



Foundation Overview





Uganda

Uganda is a relatively small country (236,040 km², about the size of the US state of Oregon) with a large population of 28.8 million that is increasing at 3% annually — among the highest rates in the world (World Bank, 2007). Eighty-two percent of the 13.76 million person labor force is involved in farming with more than 80% of land being used for small scale farming (Mukiibi, 2001). Since such a significant portion of the population is involved in agriculture, the vast majority resides in rural areas. Nearly 80% of the population lives outside urban areas. (Uganda Bureau of Statistics, 2002).

Western Uganda

Kibale National Park is one of ten Ugandan national parks. Unlike many of the vast savannah parks of East Africa, Kibale NP is a relatively small (795 km²) forested park and home to chimpanzees, red colobus monkeys, elephants, and many other species. Outside Kibale National Park, the landscape is a densely-populated area with over 270 people/km² depend on the land to sustain their livelihoods. The area is composed mainly of two ethnic groups: Batoro and Bakiga. Forests and wetlands are particularly important for families to provide them with water, firewood, medicines, building poles, and other natural resources. These rural areas lack electricity and families meet their energy needs using firewood or charcoal. Farms are extremely small. Most are less than 5 hectares and this small amount of land must support an entire family. In this region, the average daily working wage is \$0.85 and available employment opportunities are limited. Working in fields, driving bicycle or motorcycle taxis, running small shops in town, or selling firewood, charcoal, livestock and food crops are common ways to earn a small income. Only a small contingent is employed through tourism-based activities or by international researchers working inside the park.

Health

Disease and illness contribute to declines in population health. According to the National Guidance and Empowerment Network, 11% adult men and 13% women are infected with HIV/AIDS (Berry and Noble, 2007), which plays a role in reducing the average life expectancy nationwide to 48 years for men and 51 years for women (World Health Statistic, 2007). HIV/AIDS has had a devastating effect on Uganda. In some cases, the infected persons are unable to work, straining the ability of caregivers to tend to the sick or to work twice as hard in their place. The added costs of medication and medical care, the lost ability to care for children also increases the burden. In Uganda, more than 2 million or 18% of children are orphans by at least one parent (UWESC, 2005).

Table 1: Ugandan health and living statistics

<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Source</i>
Lifetime births per woman	6.9	2005	Population Reference Bureau 2005
Use of firewood for cooking (%):		2002	Uganda Bureau of Statistics Census Data 2002
Rural:	81.8		
Urban:	91.4		
	22.4		
Mean household size:	4.7	2002	Uganda Bureau of Statistics Census Data 2002
Government budget spent on healthcare (%):	7.6	2007	World Health Statistic
Adult prevalence of HIV/AIDS (15-49 years) (%):	11-17	2006	National Guidance and Empowerment Network, Uganda

Table 2: Ugandan Education statistics

<i>Statistic</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Source</i>
Primary completion rates (% of relevant age group):		2004	World Bank 2007
Male:	61		
Female:	53		
Progression to secondary level (%):	37.8*	2005	World Bank 2007
Repetition rate (%):	13.7*	2005	World Bank 2007
Low income:	6.4*		

* indicates most recent data available within 2 years of year indicated



Education

In 1997 Uganda introduced universal primary education, and for the first time primary education was free. However, students must pay for secondary school fees in addition to exercise books, uniforms, and lunch. For the majority, a secondary education still remains unattainable. The Ugandan education system is modeled after the British educational system, having three levels. Primary school normally begins for children at age 6 and lasts seven years. After passing entrance exams, students move to ordinary level (or “O levels”), which lasts four years. To move to advanced level schooling (“A levels”) and complete the last two years of secondary education, all students must pass exams in five areas: biology, physics, chemistry, English and math. Even for privileged students, passing these five core subjects can be extremely difficult. Completion rates for the primary level are 57% and progression to the secondary level is 37.8% (World Bank Group, 2007). In addition, most rural schools are chronically overcrowded and lack adequate supplies, equipment, books, and drinking water. Few informational and educational resources are provided outside of school. There are not even enough texts for children to take books home to complete homework. Libraries have been used around the world not only as a hub of information, but also to supplement educational needs. In Uganda, however, only three of the 23 public libraries in Uganda are located in the rural communities where they are most needed (Ikoja-Odongo, 2004).

