

Preacher to Entrepreneur: a Ugandan Journey, part 2

Richard Smart reports on the progress of the Ugandan countryside enterprises which he chronicled in the last issue of FiBQ, and identifies the challenges for the Global South.

What would it take to enable countries in the Global South to escape the poverty trap and achieve the ‘tipping point’ to become middle-income countries like those in southeast Asia? In this second FiBQ article, Richard Sharp asks that question for Uganda, and by extension for the rest of Africa.

Living in rural Uganda is very different from living in a large Ugandan town with a middle class of salaried workers who send their children to school, frequent restaurants and employ domestic helpers. Subsistence farmers eke out life hand to mouth, without drinkable water and income for school books and uniforms, and are always at the mercy of sudden and expensive medical bills. The challenge in Uganda is in the rural areas. If these can sustain profitable, scalable enterprises, urban populations can be fed and rural life become more attractive than urban slums.

My experiences of the last six months have shown me the importance of three qualities: transparency, competence and hard work.

The start-up piggery and chick projects in which I invested my time, energy and funds have not produced the results expected. Something was achieved, but not the self-sustaining scalable

enterprises that I’d intended and hoped for. Transparency and competence were two issues. When dedicated funds are directed to other uses – not a rare event – transparency is difficult in shame cultures, but it’s essential if trust is to develop and further funding to materialise. In another case the issue was competence. Is the price paid for stock at the correct market rate? How certain is demand? Are the workers’ skills sufficient, or is a period of training required? These issues are common to all businesses, in the Global North as much as in the Global South.

By contrast, where funds were invested into ongoing projects, results exceeded expectations. Tools with a Mission funded Robert to equip the vocational training centre. A repayable loan enabled him to buy materials so he and his staff could build domestic furniture such as doors and stands for water tanks. Similarly, Tape and Chris have successfully run chicken projects for many years and learnt about different types of chicken and the market for poultry. Peter and Evelyn have learnt over the years how to make their turkey business profitable. Fred and Prossy have turned their piglet business into an enterprise making good income and investable profit. These are all scalable projects that, with the needed capital,

could expand to provide employment and sustainable rural incomes.

FiBQ and the annual FiB Retreat provide a mine of information about how to do business with Christian values. Articles describe the sweat, the tears and the years of experience it takes to get projects that are viable, sustainable and provide employment. A huge encouragement to me has been the Industrial Christian Fellowship’s centenary history. It documents Christian ministry among the navvies, Victorian England’s most marginalised class, along with, at the top of British society, three contemporary Balliol Oxford graduates, economist R H Tawney, William Beveridge, ‘the father of the Welfare State’, and William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury 1942–44.

And this is the same challenge, for Uganda, for Africa, and throughout the Global South: how to match the experience, the wealth and the Christian commitment of those at the top with competence, integrity and hard work by the rural poor at the bottom. I look forward to being at the FiB Retreat in April to meet as many of you as have the capacity and the will to invest your time, experience and money into bringing Uganda to the tipping point into a middle-income country. It can be done! 



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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