

Diary Frouke Maas in Uganda

Frouke left on August 1 to work in Uganda for nine months. She works there as a management advisor at the FUGA organization in Ntungamo town.

FUGA (Fukui Ugandan friendship Association) is a Ugandan NGO that aims to strengthen communities and reduce poverty in rural Uganda. Established in 1999, FUGA is headquartered in Kampala, with an office in Ntungamo District. FUGA works alongside a sister NGO, FUGA-Japan (based in Fukui, Japan) to raise funds for the activities and to develop cross-cultural linkages between communities in Uganda and Japan.

Since the founding, FUGA has worked predominantly in Ntungamo District in Western Uganda and most intensively in Ruhaama County, close to the border with Rwanda. This focused approach has enabled the organization to develop a close relationship with local communities and partner organizations operating in the area.

FUGA aims to deliver its mission to reduce poverty through activities in two inter-related intervention areas: "Education for All" and "Healthy Communities".

Frouke says: Obviously, the job is rather broad and challenging, especially for a period of nine months (some prioritizing required after my arrival). It also is a very interesting and comprehensive placement, I believe! The project has valuable goals, different working areas and important issues to address, in close relationship with the local community. I am looking forward to it very much. Interested in the unknown and happy with the opportunity to contribute to and to live and work in this other culture...

Frouke Maas in Uganda, September 2006

Every VSO placement starts with an in-country training to help you adjust to the new culture and living environment you will spend the coming months in, working as a volunteer overseas. And so did mine, most welcome. How many travel experiences and heavily filled backpacks you might have had, living in a developing country obviously differs from 'passing through'.

I have spent the first nine days in Uganda's capital city, Kampala. Briefings on finance, health and security issues covered first part of the training. The second part aimed to teach me how to ride a motorbike off the road and on main roads in and around Kampala. This also implied avoiding cattle crossing the road and driving through big mud humps. How different that is from the highly cultivated roads in Holland! Consequently, a third component: experiencing life in Kampala, followed automatically.

Nine days in this city, as colorful and hectic as Africa can be, were impressive, intense and enjoyable. The fourth component, language training, will take place soon. The ability to speak the local language (Runyankore), even to a lesser extent, will help me integrate in the local community and fulfill the placement effectively. Moreover it is highly appreciated by the Ugandan people someone takes the effort to speak their language. I'm looking forward to learn it.

I was very curious about where I would end up and could hardly wait to get to my placement, up-country in Ntungamo town. Francis Makuuza, managing director from FUGA joined me together with VSO staff member Daniel and my motorbike. We went all in a pick-up on our way to my new hometown, 5 hours southwestern of Kampala, close to the Rwandan border. The environment is beautiful!

The Fukui Ugandan Friendship Association (FUGA) is the company I am working for during a period of nine months in total. FUGA aims to deliver its mission to reduce poverty in Ruhaama County through activities in two inter-related intervention areas: "Education for All" and "Healthy Communities". They work in close relationship with local communities and partner organizations operating in the area.

Activities are mainly focused on Health and Health related education, operated by means of a Health Centre owned and exploited by FUGA. A second important working field is the support of orphans and vulnerable children who live in the Ruhaama community.

Although VSO prepares all volunteers beforehand that the placements often turn out differently than stated in the placement description, I can quite easily state that mine still focuses at the same goals as anticipated. My tasks are as follows:

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- Advising and assisting management with staff management issues and competence management advice
 - Improve work planning and budgeting and implement planning & control cycle
 - Training staff (proposal writing, budgeting, work planning)
 - Visiting the project sites for monitoring and evaluation
 - Designing new projects and writing funding proposals
 - Preparing reports for and have meetings with donors, the FUGA Board and partners.

Having said this, I must immediately add one comment. I could impossible envisage how these goals would work out in practice. The FUGA Medical Health Centre in Ruhaama is so small and poorly equipped and maintained that I feel real basic aid and short term fundraising are far more important than (financial) management advise to begin with. Next, FUGA appears to have side activities (tree planting, selling wood) to ensure some income, which is a good initiative. However, it also requires management attention, being a scarce source at the Health Centre.

On the other hand the fundraising does tie in closely with effective management and the ability to governance funds raised from the donors. Board meetings have not taken place since March, because no funds are available to pay the board members for the time they would then spend. The question is where to start, fundraising or building management capacity?

I will figure out the best approach in weeks to come, although... I already know the answer...both!