

# Abaydaya Jews of Uganda

## Update from the Namatumba community in Uganda – November 2008

I met with Aharon on Wednesday 12<sup>th</sup> November in Kampala and we discussed his council's ideas for developments in their community. It was a really rewarding discussion for both of us.



First of all, some background that I found out. There are 23 families in the Namatumba community. Three of these have no children and seven of them have no husbands. Aharon's is a typical family. His older sister, Esther is 23, Aharon is 21, then Annat 19, Yonah 16, Ruth 15 and Joel 3. Aharon's mother is alive but his father died two years ago in a road accident.



Aharon pictured in front of one of the new windows

Aharon came to Kampala with a letter, stamped and signed, detailing the expenditure on the windows from the money raised from kippot sales in the UK. I had told him that I would like to see his community's priorities for the money we have raised in Australia. I had told him that the continuing funds are not guaranteed and so the spending should be directed on sustainable projects that can generate some income for the community. The letter he brought to me listed seven ideas that they would try and implement if they could raise more money from kippot sales.

### 1. Agriculture

So, their first aim was to start generating some money for the community by "expanding the agricultural sector". At the moment they grow maize, bananas, sorghum and sweet potatoes – but only enough for them to eat. They have one acre of land that would be ideally suited for pineapples and another half acre for cabbages. He brought me details of how much it would cost to set up and how much income it could generate. I hope this isn't too much information? Like I say, I was intrigued by it all. So, firstly they have to hire some "machinery" – a bull and a plough! This costs around \$30 per acre. Then in the first season they need \$200 of manure – but this will reduce with each season. The pineapple seeds themselves cost 5c per pineapple. He told me that if they plant in rows (which they must with pineapples) they can fit 10,000 pineapples into the acre they have. So for 10,000 pineapples the seeds will cost \$500. They will need to hire some labour and some expertise and all in all the pineapple project will cost around \$1,000 to set up.

The first harvest will be six months after the first planting and is expected to yield 7,000 pineapples. These can be sold at market for around 50c each. So the first harvest will generate around \$3,500. Each seed last for three seasons – one year and then they will need to transplant. So the second harvest will be around 4 months after the



first and should generate 10,000 pineapples and an income of \$5,000. Each harvest from then should generate around \$5,000 – if there is no problem with the growth. I think it's a fantastic investment and I told them to put all the money we have raised towards this project and then to use the profits sensibly towards all the other projects they have planned.

The cabbages can be sold at around 25c each but as they don't need to be planted in rows it's possible to plant twice as many as pineapples in the same space. So the half acre of swampy land they have for cabbages should net them around the same as the pineapples. But I think they should focus on one crop and getting that right before diversifying.

## **2. Adult literacy and education for all**

Out of the 23 families (roughly 180 people) in the community there are only four adults that can read and write. There are around 20 children that can read and write in both English and their local language. They want to buy some chalks, boards, books, pencils and pens and then find a volunteer from somewhere that can teach them the skills to enable them to read and write. I think there would be some willing volunteers from the Jewish community around the world that could integrate themselves in their community for a few weeks at a time. I'm going to write a detailed article and see if there's any response to this.

School and University education is not cheap in Uganda. Primary education is free but secondary schooling costs around \$125 to \$250 per term. There are 3 terms in a school year and 6 years of secondary school and so the costs of completing school (assuming no years are repeated) ranges from \$2,250 to \$4,500. Aharon is one of the first from his community to complete secondary school. He is 21 and had some years



when he was not being schooled as his mother could not afford it. In the past they have bought young calves and reared them to cows and then sold them to pay for Aharon's school fees.

Further education fees are considerably more. A technical college costs around \$650 per term and university fees range from \$1,500 to \$3,000 per term. It's simply not affordable for 99% of the population. No one from Aharon's community has ever had any further education.

## **3. Synagogue completion**

The members of the community are all religious Jews. Not in the same way that religious Jews are in the developed world but they keep Shabbat, eat kosher, go to synagogue as much as possible, partake in all the festivals and are god-fearing. It's actually very easy for them to keep Shabbat holy as there is no power and they simply spend the day sitting around chatting with each other.

Their dreams for their synagogue are to install the glass in the remaining ten windows. We have already helped them fit two windows and they have twelve in total. Each window costs around \$125 to fit – including the frames, panes, cement, labour, sand and transport.



They want to put down a proper cement floor – at the moment it is stones and dirt. This will cost them around \$850.

They would love to have doors on their ark rather than a sheet that hangs over it. They also wish to have book cases for their books and 20 more chairs for their congregation. They currently have ten chairs and three benches and the women generally sit on the floor.

