



## True Grasses report 2013-2014

### **Note from Founders & Team Leaders**

Together we brought so many conversations and ideas into reality this year. As you'll see in the next few pages, we accomplished a great deal with our modest budget. Even with all of the numbers and photos, it is still hard to grasp what is happening on the ground. But behind each program, each number, each photo is the reality of life in East Africa. Real problems. Real solutions. Real failures. Real relationships. Real people.

We have participated in burials, marriages, births. We ate meals deep in the bush and slept on dirt floors. We sat in hospitals and drank deeply from fresh-dug wells. So many things couldn't be communicated in these pages. Late night conversations over hot cups of tea (chai) don't exactly fit into an annual report, yet it is the true soul of True Grasses. Go ahead and read through the report and see the pictures. But if you're wondering if your contribution really made a difference, you may need to come and see for yourself where sacrifice and service come together in the lives of many. One thing seems certain to us, your contribution made a difference to you. You gave when you weren't required. You freed yourself from the shackles of consumerism enough to think of another. And for that, we are thankful.

From the team leaders, thanks.

Simon & Anna Ruth Nambafu

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## INTRODUCTION

True Grasses (TG) is an indigenous non-profit organization founded in 2013 to help rural communities of extreme poverty in Uganda and Tanzania. TG focuses on education and self-sustaining community micro credit programs. It's now two years since we started operating in East Africa; we started work in Uganda in 2013 and Tanzania in 2014. With the program areas of Micro Credit and Education happening at all fronts. It has been a year in which we have learned so much through the challenges of things not going the way expected and the amazing challenges that brought 'fruit'. We started projects and saw them through and we had to see some come to an end for various reasons. We are growing our presence in East Africa, and we have just started serious partnerships in Tanzania and we are excited about our future! We conducted a meeting in April 2014, where we decided with all that we learned in the past year, to focus mainly on education and micro credit projects and emphasizing on Tanzania and with that we also agreed that we shall establish True Grasses headquarters in Tanzania as well. With this decision, True Grasses Tanzania started operating in August 2014 in Moshi and has managed to acquire land in Kisarawe, Dar where we intend to build a school.

### **So why do we love this work?**

We love to see, girls' educated, water wells drilled and people living in areas of extreme poverty empowered to become self reliant through job creation. We are enthusiastic about many more positive initiatives that help these communities tackle daily challenges of extreme poverty. We are changed people, having learned that our unsustainable methods of charity must be replaced with compassionate and empowering community-building as a basic strategy. In our partnerships with local communities, we have been reminded that "it is more blessed to give than to receive," a sustainable approach that has been valid since the days Jesus said these words. We are seeing this truth in villages that embrace giving to one another and we see this truth in our servant-hearts, demonstrating it on a daily basis. The most encouraging part is that there are many more Africans lining up to serve in similar ways as we prepare to grow our creative and culturally-appropriate community development projects. It is fulfilling to be a part of it all.

## MICRO CREDIT PROJECTS

In 2011, True Grasses began a partnership with Community Builders Group (Canada) creating the Pay it Forward (pif) based micro grants program in East Africa. Over 20 beneficiaries from communities of extreme poverty have been accepted into the program. The beneficiaries have an opportunity to engage in various businesses as their quest to find natural pathways to wellness and self-sufficiency. True Grasses values respect for all persons, sustainability, open learning and emergence in addressing the systemic issues of poverty.



Micro Credit Project has been working in six districts this year. The work primarily revolved around piggery, poultry farming, and jewelry/bags from paper beads, though various other projects have been implemented and supported, such as other persons making crafts. Lessons have been learnt

when seeing some projects come to an end and at the same time we've seen several noticeable signs of Pif's impact, such as an increase in family incomes, families are now taking their children to school, living conditions are improving and increase in numbers of





people wanting to join the program, are encouraging reminders that equipping them with business grants and encouraging women is at the heart of community empowerment.

Many people have purchased True Grasses crafts made by lame, widowed, youths and HIV/AIDS parents. Sales from these crafts give the Micro Credit Project program a strong sense of sustainability. This project has been one of

the highlights as it has shown an overall improvement in people's lives as well as a project that is sustainable and that gives the buyer not just what they want but a sense of being part!

True Grasses has learned a lot through the year and believes in giving a micro credit loans in kind rather than physical money to the beneficiaries, e.g. we give pigs and chickens, rather than money itself, as this was at times spent on personal demands or used elsewhere and not used for the project. In Uganda, we distributed around 8 piglets to our first group of beneficiary's and some were able to pay forward to others. With chicken farming, this has progressed slowly due to the market value of the chickens and only two families have benefited from this. Farming will be our 2015 focus, since in 2014 many poor families approached us asking for help in farming (e.g. seeds, animals or tools).



### **Bamboo Shoots Guesthouse**

The Bamboo shoots bed and breakfast was our Mbale, Uganda headquarters, being so much more than a place to lay your head or an office for True Grasses! Unfortunately, we were forced to close it down due to reasons outside our control.



But during the time it was open, the guest house provided, a wide selection of food, a coffee shop, tourist information, a library, and souvenir shopping. Crafts continued to be the largest revenue producer. It provided an organizational model that is flexible in approaching new markets while maintaining identity around its core competencies. And as the guesthouse played to these advantages, it also models appropriate, ethical business practices to the community in which it operates. Besides it being a micro credit project, reinvesting its income back into other projects.

