



2008 Autumn Newsletter

"Africa Matters"

A letter from the director

Dear Friends,

"If you had three children and could only afford to send one of them to school, how would you choose?" This is what one of our Village Aid team suggested asking supporters. It certainly is an everyday problem for our partners in Africa, and something people in the UK don't have to consider.

So many of the things we take for granted, and rightly so in the 21st century, families in Africa can't rely on: water, decent food, transport and healthcare. If the credit crunch gets worse, it will be the poor who suffer first, for longer and most deeply. Village Aid has to be there for them.

Next year we will be twenty years old as a charity, and we remain 100% committed to working alongside the poorest people in rural Africa. We've got so much to be proud of - thousands of young people helped into school, farmers supported to double or treble their yields; women and marginalised people given a voice in local politics and decision making for the first time. The facts in the right-hand column puts some figures to our claims. In the five and a half years I've been here we've seen major achievements and new programmes springing up. We know what we do works. It's sustainable, ecologically sound, and vital for the future.

But the challenge remains! Village Aid has to raise more money. We've always been shy about asking for cash from long term supporters, but this year we've launched a comprehensive "Africa Matters" appeal to raise £100,000, and anything (legal!) you can do to help us reach that target will be much appreciated!

If 1000 people could each raise £100 we'd be there. If 100 better off people each gave £1000 we'd be there! If ten corporations each sponsored Village Aid by £10,000 we'd be there!

The sums are not too hard, but convincing people that it's possible is quite tough these days. Jo's article on our upcoming events and initiatives on Page 8 will hopefully inspire your best efforts on our behalf. Phone, email or write in with your pledges or ideas!

We've been given a welcome donation of shares this month. If yours are underperforming and causing you anxiety, why not get rid of the worry altogether and donate them to Village Aid?

I am looking back with huge pride at what Village Aid has been able to do, and know I'm leaving it in safe hands. I'm retiring soon to write the proverbial novel and take on new challenges elsewhere, but will always remain completely committed to Village Aid and its work.

Warm wishes,

Susanne Garnett Executive Director ■

Village Aid is currently working in conjunction with local partners in 267 villages:

Gambia: 30 villages

Ghana: 85 villages

Sierra Leone: 104 villages

Cameroon: 30 villages

Nigeria: 24 villages



YAPAD in Sierra Leone works with 50 youth organisations, who in turn work in 30-50 villages, helping a further 2000 communities.



Sierra Leone

Mustapha Mansaray - A profile

Pujehun lies in the south of Sierra Leone. It borders the Atlantic Ocean on one side, and Liberia on the other. The district is predominantly Muslim, and employment is often in diamond mining, fishing, coffee and cacao plantations. Pujehun is remote and offers few opportunities for young people. There is limited access to land and other natural resources, and young people are easily exploited by people in positions of power. Many prefer to leave this remote part of the country for the urban centres which offer greater potential for employment.



Mustapha Mansaray is from Pujehun, and has 10 years experience of working with local young people to empower themselves. Pujehun was one of the first places in Sierra Leone

to be affected by the war, and its proximity to Liberia made the district a hot-spot for rebel activity. Mustapha Mansaray was recruited in 2006 by Village Aid's partner NGO, the Sierra Leone Youth Empowerment Organisation (SLYEO), and trained as a literacy facilitator to support project activities in his local villages. Mustapha has linked up with the local radio station in Pujehun and runs a programme which provides news and discussions on issues of interest in Mende (the local indigenous language). He invites councillors, politicians and government officials to his programme which gives ordinary people the opportunity to ask them questions directly.

People tune in every week to listen, as well as express their views through the call-in discussions. Recently Mustapha made a request to Village Aid to provide him with a digital recorder so he can record interviews with young people in communities for wider broadcasting. Mustapha is rather quiet and self-effacing. But his broad smile betrays a sharp and observant mind at work and with cool efficiency he makes sure he has something in store for the growing audience of loyal fans each week. Village Aid is supporting this work as it is one of the most effective ways of providing a platform for young people to increase their political voice. ■

www.villageaid.org

You can now access an online shop on the village aid website. Ethical Gift Certificates are a great present for someone who's "got everything", and they also really help our in-country partners.



