

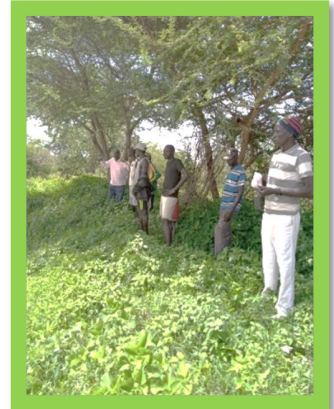
EXPOSURE TRIPS and their IMPACTS **Holy Trinity Peace Village** **Kuron**

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Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.
Philippians 2: 3-4

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As part of the overall programming of Holy Trinity Peace Village Kuron, select individuals from the surrounding areas are invited to go on “Exposure Trips” to experience other cultures, countries, methods and to widen the mind of the Toposa. Peace Building Coordinator, Eliah Lokii, took a group of six Toposa people from Kuron area to a Peace and Cultural Exchange Event in Lodwar, Kenya. The Agricultural Department Head, Mr. Juma Chelimo visited a successful Karamojong farmer in northern Uganda also with six participants. Livelihoods Department Head, Mr. Emmanuel Okori and Madam Chandia Prisca took a small group of Bonga teenage girls to Uganda to visit another Bonga Girls.



The “exposure experiences” are really divided into three categories: Peace, Agricultural, and Education. Seven HTPVK staff have been sent overseas to be trained in various fields including: Agriculture, Mechanics, Peace, Construction and Education. Not all of these are still working with HTPVK, but their training and experiences have led them to better jobs than they would normally be offered.

EDUCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIPS

What does it mean to a person who is lucky enough to be chosen to go overseas and study for a long or short time? Dozens of people have been sponsored by HTPVK to schools in Kenya and Uganda. Others have been sponsored for short term trainings in Europe. Still others have received top notch training right in South Sudan at elite schools.

When these Toposa return, what challenges do they face? What are they thinking? Through interviews of over a dozen of these candidates, the following generalities emerge:

- Upon returning, almost all the candidates wanted to support family members to attend school. Traditional Toposa thinking did not support systemic education. However, those who return have seen the need and the benefits.



Figure 1 Mr. Amvelio graduates from CHTI in Wau as a nurse.

Nurse Amvelio Lootuk: *“In 2022, I graduated as a Registered Nurse. Now, I have returned to Holy Trinity Peace Village - Kuron God took me from poverty and gave me all those opportunities. We must all help to build this country into a united and peaceful place.”*

- Those who return are more time conscious, worldlier, more understanding of how things work and how connected things are. These do not want to waste time but are keen to learn more. They do feel a deep sense of trying to bring their people out of the ignorance in which they live. This is not to say they devalue their cultural roots, which are still very strong in all of them. It is only to say that in this modern, fast changing world,

they want to help their people have a better life. Especially, the violence of cattle raids and the early child marriages they would like to see end.

Ms. Mary Natabo spent several years studying in Uganda. *“What I learned is that education is important. Now that I have been to school, I can feel that I am different. I think differently. I am Toposa but somehow, I am different. I want my children to go to school. I won’t keep them home to work. I won’t marry my girls at an early year.”*

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Primary School graduate from Uganda schools: *“I was outside studying. This has made me want more and more knowledge. I can use that to improve my family. I was lucky. My parents approved me to study. Now I am trying to drag others along.”* (i.e. meaning to get them into school)

Chief’s Daughter who is outside Toposa land in Secondary: *“ When I come home, everyone asks me how I did this? Especially the girls want to know so much. I talk with them. Their parents prevent them. But if they are together they have more influence. Slowly things will change.”*

AGRICULTURE EXPOSURE VISITS

Part of the Livelihoods and Agricultural programs at HTPVK, sometimes include a component of sharing information with neighboring countries. The first exposure trip for agriculture in recent years was done in June.2022. The previous one was in January.2015 led by Bishop Taban Paride to Kisumu District, Kenya.



Figure 2 Toposa learn how oxen plow the fields in Uganda.

Mr. Losikke Angelo from Mawieyapeta Village: *What I saw was that there is a love of the people for farming. They really do it well.*

Mr. Kere Napuyo: *“When I get back to Kuron I want to get my own pair of oxen since I have now seen that this is the reality.”*

Mr. Lopem Joseph: *“ I want to build an iron sheet house like this in Kuron. Even with cement. I like that type of house. “*

Mr. Losiikee Angelo: *“Now that I have seen children are the ones working. We have been wasting our time not using our children. Now I want the whole family to work in agriculture.”*

Mr. Juma Chelimo, Agriculture Officer, arranged the exposure trips to Uganda to the farm of Mr. Romano Longole. There were six participants from four different villages. All of them were men this time. They witnessed oxen plowing, fish ponds, plantation of trees, fruits, and vegetable gardens. There was also animal raising turkeys, chickens . Lots of discussion about methods, technologies, and how to plan and operate.

Toposa Pastoralist after exposure in Uganda: *“One thing that really impressed*

me was that the men were doing the cultivating while the women were home doing the housework. These men using animals was something I didn’t believe until I saw it.”

