing, on both sides, recipient and donor, that results. And the chief result is God being glorified and his kingdom extended.

Since 2002 I have been travelling regularly to rural Uganda, invited alongside Uganda pastors to preach and teach in village churches. In 2011 I was contacted by an organisation which

gave me bibles to give to rural Christians who could not afford to buy them. Since then, Sovereign World Trust, Operation Mobilisation and other suppliers have provided books and bibles. People valued the books and clamoured for more.

I've seen the transformation that these bibles and books have brought about in people's lives. Here's one that touched me:

Because of the abuse of what my father did to me in my childhood I hated him with all my heart. I felt he was worse than the devil. But HOPE AND HEALING FOR THE ABUSED helped to set me free from the past, to release the pain that

tormented me for over ten years. I learnt what forgiveness means. I forgave my father and now we are best friends. Thank you Sovereign World Trust for helping to release me from my prison of unforgiveness. And I learnt how to help others who are going through the pain I went through by use of this book.

Pastor Martin in Aminit has been one of my closest friends and mentors. I asked him which book had been most helpful to him. He replied, 'Forgiveness, God's Master Key by Peter Horrobin. When you forgive someone you feel relieved. It has helped me in the church, how forgiveness can turn things around and it shows the love.'



Women with chipped stones in the gravel quarry

From preaching and teaching to bibles and books. But I had more to learn. The change came as I thought more deeply about transformation – lives transformed, but also livelihoods. Three verses challenged me:

For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'
(Galatians 5:14, NKJV)

And you shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth.
(Deuteronomy 8:18, NKJV)

So he shepherded them according to the integrity of his heart, and guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.
(Psalm 78:72, NKJV)

Love, power to get wealth, skillfulness: three words or phrases that changed my thinking.

From regular short-term visits to Uganda I moved to long-term visas, to permanent residence and, my wife and I hope, eventually, citizenship. Experiencing village life in the homes of rural pastors made me look more closely at agriculture, both as food and as economic opportunity. Can we combine the spiritual with the entrepreneurial, so that rural pastors spearhead the economic as well as the spiritual development of their congregations?

Aminit in Bukedea, a county of eastern Uganda, is 35 km from Mbale, the district capital. Mbale (not to be confused with the Mbale in western Kenya,) has a population of over 100,000, was granted city status in 2020 and has been twinned since 2005 with Pontypridd. It lies north of the A109/A104 main roads linking landlocked Uganda with Kenya, connecting Kampala and Jinja with Eldoret, Kisumu and Nairobi.


Aminit is one of 16 townships in Bukedea District with populations of 10–20,000. With 22% employed in commercial agriculture, the district is in the agricultural top third of Ugandan districts. But with almost 50% of the population engaged in subsistence agriculture – halfway between the 20% and 80% recorded for other districts – life and life opportunities in the district can be dire. Women chip stones into gravel for less than £10 a month.

In a society where half the population are subsistence farmers, and almost three-quarters are involved in agriculture, increasing food production is critical. There is both need and opportunity to supplement cassava, the staple food crop, with protein. Much more protein-rich food could be produced if there was capital to invest. There is as yet no refrigeration for meat products: chickens and pigs move direct from abattoir to market and daily purchasing.

Working with Pastor Martin, these were the economics we worked out in Aminit for an initial investment of £10,000. (The costs do not include transport to market, abattoir costs, or market traders' margin.)

And these are the questions I asked:

- Demand for chicken and pork in the villages around Aminit, I am assured, is almost unlimited – but at what prices?
- Do pastors and their colleagues have the patience to wait for the chicken and pig projects to multiply from the initial capital input?
- Or will that initial capital, invested in protein-rich animals, be burned up through meeting the urgent medical and educational needs of the local congregations?

These are the hard choices. We'll find out the results in six months. 



Pastor Martin with books

Raising chickens and pigs for sale in local markets	
Two acres of land	£1,600
1,000 chicks	£2,500
20 piglets	£1,500
Sheds for the chicks, sheds for piglets	£900
Six months chicken feed	£900
Six months feed for piglets	£1,500
Employment for six months: two workers for chicken and pig projects	£480 for each project



Richard Smart is an accountant by background. Married to Corrol with two adult children, he lives in Hastings and worships at a Christian Missionary Fellowship International church. Richard and Corrol plan to emigrate to Uganda and hopefully become citizens in that country, cementing mutual relationships between the UK and Uganda.

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