Gambia

A story of Wali, trained through a Village Aid agriculture programme



The Gunkuru community group were inspired by their agricultural extension worker. They are definitely a community with a bright future, here's what they had to say...

"We are so grateful for our extension worker Wali. We have been working on this garden for more than 10 years but since Wali came our yields have greatly increased. The reason for this was because we didn't have any knowledge or skills. We didn't have anyone competent to show us what to do. That's all changed now thanks to Wali."

Wali has only been working at Gunkuru gardens for three months and it is obvious he has been able to motivate his community into action. The garden is colourful with fruit and vegetables and the women are now able to feed their families with the produce they grow as well as make money from the produce they sell.

The women said "Before Wali came we used to quarrel and fight with each other; all these things have stopped now and the person who has helped us stop is Wali. He has removed the arguments and brought peace amongst us. He taught us how to work on the garden, how to save money and he has given us useful training on seeds and composting."

The women are clearly grateful for the hard work put in by Wali and felt that he encouraged them to work hard and be proud of their garden. "Now we are able to maintain everything ourselves, even the cows can't get in due to our new fence."

The training Wali has received from AVISU is transferred directly to the community. The community wanted to thank AVISU and Village Aid for their support. "We were sleeping before, but now we have woken up because we have someone to motivate us." ■

Kebba Lowe - obituary

Kebba O. Lowe the Director of AVISU (our partner in The Gambia) sadly passed away in August 2008 at the age of 34, in his home country. Kebba has suffered from a protracted illness lasting over two years and was on sick leave for the last 12 months.

Kebba leaves behind his mother, 2 sisters, 2 wives and 2 daughters and will be greatly missed by his family and all those who knew him. Kebba's legacy in the development sector in The Gambia is of hardwork and dedication to duties.

Kebba was a self-made person whose life is an inspiration to many young Gambians who struggle with unemployment and the allure of

emigration. At a very young age Kebba showed enterprise by raising money to attend courses in both the UK (health) and Cameroon (community development). Despite opportunities available to him in both countries he chose to go back to The Gambia where he felt he was most needed to make a difference in the lives of others. ■



Kebba Lowe

Robert Fon engages local students

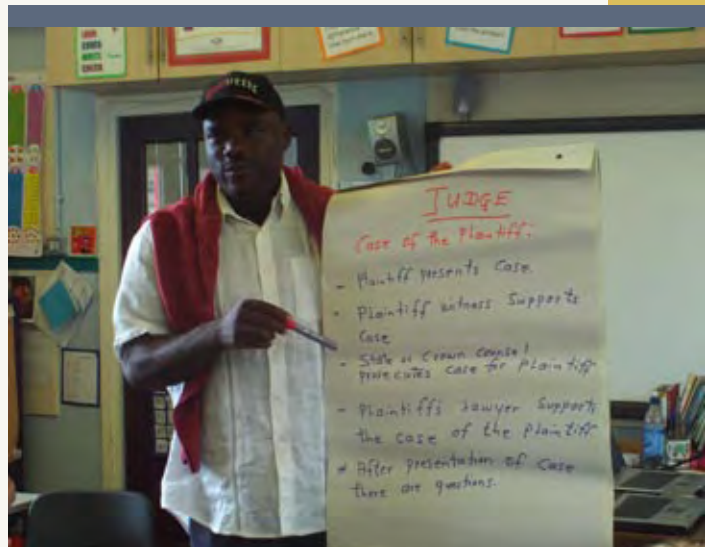
In our annual report we heard the story of Robert Fon, the barrister working as an advisor for MBOSCUA in Cameroon. In July Robert visited Village Aid and gave an inspiring talk at our AGM. He also accompanied Helen to a workshop in Taddington School. After telling the students about one of his cases related to forced marriage, the students acted out the scenes of the following story.

Aisha was 12 years old and enjoying her time in secondary school. She dreamt of becoming a lawyer when she was older. She knew she was lucky that her Uncle Ali supported her by paying all her school fees. Aisha had gone to live with him when she was six years old and he had paid for her all the way through primary school too.

