Power and Influence:
What it means for Investing in Uganda

***Richard Smart** has dedicated a lot of time since 2002 to teaching God's Word in the villages of Uganda. This meets an ongoing need, but it has made him recognise the vast potential for economic transformation in rural areas. With understanding and support, he believes Uganda can be a far better and stronger economy. Richard is passionate to see more unemployed Ugandans find jobs.*

You can wander round a supermarket in a mall in Uganda's capital Kampala and think you're in a country in the Global North. I did that in early 2026. It made me think about the 50 million Ugandans who will never see a mall, and some who may never see a supermarket.

Uganda's median age is 17, with over 40% of Ugandans under 15. The population is expected to double soon after 2050 – just 25 years away. What can outsiders do, using technical skills and money, to help Ugandans escape the cycle of poverty and unemployment? And how can we do it in a way that transfers power and influence to Ugandans?

I've come to realise that investing in a business activity is the way to a good and healthy life. Investment by foreigners can help – or hinder - this. Every sort of investment is needed, from micro-finance for subsistence farmers, to coffee plantations for SMEs, to investment in large-scale agribusinesses.

This is my experience of attempting to share skills and inputs, and of the pitfalls along the journey.

Cultural Challenges: the difficulty of saying "No"

Living in the UK I didn't realise just how much we are cushioned by clean water, effective sewerage, the NHS, and pensions for our older age. In Uganda, expecting repayment for a loan depends on a borrower being able to manage some critical issues: children's school fees, resourcing unexpected medical expenses, and paying for weddings and funerals. School fees, medical expenses and happy/sad events tend to override loan repayments, and any investor who forgets that may be in for a surprise. I was!

Henry, a Ugandan friend, fell in love with a lovely lady and wanted a wedding. He owned a shop selling clothes, so in December 2025 he took money out of the business so that he could enjoy his wedding. I visited him in March 2026. He told me he was at home because he no longer had the capital for his business. He had significantly reduced his stock because of the costs of the wedding.

It can sound hard, unloving and even unchristian to say "no" when there's a happy event, or when a family member needs school fees or medical expenses. But if the business does not preserve its capital, the owner will struggle for an income in the future. Proverbs 13.22 says that a good man leaves an inheritance for his children's children.

Admittedly, Henry faced a hard choice. In Ugandan culture very high social expectations are attached to weddings, and this creates a lot of pressure to spend a large sum of money on such an event. Only by thinking long-term, to future generations, can a person have the strength to say no to financial requests and give priority to their business.

Time – and Love

How does an investor deal with cultural challenges? By spending time with people, being transparent, and trusting that they are equally transparent with us. I learnt to recognise the challenges that Ugandans live with. Together we sought the best long-term solution for their lives, a solution that makes them self-reliant, always having enough income for their household needs.

I have found that nothing is more effective in changing attitudes than deepening a person's understanding of God's love for them and their families. With 82% of Ugandans claiming Christian allegiance, Ugandans have a platform of Bible knowledge. Christian preachers and Bible teachers are held in high regard. They are also often leaders in economic development. Working alongside such men and women is a huge privilege, and it is very often the entry-point for development.

Living and loving means being alongside and experiencing the food, the shelter and the open-hearted friendship, whether in the village or in the city. Only by being alongside can power and influence be transferred and mutually enjoyed.

Microfinance and agribusiness

Sam was a small-scale chicken farmer. He had the land and the chicken coops in place. He was prepared to put up his land as collateral for a bank loan and asked for some assistance with the application. As we looked through the application, the bank's interest rate – between 28% and 32% pa – was far too high for a small-scale farmer. I found an investor willing to lend the money at a much lower rate of interest. Sam went ahead with his chicken project. He fed the chicks, found the markets, sold the chicks and restocked. He did this a second time and was able to make a good profit. After six months he fully repaid the loan.

Repeat loans can help further development. Another chicken farmer, Joseph, had 50 chickens and an investor lent him funds to enable him to get more chicks: he expanded to 100 chicks. He repaid in full, and so I found him another loan to build a bigger building and increase his stock to 200.