The lack of quality education is especially burdensome for women and girls. While 67% of the population is literate, 58% of women, compared to 77% of men are literate (UNESCO, 2007). Girls are less likely to complete schooling. They account for only 47% of enrollment at the

primary level and 32% total at the secondary level. In a rural setting, many children are unable to complete their education or attend school on a regular basis because their families cannot afford the cost of uniforms and other supplies and/or need their children at home. The problem is particularly acute since many children are frequently taken out of school to guard crops from wild animals. Leaving school for work is particularly true for girls who tend to start work, domestic or off-farm, at earlier ages than boys (UNICEF, 2007). Women bear the burden of most household labor for their family. Most of their time is spent performing routine tasks, preparing meals, maintaining households, childrearing and collecting firewood and other resources. In addition, they work in the fields and are often responsible for earning income to support their children’s schooling. Marriage and early pregnancy also contribute to drop-out rates of young girls.

Outside of school, Ugandan women currently have limited educational and economic opportunities. Focusing on women and girl’s education is significant because it provides resources to improve quality of life for the women and their families. Women also have a tendency to place a higher emphasis than men on family welfare and the needs of children. When women earn income, they invest it in their households. Educating girls has been one of the single most effective ways of reducing poverty in countries (Derbyshire, 2002). According to a UNICEF (2001) report, a “mother’s education has a profound effect on her child’s health and quality of life” (p.10) and educated girls were more likely to “postpone marriage and having children, seek health care...[and] have lower rates of STIs and HIV” (p.11).

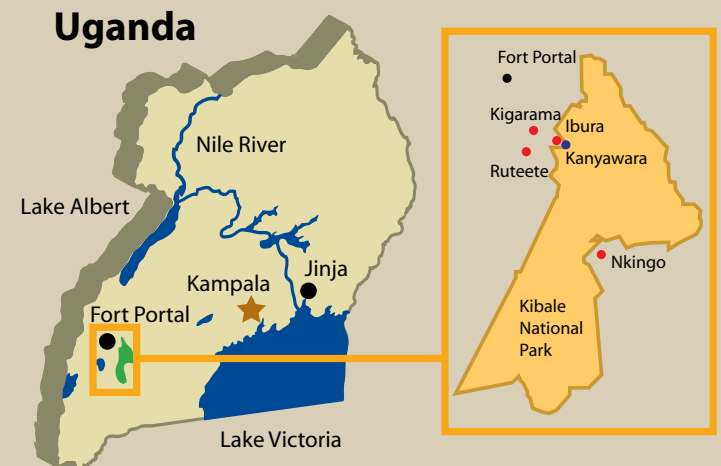


Books Open the World

Books Open the World is a non-religious, non-political organization that supports education for women and children in western Uganda. While working as researchers in Kibale National Park, founders Gosia Arlet and Freerk Molleman saw firsthand the need for educational and literacy resources and began working with communities to make a difference in this region. They founded the Foundation for Children's Education in Uganda in 2004, which specifically focused on the needs of the women and children in rural communities outside Kibale National Park. In 2004, Joel Hartter joined the Foundation. Though our focus has been mainly women and children, we welcome all community members to participate in our activities. Since the beginning, the Foundation's goal has been that of encouraging and promoting literacy and education in these communities. We decided to change the name of the Foundation to Books Open the World in 2007 to reflect our desire to use these rural community libraries as centers for education, opportunity, and empowerment.

Books Open the World seeks to promote and encourage education and opportunity in rural communities for children and women through community libraries, literacy classes, vocational training, support groups, and by supporting all levels of education.

A map of Uganda highlighting the activity sites of Books Open the World surrounding the Kibale National Park.





Community Libraries

Books Open the World works to improve educational opportunities in several ways. First and foremost has been the creation of community libraries. The Foundation uses existing one-room rented store fronts for each library. In March 2005, the first community library was opened in Kanyawara. The following year, three more were opened: the Kigarama, Ruteete, and Nkingo libraries were opened between May and August 2006. A fifth library was established in July 2007 in Kanyambeho. The purpose of these libraries has been to provide resources for women and children and the communities within which they live. Along with providing books, the libraries serve as locations for activities such as literacy classes for women and story time for children. As a rule, the Foundation hires women as librarians in order to increase opportunities for women to earn income. Currently, each library employs one part-time librarian.