One day, she found out that her 'Uncle Ali' was not related to her at all. It transpired that her parents had followed an African tradition of arranging a marriage for her when she was a baby and that Ali was actually to be her husband. Aisha was devastated—she did not want to marry this old man! She went to her parents, but they did not want to upset Ali since he was wealthy and had helped them in the past. They wanted Aisha to stop shaming them

and accept her marriage and her fate. Aisha couldn't do this and instead ran away to another family member who lived in the city. He introduced her to a lawyer who agreed to take on the case. He asked her how she felt about the situation and she said, "If I have to get married to this man, I will drink poison and die!" Ali was taken to court and accused of attempted forced marriage. Aisha returned to her parents and continued her education in peace.

This is one of the many cases that Robert has dealt with in Cameroon. Forced marriages are now illegal under the age of 15. By supporting Village Aid, you are supporting children like Aisha. ■



Witchcraft

Earlier this year Rashid Bawah visited Village Aid from SIMLI in Northern Ghana and talked to Jo Williams about some of the work that they carry out.

Witchcraft?! Do accusations of witchcraft still exist? Unfortunately they do and it's a serious accusation with dire consequences. Rashid and his colleagues work in areas where traditions are centuries old, and very much practised. He told me the following story.

"A grandson went to his grandmother for a loan to start a small business; the grandmother, having some savings, loaned him some money. After a while, the Grandmother needed her money back to buy seeds for her allotment. She went to her grandson's shop and asked for her money back, which she was refused.

The following day the grandson told the village chiefs that he had had a dream that his grandmother had tried to kill him. The grandmother

was taken to the chief, accused of witchcraft, and based on the result of a beheaded chicken falling forwards or backwards was banished to witch camp.

Witch camp is an encampment in the middle of nowhere and home to 270 "witches" and 15 "wizards". These people have been completely ostracised by their communities, and left to perish.

"Witch camp is in the middle of nowhere and home to 270 'witches' and 15 'wizards'"

Bringing with them all their worldly goods, they have managed to survive, but with your help could survive much better. A gift of chickens would provide a source of income and

food (selling eggs, breeding, selling meat) and give these innocent people a reason to get up and fight back for their human rights.

Rashid visited witch camp; he talked to the people there, ate with them and sang with them. He returned to town and broadcast his conversations on the regional radio station, asking people to phone in and discuss the issue. Since then the incidence of accusations has fallen, but is still widespread, and we need your help – to support Rashid and these men and women this Christmas.

Lobbying and advocacy is a major part of Rashid's role. He lobbies against violence against women, for equal rights in education and against negative traditions such as witchcraft and forced marriages. ■



Nigeria

Village Aid has been working with the Abanbeke Development Association (ADA), in a project which reaches 24 village communities. It provides people with access to credit and land, and also raises awareness of their civil rights, building the necessary confidence to engage with local chiefs and politicians, so that the lives can be improved for the poorest and most marginalised. Village Aid has raised over £30,000 to support this work, with generous donations of £15,000 from the Isle of Man government and £9,600 from the Alan and Nesta Ferguson Trust.

The response from widows and orphans has been overwhelmingly positive, as this is the first time

that their interests have been represented in community decision-making. The group farms established in October 2007 have been a great success, and some land-owners are realising that granting access to land for widows and women's groups contributes greatly to the social and economic development of the whole community. Until now women were rarely able to have their own land. It's early days, there is still a long way to go in terms of changes in traditional practice, but lives are already changing.

Next steps

The Chiefs' council has been asked to allow for 30% women's representation on the community

development and decision-making committee (under consideration), 2 chiefs out of 10 and 6 elders out of 16 elders are already in support of the motion. In September 2008, the Council of Chiefs confirmed a contribution of a large portion of mountain forest land, which in future will be protected as a forest conservation area. ADA intends to manage this land to regenerate forest and to develop non-timber forest products as an income source for women's groups.

With your support, Village Aid can help ADA to achieve these goals. We are seeking major donor support for this project, so if you would like to be a "Project Partner" with a gift of £500 or more, we'd love to hear from you! (Of course any smaller gifts are also gratefully received!) ■



Agnes - the Director of ADA - lobbies a chief (above), and makes a strong point with Josephine (right)



Growing Global!

