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I am sitting at my desk and typing this greeting while I listen to the old time Christmas carol "Have Yourself a Merry Little Christmas." Not even the pouring rain out there can drench this warm Christmas spirit. And what better way to wind up the year than share with you our early Christmas gift from two of our partners. They have been working on two groundbreaking endeavors to fortify their community development and transformation activities; advocacy for policy formulation and practicing the good old saying "teach a man how to fish." We continue to thank you all for each and every gift and prayer you have given to ensure that the work with our partners continues—because of you 2015 has been an exceptional year. May God continue to bless each one of you and your families.

*"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."*  
Luke 2:14

A MERRY CHRISTMAS and A HAPPY NEW YEAR

## It takes a village to raise a child

By Carol Musoke, Constituency Bridger

"It takes a village to raise a child." Whatever the origins of this saying, one only needs to spend a few days with our partner communities to assume its provenance in many African cultures. For thousands of years this warm culture has survived the changes of time. Not a day goes by without a random stranger stopping in their tracks to reprimand a child carelessly playing by the roadside. Not to mention much later in life, them claiming bragging-rights at that child's graduation party, explaining how their disciplinary act greatly contributed to the child's academic achievement. Many have argued that the absence of orphanages in many African rural communities is due to this belief that the entire village should be mother and father to any orphan within their community. On October 28th Peter Fish and I were privileged to witness this heartwarming community responsibility when over 30 people, including World Renew Partner Kabale Pentacostal Assemblies of God (Kabale PAG) Board representatives, staff, trainers, OVCs, Care-givers, Kabale PAG Church members, Peter Fish, World Renew Staff, and a random selection of people from the community all came to attend the graduation celebration of five of their most vulnerable children. Some of them had just completed a six month apprenticeship program in motorbike mechanics while the others spent nine months in hairdressing.

Since its conception in 2003, Kabale PAG Community Development Department, a World Renew Uganda Partner, has taken care of about



600 OVCs. Since 2009, this program has been supported by Bethany Belflower CRC as part of a Church-to-Church partnership between Bethany and Kabale PAG Central church. The OVC program focuses on improving the quality of lives of OVCs through psychosocial care and support services. It reaches seven churches and communities—Katuna, Kasheregyenyi, Kabale town, Kyanamira, Rwakaraba, Konyo and Bware.

About 2 years ago, Kabale PAG decided to practice "teaching a man how to fish" through an apprenticeship program for their Most Vulnerable Children (MVC). Through the program they hoped to increase the capacity of the children to be agents of positive community transformation. At the celebrations, the five honorees were each given a start-up kit with basic tools—a manual bicycle pump, set of spanners, pliers for the motorbike mechanics, and a set of rollers, trolley, towels, shampoo and other hair products for the hairdresser. Though modest,

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# Our Fight for Alcohol laws in Northern Uganda

## A Story of Transformation

World Renew in partnership with the Diocese of Northern Uganda identified Alcoholism as one of the most pressing issues that have affected livelihoods in a postwar conflict affected area in Acholi region. Using the community mobilization and building approach, the partner community in Wakonye embarked on a drive to influence the key stakeholder to enact a law to address the effects of alcoholism. The story you are about to read is told by Tessa Laing, Justice Coordinator of the Diocese of Northern Uganda.

Blessings to you all

by Tessa Laing  
Justice Coordinator  
Diocese of Northern

*Bishop Jonhson Gakumba leads  
our group's march through  
Gulu to demand alcohol laws.*



During the war, Angee Santa lost a lot. She lost children, family members, and her land. At one point she lost hope, and attempted to kill herself. She and her son turned to alcohol, and became addicted. Drinking compounded her mental health struggles.

I sit with her now as she calmly sorts beans under the shade of her grass roof. It's hard to imagine the drunken chaos she describes. Santa is hard to forget. She loves bright clothing, shiny headscarves and chunky jewelry. She speaks with emphasis. Her legs are swollen, scaly, and almost elephantine due to an unusual medical condition. Sometimes it's hard for her to walk, but her eyes always dance.

Santa is not the only member of our community organizing group with a story about alcohol. Last month, we buried Rose Lam's eldest son. For months he wandered out of reach of his family—drinking and drinking. He failed to take his HIV medication. Rose stayed by his side in the hospital for a week while he died.

Abalo Helen looks after her struggling brother, who regularly steals her money to buy alcohol. He comes home in a drunken rage, yelling and breaking her things. Isaac's mother, Florence's son, Miller's brother, Paul's neighbor—I could go on and on.

Twenty years of violence, displacement, and loss has left so much brokenness here in Gulu. Money-hungry vultures prey on brokenness. Northern Uganda has the highest rate of alcohol consumption in the country, and Uganda has the highest rate in East Africa. There is no regulation.