Mr. Lino Comment: *I want to be like Mr. Romano in the first place. Because I want to own all those things. I am very interested in all these things. I want to try them. I want to experiment. This trip motivates me.*



Toposa elder from exposure trip, *"I was also very impressed that during my time there, I never saw one gun. Those people are living in peace. We Toposa carry guns because we are so violent and we need protection. I would like to live in a place that has no guns."*

Joseph: *"Before I went to Uganda I didn't really believe in cows plowing. There I saw it and I was surprised. Can this be true? I asked myself. I spoke with many of them there. They said, Yes, you can do it. So I want to try. I want my kids to try. We Toposa have to get better."*

PEACE BUILDING EXPOSURE VISITS

Since 2017, there has been only one Exposure Trip through the Peace Department of HTPVK. Peace Building Coordinator, Eliah Lokii, took a group of Toposa people from Kuron area to a Peace and Cultural Exchange Event

Composite comments from ladies who went to Lodwar, Kenya, *Those people in Kenya have really worked to become developed. They have things we don't have. We Toposa have to try to do that too.*

in Lodwar, Kenya. The March.2022 event was hosted by the Kenyan Cultural Ministry. The participants spent several days participating in presentations, speeches,

cultural exchanges such as dance and song, eating together and sharing stories from their traditions.

Upon returning, most people first mention the roads in Kenya and Uganda. They laud how great they were and how there were no holes. *"... How smooth the trip was and how fast. How relaxing it was to ride in the vehicle..."*



The next thing usually mentioned are the structures and buildings which these isolated rural Toposa men have never seen before. The most common comments are: *"How different structures are and how big. I couldn't believe that a building could be this big."*

The Toposa women will mention clothes which they have seen others wearing. Those who have traveled far from their traditional places are now seen in Kuron area wearing rather fashionable clothes instead of the traditional skins, cloths, and wraps.

"We women share about the clothes and jewelry because this is very interesting to us. Our men at first will criticize our new dress but after some time they smile and say that we look beautiful."

Madam Mary Lotao: *what I saw in Kenya was so good. The roads, the stores, the food, the clothes and, well, just about everything was so much better than what we have here. I also was impressed with how peaceful it was. I did not see any guns. I did not see any fights. The people were very kind to us. That tells me with development we can have peace here too.*



“We see that these Kenyans are at peace and that peace leads to development and that development leads to a richer and better life. We want that too.”

BONGA GIRLS EXPOSURE VISIT

Perhaps one of the more entertaining and interesting Exposure trips to Uganda through Kenya occurred with a group of eight young Toposa girls with a matron from Gumariang village in the second week of November.2022. Most of these teenagers had never been out of the Kuron area and only a few had been to Kapoeta. This trip included stops in Narus, Lokichogio, and then on to Uganda where they were hosted by the BONGA Girls in that area. They were exposed to craft making, weaving, gardening, and small business development. There was also a session for Savings Groups.



These girls were a bit overwhelmed with the abundant new information. Almost everything they encountered was a surprise to them. They had never seen such large buildings, so many vehicles or crowds of people as they were now exposed to. Their questions kept the translators working overtime.

The first impression was the great condition of the roads. These girls had never been on such tarmacked roads. Not only was this the first time to travel in a vehicle for some of them but the speed which the vehicle traveled frightened them. They could not believe the number of cars. They thought all were owned by the Bishop. Once they understood these were private people they were awed that so many people could own a car.



The hotel where the group stayed was of particular adventure. These girls had never slept on a bed inside a room before and were actually more comfortable on the floor. They all wanted to sleep in the same room and didn't understand the policy of only two people per room.

They opened all the windows as they felt confined in such rooms. It was only with strong influence that they were made to close the doors to the room for safety.

When staying in a hotel that have ensuite bathrooms it was necessary to explain a few things. The greatest attraction was the full mirror which caused great excitement as these girls saw themselves in full for the first time in their lives. At first they thought it was another person. Once they understood the mirror, these teenage girls spent much time looking at themselves.

Next they had to be taught how to use the western toilet seat and the showers. They were amazed that water came to them instead of them fetching it. As they caught on quickly they soon learned to enjoy these conveniences very much. They asked if Kuron Village had these things and when they learned that yes, they are there, the girls said,....*“Oh, you are very developed more than we expected.”* They had never even used toilet paper before and this took a bit of getting used to but after one week they had the skill. A great discussion was held on how all this worked and the staff even took them outside to show them the pipes and septic system.

Bonga Girl Comment: *My eyes are opened. But I still can't believe it all. I want to go again. I like the clothes I bought and I wear them in my village and all the others look at me as*



They were shocked to see the variety of vehicles as all they know are Toyota Landcruisers and big lorries. They wondered how small vehicles could be useful? At one point they saw a high bridge and were asking how it is possible to build so high. They saw people walking on it but they were afraid to do the same until the more brave ones tried.



