



THE MILLET MACHINE PROJECT

-by Parul Sharma

Northern UGANDA- a Background

The rebels have routinely abducted children, serving as sex slaves and fighters, for the last 18 years of civil war in northern Uganda. Thousands of children leave their houses to sleep rough in the major towns, where they feel safer from the threat of abduction by the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA). Thousands of civilians have been killed and more than a million others displaced by the fighting in northern Uganda alone. They live in fear, fall victim to frequent beatings and face the risk of unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases. At least 85% of girls who arrived at the Gulu trauma center for former LRA abductees contracted sexually transmitted diseases during their captivity, according to the United Nations.

The conflict in the north of Uganda has forced 80% of the region's population to flee their villages and seek security in camps for internally displaced people. Families have been stripped of their wealth. Men have lost their livelihoods and with them their dignity. With the rhythms of traditional village life broken, Acholi and Langi elders complain of a surge in alcoholism, sexual promiscuity and rape. Hunger and sheer desperation leave women vulnerable to exploitation. An increasing numbers of young girls are turning to prostitution -- comparatively wealthy mobile army units are their best paying customers. Impoverished parents now marry off their daughters as soon as they reach their early teens, desperate to raise money to buy food and pay school fees.

The same are the conditions in the Agoro camps with a total population of about 7,000 malnourished inhabitants living in penury. The child community in these camps suffers from a number of diseases such as Kwashiorkor, malaria, bronchial infections (pneumonia, TB), skin rashes such as scabies. HIV/AIDS prevalence is of utmost concern in these camps. But all this has within an ambit which has not been able to attract international presence here except for a couple MSF workers for the entire camp, and 2 local IRC youth leaders who are teaching HIV/AIDS issues.

WTE's Presence

This dearth of basic infrastructure and social facilities has raised concern among NGO's such as 'Working to Empower' with the founder Logan Cochrane's vision "to empower those who have been disempowered." WTE with its experience in the region has felt that not only an education based approach will suffice, as abject penury and sexual violence are also issues for prime concerns in the IDP camps areas. I am calling these as issues and not as problems because I know that these so called problems could be solved by bestowing efforts such as small income generating projects which had been initiated ,supported and successfully completed by WTE . One such project is 'The Millet Machine Project,' which has been completed this year .

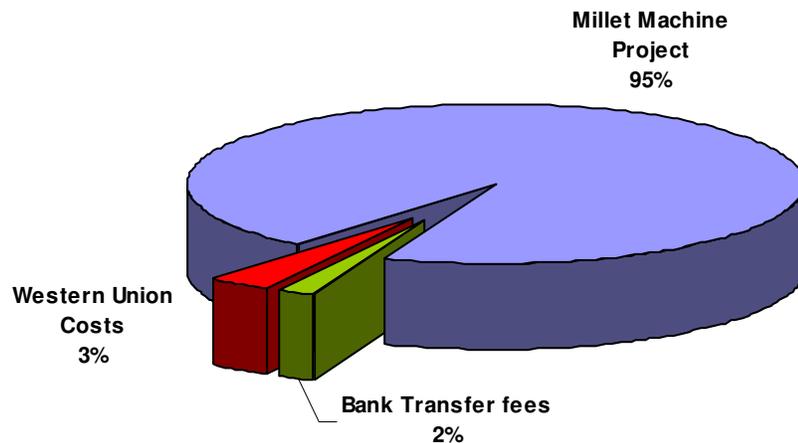
This all started during 2006 when Working To Empower reported that school teachers within the Agoro IDP camp had not been paid in nearly a years time. Because of this many teachers had left the school, leaving the primary school unequipped – in a place where already no secondary school exists.

The millet machine provided by WTE

Just to give an idea of existing educational facilities in IDP camps there is only a primary school with no secondary school, making illiteracy a huge problem. There were 45 teachers initially which reduced to a present of 18. The teachers here have not been compensated for over a year, and many have discontinued to teach in an effort to support their families in the fields. Lack of compensation proves such low motivation and many have given up. Working To Empower felt that illiteracy is one of, if not the biggest obstacle here, and it would be crucial to continue to promote the education within Agoro camp. Also an imperative thought which came to his mind was that teachers who lack motivation can not be good teachers, which is perhaps why the performance levels were so low in the primary school .Grouping these teaching and addressing their concerns, Working To Empower developed and approved their proposal of a millet machine project envisaging that the funds gained from this project will allow the teachers to continue their work in schools and may even influence other teachers to return to the school.



Distribution of Expenses incurred in the project



The project was developed between WTE and its locally based partner organization. A large number of people got employed and became self-dependent after the Millet machine started

working. Also the funds generated brings in 30,000 UGX per month for the teachers group and had motivated the teachers as they are being rewarded with some salary, which will also help the teachers to earn for other members of their families. Above all this brought a motivation for education among the community and thereby awareness is being created among the inhabitants of these camps about the HIV infections and other diseases.



Millet Machine Being installed in the camp

Working To Empower aims to assist local organizations to innovatively solve locally identified problems by applying practical experiences and Working To Empower's knowledge and assistance.

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