

Message 5. Nov 17-23. Uganda Progress and Kenyan traditions



Standing by dead sacred tree



Agneta and Caleb(in blue) welcoming the cow

This week began with the visit to a very large indigenous tree (over 100 years old) that died recently. I used to enjoy seeing it on my way between Kalenda and Kakamega. Because it had lived so long and provided the shade under which many meetings were held, when it fell of old age, no one cut it up, out of respect for this historic tree. The photo of right shows the cow that walked with one older and one young man all the way from Kalenda, Kabras to Lusui, (south of Kakamega)- equal to more than the distance of the Boston Marathon! It was given as an honor to the uncle by Agneta's three sons. Uncles play an important role in traditional families here.

I am really grateful for the trip Agneta and I took to Nangoma, the Busoga region of Uganda this week. The most expensive part of the journey was getting the Covid Test that allowed us to return into Kenya. The tests are only available in cities with airports, and in western Kenya that means Kisumu and Eldoret only. The specimens have to be sent to Nairobi, so we get the results between 24 and 48 hours later! We formed a team with Apollo Wopicho from Mbale, Uganda who is former clerk of Uganda YM and now development chairman and trustee. We led a two-day workshop in Nangoma, a village between the main Malaba/Kampala road and Lake Victoria. We discovered a new paved road that reached Nangoma from the south. We arrived later than expected due to a tire puncture.

Instead of teaching, we asked lots of questions. First, we asked what were the main concerns of people in Busoga region. Immediately the men wanted to answer, but instead we divided everyone into four groups so we could learn every body's concerns. The four groups were:



Children of Nangoma



Teenagers/ Young Adults of the area

The concerns of the **children** were: support of orphans, health care, lack of nearby secondary schools, and handskills training. The **young Friends** concerns were: low level of schooling available, lack of health care, lack of churches, poor leadership in the churches.



Women of Busoga region



Men of Busoga region.

Concerns of **women** were: lack of church buildings, need for training on income generating projects, and health care facilities. Concerns of **men** were: request a hospital, a secondary school, a technical school, and build churches with keyboards and bibles, plus money to pastors to attend conferences. There was a lot of feedback, especially with the men's requests. That required a lot of outside help.

I asked how many maize seeds they planted in each hole and was told 4 to 10! and extras are pulled up and discarded. She explained how in Kenya and USA only 1 is grown per hole-not throwing away money and seed. Apollo asked when and at what price they sell their bags of maize. He was told they sell them immediately at harvest time at a very low price (half the price of towns nearby), and then later during drought have to buy them back at 4 times the price! They began to see where they were wasting money. .

Apollo, who recently got his master's degree in Natural Resource Management, began asking about what resources they had that could be used to create money. Land? Some have 5-10 acres, one had 20 and Nangoma itself has 100 acres! They agreed they had good soil, rocks, trees, rain, materials for bricks, only lacking sand. Labor and people were plentiful. Capital? They felt they lacked it, but in further questioning discovered they had money- they just did not realize that trees are money, good soil is money, animals and plants are money. They saw they are not as poor as they think- they only think they are because of:

Lack of knowledge-(need training in agriculture, hand skills, etc.)

They lack entrepreneurship (don't use their brains to think of solutions)

Laziness- (not willing to put in their own effort)

Not working together- (envy and fighting others who work hard)

Detractors who prevent improvements.

Late in the afternoon, the women women showed us their extensive plantation of eggplants they had planted (some of which we ate), plus maize and cassava. After the morning session, they'd decided, that instead of selling their maize cheaply, if they could get a small grinding (posho) mill,(which are not available locally!), they could sell it as flour instead to earn a lot more money, and they'd now learned to save some for the drought season.



Cassava and maize



Bright red and purple eggplants

At 4am that night, as we slept in the school, there was extremely strong wind and thunderous downpour of rain for over an hour, causing all to wake up and move if they were to sleep. It was so strong, the buildings shook, and some began praying earnestly. What was God telling us all?

The next morning, they were eager to work on solutions. They appointed a development committee led by a man who'd been making bricks to build a meetinghouse, chose a man who planted the 25 acres of trees by hand, to be secretary, and chose a local woman, our hostess to be treasurer! They are to organize further trainings in agriculture, hand skills, saving and loans and to coordinate the projects of development in the area.

We then asked all pastors to sit up front. Agneta, who just finished at FTC, shared advice on the duties of pastors (not just preaching on a Sunday). It was decided that Joseph Nyongesa will serve as leader of all the pastors -a middle aged man who has been going by bicycle to serve in a distant church. They will try to get one of the three younger ones to go to FTC for further training.



PASTORS OF BUSOGA REGION

Left to Right:

Rachel Mumusana- Nangoma

Joseph Ongoya- Lutulu

Robert Jani- Kimidi

Joseph Nyongesa- Nangoma

Peter Mugoya- Namakhinya

Finally, it was decided to focus on three concerns/projects:

- 1) Build a church at Nangoma (not next to school but closer to land boundary).
- 2) Work on developing some kind of health center/dispensary
- 3) Learn income generating projects (handiwork/ savings and loans)

Meanwhile the local government official offered to meet UYM leaders and spend a couple days walking the boundaries, to see if they can get squatters to pay rent or to move peacefully. Some will gather photos and statistics that will help in grant writing for a medical project and at same time give a room and housing to the nurse we trained at Nangoma school. Others will look for people who can come continue practical trainings in handicraft projects, table banking, etc. We all left Nangoma with joy over a fresh new start at dealing with the poverty of the area.

Yesterday, I travelled to Kisumu, met with FUM staff, visited Manyatta Friends briefly, and on my way back to Kakamega, visited Sarah Litu, the new Vice Presiding Clerk of USFW Kenya.

Today I am preparing to go celebrate Thanksgiving in Kabras with Agneta and others in her local meeting. My namesake here, has been making an enormous cake for the feast.

Thanks for all your support and messages. With much gratitude, Marian