Village Aid has now extended its educational outreach work thanks to new funding received from DfID for our 'Growing Global!' programme. Targeting rural primary schools in four counties near to our base in Bakewell (Derbyshire, Cheshire, Staffordshire and South Yorkshire), the aim is to engage primary school pupils and their teachers in global issues by bringing the world to their classroom through drama and storytelling.

Based around ideas presented in traditional West African stories, pupils will question why it is important that people's stories are shared around the world. They will be taken on an imaginative journey through a dynamic and engaging piece of participatory theatre-in-education that requires them to consider their place in a global society. By sharing their own stories, and learning those of the people of West Africa traditionally and today, pupils will recognise the similarities and differences in their lives and question the inequalities that exist.



Through Village Aid's partner organisations in Ghana, The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Cameroon and Nigeria, African young people's stories will be collected for use in the drama so that their voice is heard.

Pupils and staff at Taddington Primary School have already been involved in a piece of action research for the 'Growing Global!' programme which explored the ways drama and storytelling can be used to bring in the global curriculum in a small, rural school. ■

Mehreen Jaswal

I have been the Africa Programme Officer for Village Aid since April. My job is partly funded by the Baring Foundation. In November this year we will be holding a conference with all of our partners in Sierra Leone and my role is to organise this conference to ensure it is as efficient and successful as possible.

Since joining Village Aid I have had the opportunity to do some project management, liaising with partners and ensuring their needs are met. I have also done trust fundraising and raised £3,000 from The Rufford Maurice Laing Foundation for our work with ADA in Nigeria.

I recently had the opportunity to visit our partner AVISU in The Gambia to support the induction of the new Director and recruit new project staff. It was fantastic to see the great work being carried out by AVISU and what a difference they have made to the lives of vulnerable people in their community. I am really proud to work for a charity that is making such a difference in the lives of others. ■





Ways you can help

Christmas cards

This year, Village Aid has teamed up with both Card Aid and CharityGreetings.com to provide you with two ways of sending your Christmas wishes.



Buon Natale cards are available in packs of 10 for £3.85 + p&p. Please see enclosed order form.

Inside, the message reads *"With Best wishes for Christmas and the New Year"*.

If you know of a group that may be interested in buying or selling cards, please let us know.

www.charitygreetings.com/villageaid

This is another way of sending greetings at Christmas, and with the large selection, at any time of the year! E-cards cost £1.99 each, with £1 donated directly to Village Aid. If you're going green this year, please use www.charitygreetings.com/villageaid

Buy your christmas presents online

Buying online? Don't forget www.buy.at/villageaid - the shopping portal that gives Village Aid a percentage of your purchase value at no extra cost to you! From Amazon to John Lewis, your purchases can benefit Village Aid!

Or if you're buying flowers online, please use www.charityflowers.co.uk and select Village Aid as your chosen charity. We will receive 15% of the purchase cost at no extra cost to you!

Buy an ethical gift certificate

Give a gift that changes a life – from literacy, to tree planting, to livestock. By giving a certificate, you can be assured that your money will go much further this year. Please see enclosed order form or visit www.villageaid.org/gifts for further information.

Old mobile phones

Got an old phone and charger lying in a drawer? We haven't got a recycling scheme, but a re-use scheme! Many of our facilitators and extension workers jobs would be made much easier if they had a mobile phone. If you have a spare one, and preferably unlocked, please send it to us at the Freepost address and we will pass it on to our partners.

Donate to our Africa Matters appeal

You can do this by filling in the enclosed donation form, or logging onto our website www.africamatters.org.uk and clicking on "donate now".

Forthcoming events



31st October

Charity Auction at the Mackworth Hotel, Derby. Admission £2. With Charles Hanson (from TV's Bargain hunt!). Come along and buy some early Christmas presents.

8th November

Coffee Morning - at Darley Dale Village Hall 10-12am

24th November

Charity Market, - at Bakewell Market. 9am - 2pm. Good quality saleable goods needed!

28th November

Open Afternoon at Village Aid - 12 - 3pm. Come along, bring a friend.

6th - 7th December

Matlock Victorian Market Stall - Volunteers wanted! Come along and support us at our fun stall.

For more information on any of the above please call Jo on 01629 814434 or email jo@villageaid.org