Another Christian brother, Ben, had started constructing a farm building for turkeys but the cash came to an end and he couldn't buy the fencing to make the project secure. An investor made a loan to Ben and helped him to complete the building. This investment enabled him to buy chickens as well as turkeys, and to sell them at a profit.

These are three people who have made a successful improvement in their personal lives thanks to a microfinance loan for their businesses. They are experiencing the force of Romans 12.2: "Be transformed by the renewing of your mind." This includes being able to say "No" when family and friends come asking for help. Only when profits have been made are there funds to help with increasing demands from the extended family.

Agribusiness

Fred is a 60-year-old entrepreneur. He and his wife started with chickens and pigs, moved on to start a small hotel, and currently are investing in a coffee plantation, inter-cropped with banana plants. Fred is not only a serial entrepreneur. He funds and runs a Technical Training School for unemployed young men and women. Surplus food from their vegetable gardens feeds under-nourished children with a healthy diet. Fred and Prossy's children are getting a graduate education so that they can continue this Christ-inspired business to a second generation.

These are the economics. Fred and Prossy bought five acres of land for the coffee plantation, developed the ground for planting, drilled boreholes and built workers' accommodation. From their own resources they contributed 52% of the full £42,000 required. Investors from the UK made loans of the remaining 48%, at 5% interest per annum. The coffee plantation is expected to be up and running, with the full 48% and interest returned within five years. The inter-cropped banana plants may enable repayment of part of the loans from the end of year 2.

Fred at the coffee plantation

What I have learnt

I have been visiting Uganda for long periods since 2002. Starting as a Bible teacher, I progressed to Christian books and journals like FiBQ – all of which have been hugely welcomed and read avidly by those receiving them. But in the course of these 24 years I came to recognise that Bible teaching and Christian books alone cannot solve all Uganda's issues. So the third strand, not forsaking the first two, is development. For that, FiBQ has been immensely helpful, along with some seminal books such as *When helping hurts*, by Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert[1].

When I flew to Uganda this year I was reading a book on the plane titled *Unlimited* by Jen Baker[2]. Page 14 gives a definition of influence as

> *"The capacity or power of persons or things to be a compelling force on or produce effects on the actions, behaviour, opinions etc of others."*

Encouragement and information are two of those 'capacities'. Together they can shift a person's thinking from expecting handouts to working and running their own business. People move from being reliant upon others to becoming innovative and creative.

But I would claim that biblical teaching and motivation are the first requirement for anyone seeking power and influence. The Bible's message changes mindsets, installs new lifestyles, and enables the starting of a responsible Christ-centred business. Here are some of those mindset changes.

- Scriptures such as Philippians 2:3 ('Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit') and 1 Timothy 6:10 ('the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil') enable a person to examine their heart towards money. Money isn't the goal: it's a means to a better lifestyle. John Wesley's maxim is helpful – 'Earn all you can, Save all you can, Give all you can.'[3]
- This attitude to money leads away from paying a worker as little as possible in order to maximise profits, and starting to value a worker and think of them as partners in the business.
- Luke 16:10 reminds us that faithfulness with our time and money enables us to be trusted with more. This promise encourages an employer, knowing that their goodness and faithfulness are not in vain. Their business serves a Lord who repays abundantly.

Whether for microfinance or agribusiness, my two decades of travels around Uganda convince me that there are many more potential entrepreneurs who need investors. Like Henry, Sam, Joseph, Ben and Fred, they await friendship, encouragement, and Christ-honouring investments. For more information go to:

https://www.tencommunity.net/pages/smart-projects.


Fred Alimet, the project supervisor

1. Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When helping hurts*, Moody Press 2014.
2. Jen Baker, *Unlimited*, CWR 2015.
3. Wesley said this in his famous sermon on 'The Use of Money', in *Forty-Four Sermons*, Epworth Press, 2000.

***Richard Smart** is an accountant by profession, but devotes much of his life to Bible teaching and research in Uganda. He has been a supplier of a large amount of Christian literature to Ugandans for the last 15 years. But his deepest desire is to see spiritual depth and economic growth throughout the country.*