Maintaining the libraries requires the full participation of each community each is overseen by a local executive board responsible for receiving and distributing books to the five libraries, purchasing supplies, and managing the day-to-day operations of the library network. Most of the books in the libraries are in English and cover a wide variety of topics and range of reading levels. Children's and pre-teen fiction, textbooks, encyclopedias and dictionaries, National Geographic magazines, and many other books line the shelves in each library. While the majority of the books are in English, Books Open the World also provides books written in Rutoro and Rukiga, as well as those by Ugandan and East African writers. Readership varies widely from small children to adults and abilities range from very limited to advanced proficiency in English, Rutoro, and Rukiga.



Adult Literacy and English Language

The community libraries serve as hubs for the adult language classes. Some of the libraries have proven too small to accommodate the growing number of students and classes have been re-located to neighboring schools or community buildings. Since many women in the community either have not completed their education or have had little opportunity to use written language skills, many cannot read and write in English, let alone in their own language. Often times, they must pay someone to read or write letters or cannot keep their own records of business transactions. Books Open the World provides classes two to three times per week where teachers from the community facilitate classes in Rutoro, Rukiga, and English. While our focus for these courses is women in the community, our doors are always open to all community members.

Pre-school

Support for children's education comes in many forms. A pre-school operates from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m. in Kanyawara for children ages 4-6. Parents are expected to pay a small fee to cover a portion of the costs expended for supplies and meals. The Foundation employs a teacher from the community and subsidizes the remaining school supplies, lunch, and operational costs. Pre-school has positive effects on children's development through early exposure to learning. It also helps mothers by freeing up their time a few hours a day to work in the fields, at the home, or to fulfill other obligations.

Tutoring

Many children drop out of school due to a lack of books and large classroom sizes that limit teacher-student interactions. Most schools do not have enough books for children to take them home with them to read or practice. Chores at the home may also interfere with their attendance. Therefore students in rural communities tend to perform poorer and have a higher propensity to repeat grades or drop out entirely than their counterparts in urban areas. Tutoring programs have been set up to strengthen and sharpen students' skills in a variety of subjects.



Scholarships

Books Open the World currently provides scholarships for orphaned girls and those who are extremely poor to support their secondary education. Some girls are supported at a day-school, Kigarama Talents High School, while a small number are supported at boarding schools in Fort Portal. Freerk and Gosia have visited each of the schools and spoke with the head teacher about the pupils at the school. Many girls in rural communities, especially those who have been orphaned, are forced to drop out of secondary school because they lack the financial resources to pay school fees, because of teenage pregnancy, or both. Books Open the World believes that these girls deserve an education and thus currently (2007) supports 15 girls in secondary schools in Fort Portal and Kigarama.

Women's Groups

Along with literacy classes, Books Open the World works to provide vocational training for women. Sewing classes are offered at the Kibale Women's Club in Kanyawara. A human-powered sewing machine was purchased for the club by Books Open the World in March 2006, and one of the club members was hired to teach the other women this craft. In 2007, Books Open the World bought a second sewing machine for the Kibale Women's Club. This not only provides women with a chance to learn a marketable skill and sew school uniforms for the children, it also gives them a space to come together and form community bonds.



Future Plans

We look forward to the growth and development of Books Open the World's activities in Uganda. Currently, we are working on several new projects while expanding existing ones. Our goals include:

- the formation of additional libraries
- expanding literacy and English classes
- sponsoring more children in secondary schools
- translating books of Ugandan and African writers into local languages
- increasing community involvement and ownership of programs
- supporting conservation and health-related services

How You Can Help

Books Open the World is supported 100% by donations and grants. As our initiatives grow, costs increase. We work diligently to keep operational costs at their minimum. Donations are essential for making our programs available to the communities in western Uganda. Monetary donations support operational costs such as:

- shipping of books and supplies
- salaries for Ugandan teachers (the executive board and staff are unpaid volunteers)
- rental costs for library space
- scholarships to send promising girls to secondary school
- purchasing key books not available through donation, such as those written by East African authors

For more information or to make a donation, please visit www.booksopentheworld.org.

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