

DAY CARE CENTRE UGANDA

The Acholi Quarter is a slum district in Uganda's capital, Kampala. A Ugandan NGO, Meeting Point International, has been working here for many years, helping to improve the living conditions of the population and re-establishing a supportive community fabric. On the initiative of Meeting Point International, a centre was opened in the slum in 2004 for the care and education of 40 children, aged between 2 and 6 years: the Day Care Centre. The aim was to respond to a need expressed by several mothers who were concerned about leaving their young children largely unattended for the whole day.

Context

The Acholi Quarter is a slum in Kampala, the capital of Uganda, home to some 700 families. They are for the most part members of the Acholi tribe from the northern regions of the country who have fled to Kampala to escape the highly insecure situation created by the actions of the rebels of the Lord's Resistance Army. Their homes generally consist of mud huts with roofs of sheet metal, rags or straw; in the entire district, there are only two taps supplying water and no sewage system.

The households are often single-parent families and are very large, because in many cases children who have lost both parents are taken in by other members of their clan (the extended family); there is a high incidence of HIV/AIDS infection among adults and a very high infant mortality rate. The main source of livelihood for the slum residents is provided by work in the nearby quarry. The work essentially consists in breaking up large rocks to obtain gravel for use in construction, with an average daily earning of about 1,000 Ugandan shillings, equivalent to less than 0.50 euros. Very few families in the slum can afford to send their children to school, and for many youngsters, distance adoption (sponsorship) is their only chance of gaining admission to studies and escaping from the slum. Many children instead contribute to the family income by doing casual work, or they carry out the daily household chores while their parents are at work. Those pre-school age children not taken by their mothers to the quarry are left in the care of older siblings or simply to the collective care of the village.

Centre

The Day Care Centre was initially set up in a room provided by the local authority, and was under the responsibility of a qualified teacher.

During the year, however, it became apparent that:

- the number of children from the district for whom attendance at the Day Care Centre was requested or considered necessary was over 80;
- there were in addition 20 school-age children awaiting school sponsorship through distance adoption, for whom attendance at the Day Care Centre was clearly preferable to a state of almost total abandonment during daytime hours.

So, in January 2006, following awareness campaigning and fund-raising activities, work started on building new premises. The Day Care Centre - in collaboration with YES and the Lugagnano Committee for Kampala - successfully constructed a more salubrious covered area suited to educational activities, on land made available by the local council.

The structure is provided with the equipment necessary for school activities: desks, benches, blackboards, books and educational and teaching materials. The children are to be provided with all material used in the activities, and Day Care Centre uniform.

Activities

The activities, which are recreational and expressive in nature and broadly graded in line with the different age groups, take place from 8.00 to 13.00. Efforts to improve the quality of the service offered comprise: further differentiating the activities according to the age groups and needs of the children enrolled; introducing the use of English (the children speak only the Acholi language); and developing the pre-writing and pre-reading activities normally conducted in nursery school. The teachers attend training courses and are guided in the planning and assessment of the activities.