

WEEK 1: WEDNESDAY MAY 14TH, 2014 – TUESDAY MAY 20TH, 2014

I began my adventure to Uganda early in the morning on Wednesday the 14th of May arriving into Entebbe just before midnight filled with anticipation. Over the next six weeks I will be spending time in Kampala, Masindi, Hoima, and Buliisa researching primary education in rural Uganda. I am partaking in an internship with Link Community Development International (LCDI) to assess the quality and accessibility of primary education in rural Ugandan schools and the effectiveness of the LCDI programmes and initiatives within their sponsored schools. Some of the factors that I will be looking at whilst visiting the primary schools include:

- the rates of teacher and pupil absenteeism
- the academic performance of the children, with a primary focus on literacy
- the overall environment of the school and whether it is conducive to learning
- whether there are gender disparities
- how disciplinary issues are resolved
- and the preparedness and engagement of teachers with their students

I arrived into Entebbe late Wednesday evening. The rush of warm air greeted me as I stepped off the plane and I felt happy to be back on African soil. The sky was filled with the city lights, but there remained a calmness as we drove past Lake Victoria, and as soon as I reached Kampala I noticed that no matter the hour Kampala remained awake and lively!

I spent Thursday morning at the LCDI Kampala office preparing for an afternoon of meetings with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE). Upon attending the meetings at the MoE and FAWE I had insight into how education was implemented nationally from the ministry official's outline of the primary education system in Uganda. Furthermore, my meeting with the representatives at FAWE illustrated the challenges faced by girl pupils and how the organisation is implementing national programmes to correct the gender equality imbalance in Ugandan schools.

A constant theme that was apparent in both of the meetings was the overwhelming amount of challenges primary aged children face in Uganda. In the rural areas of Uganda education still holds little value amongst agrarian and pastoralist communities. The children are needed to tend to the crops and look after the herds of animals. This at times causes young children to be frequently on the move and therefore regularly changing schools, making it difficult for the child to have consistency in their educational pursuits.



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Furthermore, in these communities it is especially difficult for young girls to thrive at school because there are expectations of completing daily domestic tasks and assisting their families on weekly market days. Additionally, some young girls are also susceptible to early marriages and unexpected pregnancies, which contribute to the drop out rates amongst young girls. However, the overwhelming issue for both primary aged girls and boys seems to be the lack of parental support concerning education and the unrealised value of education in improving a child's lifestyle and future opportunities.

The meetings with the MoE and FAWA left me wondering about the experiences I would have whilst visiting rural Ugandan primary schools. Filled with anticipation I left Kampala on Monday after a day at the LCDI Kampala office and spent the evening travelling to Masindi where I will be based for the next four weeks. The drive from Kampala to Masindi was breath taking. Once we left the city we were enveloped by rural countryside and the dark green hew of the dense forests.

Occasionally we would pass by small villages where Ugandans would be selling fresh fruit and vegetables. Mangos and pineapple are currently in season so there was a sweet smell in the air as we drove past the roadside stalls. As the evening turned to night the stars and bolts of lightening lit up the sky; yet, the night remained silent apart from the sounds of the insects. I kept waiting to hear the crash of thunder in the distance, but it never came. After four hours of driving we reached Masindi, which is a relatively small town inhabited by very welcoming and friendly people.

I will reside in Masindi and travel to schools in neighbouring districts, Hoima and Buliisa, as well as visiting primary schools in the local Masindi district. After my journey on Monday, I spent Tuesday at the LCDI office in Masindi, which is part of the district education office for the Masindi region, and I received a warm welcome from the Head Inspector of Masindi schools as well as the Director of Education for Masindi and I am thoroughly looking forward to the week ahead where I will be visiting a variety of schools in Masindi including government schools, a private school, an all girls school, as well as a school for disabled children.