#### **4. Power**

There is no electricity in the village and all their lighting comes from paraffin and kerosene burners. Aharon has seen the wind-up charge camping lanterns that I am trying to bring to Uganda via Enlighten Africa initiative that I have jointly set up ([www.enlightenafrika.org](http://www.enlightenafrika.org)) and has been telling his community about them and they are hoping they can purchase some. We can set up a payment plan so they can buy them over a few months and it shouldn't cost them too much more than their monthly expenditure on fuel. Obviously after a few months the lamp is theirs to keep and then they have no more expense.

#### **5. Any transport means**

Aharon told me that whenever anyone from his community needs to purchase something they must go to the closest town. It's too far to walk and they have to spend a couple of dollars on public transport each time. They think that a couple of bicycles would be a great addition as they would be able to ride to town on these for free.



#### **6. Water**

At the moment the families all pay \$1 a month to the government to allow them to use a government bore hole just outside their community. There are hundreds of families all using this bore hole and often the queues are very long and it can take all day simply to fetch a jerry can of water. \$1 a month may not sound much but between the 23 families this is around \$275 per year.

The community think that if they can dig their own bore hole, not only will they save this \$275 per year and a considerable amount of time, but they can also charge out their bore hole to other families at a competitive rate of, say, 90c per month. Aharon believes they could rent out

it's use to around 50 families bringing them income of \$540 per year and therefore a net turnaround of \$815 annually.

The cost of digging a bore hole in the Namatumba community would be around \$2,000.

## **7. Health**

### **Toilets**

The health of the community is not good. They do not have good hygiene and many people get sick and some die of their illnesses. None of the families have proper pit toilets. They simply have a separate building which they use. They have tried to dig a pit toilet but they always hit stone and cannot dig the appropriate depth.

They want to install a community pit toilet in the vicinity of the synagogue. The cost of this was broken down by Aharon and explained to me as follows:

\$2 per foot to hire and expert to dig the pit. They need 25 feet so the digging costs are \$50.

The bricks are 5c each and they will need around 2,000 costing \$100.

They will need four bags of cement costing \$18 per bag, 6 iron sheets at \$13 each, 12 ventilators and two pipes.

The grand total for the labour and parts is around \$500.

### **Malaria**

Malaria is common and is a major killer in this area of the world. Most of the mosquitoes that carry the disease are the ones that come out during the night (10pm to 4am) and so simply using a mosquito net is the easiest way of preventing contracting and the spreading of the disease. Impregnated mosquito nets cost around \$5. Only a few families have nets as they generally don't even understand their purpose. Three nets per family would cost \$345.

### **Health care unit**

A long term goal for the community is to have a health care unit or clinic in their community. This is way off however as it would not only need investment in the building and the purchasing of drugs but it would also need a qualified practitioner. This would mean someone from the community going to further education and qualifying and then coming back to live and work in the community. At the moment they have to travel 45 minutes by road to reach the nearest clinic. This is often very difficult with the very sick – the condition they are normally in before they make the decision to go to get some treatment (often very expensive so put off as the last option)

Overall, the plans they have are well thought out and sensible ones. They have ideas to develop the community in sustainable ways and not simply by receiving handouts. If the pineapple project is successful and they are able to manage its profits appropriately then some the other projects should be attainable. I have asked Aharon to keep me informed of the progress –

although he had his camera phone stolen and now has to pay for a photographer to come, and then pay to scan the photos and email them to me so I am looking for an old mobile phone that I can give to him. Unfortunately, phones are very expensive to buy here so finding one from overseas is much more feasible.

The school fees are by far and away the highest cost that Aharon's community face. I'm still not sure why the government is unable to provide free secondary schooling for all – they do have some free schools but they are so oversubscribed that it's usually over 150 pupils per teacher. The private schools have a much better ratio (although far from perfect) of around 70 pupils per teacher. The vast majority of the Namatumba community complete primary school and cannot afford to go to secondary school and so their education finishes at 12 years old. The cost of putting a child through secondary school is around \$50 per month and is simply not affordable for the vast majority of the population. The kippot that the community makes are potentially a way of generating income for school fees. 100 kippot can be posted from Kampala to almost anywhere in the world for around \$50 and if we can find barmitzvahs or even weddings that would like to have these for their guests at a price of \$10-\$15 per kippot then we can raise some considerable funds. One barmitzvah or wedding (with 100 kippot) per month would raise around \$1,000 to \$1,500 which could put 20-30 children through secondary school. I'm thinking about



the feasibility of this and if the demand is there from the Diaspora to make the link between kippot and a school fee fund? Do you have any thoughts on this?

I thought you'd want to know how much your contribution has helped these 23 families. Without your generous purchase/donation the pineapple project would not have been able to get off the ground.

I would like to look into setting up a website for the kippot barmitzvah/wedding to school fee idea. It could easily be marketed world wide and I'm sure we could find one a month across the entire Diaspora. It would just need the word to spread – not such a hard thing for us Jews! Any ideas or feedback on this or any thing else I've mentioned would be greatly appreciated.

Take care, hope to hear from you soon.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Adam". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Adam