This was our biggest project and most profitable community run project. We were able to start this project from scratch, though the actual building was there, it needed lots of renovation, just like the compound and throughout the weeks we were able to make the whole compound look like a real home. A camping area and vegetable garden were added some time later. We had to do lots of research and marketing for the guest house. We had to write down guidelines, work contracts, food menus and trained the local staff and we saw staff change and grow. We also had to go through the hardships of finding the right people but still they were unfaithful at the work. Guest house property was mismanaged and funds embezzled. We restructured, hired and rehired new management. Despite all these challenges clients kept coming in through adverts and passer by's. We saw the place pick up to becoming one of the top B&B's in Mbale town. All in all, it was a great project that took a lot on us, but also gave a lot back to the community. We decided to close down the guest house after the owner of the property wanted her house back. Another lesson learnt, in some countries everything is possible. Though we see the letting go of the guesthouse as a loss, we do not see the project as a loss, as it

has given us more in knowledge and wisdom than the funds invested. And at the end we need to remember however much we hate to see losses, we need to move forward with what we've gained.



### EDUCATION - Soroti Youth skilling Centre'

Soroti lies in the North Eastern part of Uganda neighboring Karamoja and war torn Northern Uganda. It has harbored thousands of internally displaced people. Because of this insurgency, True Grasses

in partnership with OM Switzerland runs a skilling project that empowers the youth with technical vocational education in carpentry and joinery skills. This training enhances their capacity to respond to meaning full lives. Trained youth and currently produces quality standard furniture for the residents of Soroti town as a way of sustainability and the profits are being ploughed back into the expansion of the project.



### TRUE GRASSES NEW LOOK

Since True Grasses focuses on Tanzania as well, this also meant changing our name from True Grasses Uganda, to solely True Grasses and this has been implemented into most of our communications and profile. The website [www.truegrasses.org](http://www.truegrasses.org) has a new look... In response to comments on the content and usability of our website we have made some significant changes. You'll find more detail, hopefully in a manner easier to find and use. We're always striving to 'get it right' with better ways of giving you the information you need on the work that we do. We also try to do this without unnecessary administrative costs. As a result, we now work with two volunteer webmasters based in Austria and the Netherlands and are working with templates and input from volunteers. Ours may not be the 'flashiest' or most hi-tech site you've seen and there are some limitations to what we can do, but we are proud of what's been achieved.

When exchanging information with donors, local governments, or local communities, communication is key. Year 2013 & 2014, we began first Phase of a new communications strategy. We launched the organizational website, partner-organization newsletters and Facebook Page with our main goal to give you a clear idea of what we do here in Tanzania and Uganda—our goals, achievements and challenges. We also want to provide a transparent lens into how we manage and use our donor contributions. It's our hope that you'll find our new website does all that. Please e-mail comments on our new 'look and feel' to us. Visit our website for more information. [www.truegrasses.org](http://www.truegrasses.org) / [www.truegrasses-safaris.com](http://www.truegrasses-safaris.com) / [www.facebook.com/truegrasses](http://www.facebook.com/truegrasses)

### LOOKING FORWARD

We desire for others to live healthy, full, long, and productive lives and are willing to make some personal sacrifices to make this happen. We hope that his report it is a window into our desire: to Join God's work by deeply, personally impacting the lives of families in East Africa. We also hope it's clear that we are working hard, community life is becoming better, and your investment has been well-managed.

This year we have worked to improve ourselves, increase our workload, and be more effective in the field. The year ahead is going to be big one. We are ready for the challenge! Here are a few highlights we are looking forward to year 2015:

- The Micro Credit Project will begin a 5-year plan to start a sustainable community income generation project through doing farming that will provide more jobs and incomes to even more communities.
- True Grasses will start piloting a new education program aimed at helping orphaned, abused young girls and teenage moms to stay in school. The result is better options for the girl's' future. True Grasses will focus on fundraising for the New secondary School project for the girls' in Tanzania. We will progress slowly so as to incorporate lessons learned and not grow beyond our means. (Please see our Pwani Hope School brochure for more information).
- We will dig to provide "Clean drinking water." The Water Source will have an integrated model of drilling and education. A Water Source will help the local community to discuss additional life changes necessary for increased sanitation. In addition to provision of safe water source, True Grasses will help communities establish a savings system for future repairs needed for the water pump.



This plan, all on one piece of land, comes with significant challenges. We need to continue with our own staff development. We need more training, and we need to train others. We need to make sure more people know about True Grasses. An ambitious work plan and budget simply cannot happen without committed, energetic investors like you.

If you are reading this, then we are making some assumptions about you. You want to make a big impact on our world. You desire for others to live healthy, full, long, and productive lives. You are willing to make some personal sacrifices to make this happen. We share those same desires. We want to use every resource available to us in a positive, helpful way in East Africa. You can have a big impact on us in a variety of ways. First, make a monthly financial commitment. We'll commit to updating you with what is happening over the year. Second, tell others about us by sending them to our website or giving them this report.

By committing to do something today, you will be changed. We truly believe that taking this effort will catalyze a change in your life. It may seem insignificant, but you'll notice when a report about Africa comes on the news, you will pray differently. You'll reconsider a few of your purchases as you'll see more fulfillments in helping someone else. As crazy as it sounds, by helping someone else, you'll find yourself encouraged as well.

## CONCLUSION

So, as we look forward to expanding our services to Tanzanian villages, I want to invite and challenge you to join us. We need people who believe in our approach and will entrust and empower us to serve more people here in Tanzania. We are looking for more business partners, more foundations, and more monthly donors willing to share resources in meaningful, sustainable and empowering ways. As you consider joining us in this partnership, know that we always have an open invitation for you to visit our work first hand. We welcome the idea of you sharing a personal, life-changing experience as we introduce you to important people who are leading important initiatives in East Africa. We welcome you to join with us as we serve in Tanzania.

The milestones we celebrate would not be possible without the generous support of our sponsors and donors. Our thanks to each and every one!