Alcohol is not only sold in bars, but in every tiny shop selling everything from toothpaste to batteries. Bars are open 24/7. Worst of all, 40% spirits are sold in tiny plastic sachets of 100ml for 20c NZ. The ethanol is imported from Kenya by various Ugandan companies who add flavors and colorful packaging. They are so cheap children buy them and slip them in their pockets to take to school. It doesn't take many to knock you out.

Where is God's Kingdom? Where is God amongst this brokenness? So often this world seems like a Kingdom of capitalism. The king is the company and the "rule of law" is the free market. And yet Jesus teaches us to pray to our Father, "your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."

I love The Message translation of Colossians 1, which tells us that through Jesus' death "all the broken and dislocated pieced of the universe, people and things, animals and atoms, get properly fixed and fit together in vibrant harmonies." While the Kingdom is not fully here yet, sometimes I think we can see God putting things back together. We can see the 'vibrant harmonies' of the Kingdom peeking through.

A couple of years back Santa came to know Jesus. God gave her the reason and the strength to stop drinking. This year she walked into one of our little churches to our group's strategy meeting, ready to join our fight. Our small organizing group, named Wakonye Kenwa, is about finding strategic solutions to address problems facing our community. We want to be part of God's work to put back together just one little broken and dislocated piece of the universe. Specifi-

cally, we wanted laws regulating alcohol, including a ban on plastic alcohol sachets. So we tackled Gulu District Local Government.

Members like Santa walked around our community collecting data and personal stories about the impact of alcohol on people's lives. We submitted a big report to the District Government, and lobbied till they agreed to start writing the law. As it turned out, Government can be a slippery bunch. Keeping the law-making process moving and making sure our major demand (the sachet ban) was included, proved to be the hardest part. So we started collecting signatures for a petition calling for a sachet ban. We made friends with the biggest local radio station, who let us run a six-week series featuring former alcoholics from our group and the wider community. Each week we pushed for the ban on sachets.

It has not been an easy year! Part way through the campaign, Santa spent a week in the mental health wing of the local hospital. Her son, who she thought had left his days of alcohol abuse behind him, got raging drunk again. It triggered her past struggles and caused them to resurface. We visited her in hospital. Her usually spirited eyes were dull, staring blankly. She spoke about haunting voices, and an uncontrollable sorrow. The day before we filmed our short video calling for a ban on sachets, Paul's neighbor died of alcohol poisoning. He spoke about it in the film. When Josephine's hut was burned down by a drunken person, she told me she was thankful that at least the anti-sachet petitions she was collecting were safe from the fire. They were stored in another hut. For me, working

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closely with local Government in Gulu has been like wading through a bureaucratic swamp of incomprehensible head-ache inducing inefficiency.

Our campaign climaxed in a march through the streets of Gulu to present over 10,000 signatures we collected to the District Council. Our very own Bishop Johnson Gakumba, of the Diocese of Northern Uganda, led the march along with other religious and cultural leaders we invited. That day I got to see the members of our group proudly marching through the streets, followed by hundreds of supporters. Santa, only two weeks after returning home from hospital— struggling with her swollen legs— made it all the way carrying her sign. No one chanted louder than Santa. The District Chairman received the petition and publicly declared, as the media's cameras rolled, that the law would be passed by the end of the year.

I believe we are starting to see moments of God's transformation. These are moments where broken, dislocated pieces of our universe are starting to be put right. Gulu's new alcohol law banning sachet alcohol is on its way. Santa does not define herself by the losses of her past, her disability, the drinking, or the demons in her head that still return to haunt her. She is God's person, who marched boldly through the streets of Gulu demanding justice and praying "God, today your will be done."

➤ *Santa at the studio boldly sharing her story, not leaving out a single messy detail.*

➔ *Santa marching through the streets of Gulu.*



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these tools will help the young people start off with simple jobs while they raise money to purchase the more advanced tools.

The celebration was no different from a typical Ugandan graduation ceremony. It kicked off with a typical African Pentecostal praise and worship session followed by a sermon from one of the church deacons. Later there were speeches from a sizable number of peo-

ple, eating, cake, hugs, certificates, and start-up kits for the five honorees: Christine, Keith, Richard, Isaac, and Nicholas.

For me, the highlight was the bible-scripture-loaded speeches from the different people. In general, the honorees were encouraged to treasure the skill they had received, diligently utilize it, strive at improving it, commit to being outstanding role-models to the rest of the OVCs, and above all, always put God first in all their endeavors. On behalf of

the five honorees, Richard encouraged the other OVCs to hold on to the hope that in God all things are possible, they promised to do their best not to "shame" anyone by misusing the opportunity God had given them, and requested everyone in the house to continue praying for them not to fall from the promise they had made. There wasn't a dry eye in the room. My prayer request is that you too, would lift up Christine, Keith, Richard, Isaac, and Nicholas as they begin this new phase of their lives.