Figure 3 Kenya Cultural Festival Event in Lodwar

They also entered multiple storied buildings and at first were fearful. *“How can this be?”* They asked. They had never been up so high before. At one point, they entered a modern shopping mall and were astounded at the amount of goods and things in the place. They were anxious of the steps, they were afraid of the floor (that they would slip and fall). But it only took a half an hour before they now relished the experience and even the steps were not a fear to them on the way out. They were surprised to see how cheap everything is since they pay such high prices in the villages for such goods. For themselves these girls mostly purchased cloth, clothes, shoes, seeds and cooking oil.

In Uganda, the Toposa Girls met other Bonga Girls and saw: weaving of clothes, gardening, stores, different ways of cultivating. They ate many different foods and drinks. Some they liked and some they did not. Some they got used to very quickly.

Now they are very interesting in the weaving. They would like to buy one machine and start a business.

IMPACTS

It can be challenging to measure the impact a visit to another country has on an individual. There are not many reliable indicators to see how a person’s mind and attitude have changed. Definitely, there is change. How to measure that is another issue.

Mr. Joseph: *I hope we can have peace too. This way development will come. Our roads are terrible compared with those other places. We need our government to fix our roads so development can occur.*

Certainly, every participant in an exposure trip returns with a broader sense of the larger world outside of their Toposa confines. Most of these Toposa have in small ways adopted more modern clothing styles, food tastes, and a However, perhaps the main question is: What changes have occurred in the thinking process ? Certainly, there is a more mature understanding that

beyond Toposa Land there are other things.

Many have mentioned the peace which resides in the areas they visited. They seemed to make the connection between peace and development. This would be a great impact if those experiences lead to a more peaceful resolution back in their villages. Even the BONGA Girls in Uganda commented to the Toposa BONGA Girls: *“What brought about all our development was peace. Without peace we could not do things like this.”* These sort of comments from their own kindred people have a great impact on how the Toposa go forward in their thinking about peace.



Figure 4 Exchanges of culture, dances, songs and traditions bring people closer and reduce mistrust

Through the comments of those who were exposed one can get a sense of what challenged them and where the line of reasoning is going. Most who attend these exposure trips return changed. They themselves have difficulty in analyzing what they have experienced. It takes time for things to cultivate in their minds.

However, they now become “**Agents of Change**” in their own communities as Mr. Lopem Joseph (right). He frequently addresses his people on the issues of modernization and becoming more developed and fighting less about cattle.



CHALLENGES

The cost of these exposure trips is not small. In addition to fuel and vehicle maintenance and the drivers per diems, a budget is needed for room and board for a group of people. Also, some extra money is needed for them to purchase drinks, snacks and in case of emergency.

Bonga Girl: I loved the trip. My father didn't want to hear any of it because he thinks I will run away after seeing these good things. He wants me home to marry and bring him cows.

Translators work too hard and if there is not sufficient English amongst the group, it is advised to have more than one who can translate.

The organization of these trips requires advanced planning and

communication. For Peace Village this is not always easy as the isolation of the village makes transportation sometimes a risk.

LESSONS LEARNED

Trips such as these need to be planned well in advance. There are many lessons learned from previous trips. The budgets need to have extra padding for things which will always arise such as extra food, a broken vehicle, a sick person or other unexpected expense.

Communication is vital with those to whom the group is going to visit. There may be delays along the way and this will impact scheduled activities. Built in flexibility helps in alleviating some of these. However, not every contingency can be foreseen and one must be ready for anything.

Mr. Lino: *We were in the dark. Now we see that money can make money. Cows will die but money never dies.*

Even though Toposa share language with Turkana, Jie, and Karamajong there is still need for translators. English is widely used for advertising, traveling processes, and shopping so someone must help these visitors understand all this.

STRUGGLES WHEN RETURNING

We do face some pushback from those unable to have these experiences. Many Toposa will ostracize or criticize these educated ones with taunts of; “...what will you do now with that book knowledge? It is useless out here. You have no cows, how will you marry? You have lost your culture and respect for your elders. What woman will marry you if you can't raise cows?”

What happens in many cases is that those who are of lower education try to cut down those of higher education instead of trying to build themselves up.

It is best to budget something for exigencies such as clothes when taking these young girls. Even though they are isolated Toposa, they are still concerned with fashion and how they look to others. Most Toposa women are used to going about with only a cloth (em ae lia) covering them. They feel shame when they arrive at a place where everyone is dressed in modern clothes. In one instance, the group had to purchase shirts for the

participants as they did not want to look like “uneducated, naked tribal people”. Consideration must be given to the sensitivities for those going outside the country.

SUMMARY



Overall, the exposure trips have had positive impacts on those who have participated. These Toposa return with renewed energy and new ideas. They want to plant different crops, try different methods and live a better life. The relationships they build with other cultures and other countries will serve to strengthen ties in the future. We learn that there are good people everywhere.

Although, many may never again travel so far, they have had an experience which will never leave them. The next generation of youth will surely benefit from the changed attitudes of their parents.

Madam Nakwar: *“I want all these little ones to go to school. I want them to learn the new ways. They won’t forget their Toposa culture but they will be able to live in this world. I can’t even read the cell phone I have. I need the young ones to help me. How can I do anything like that? We Toposa have to catch up.”*

(Sources: Interviews of HTPVK staff, Exposure Trip participants, Bonga Girls, Toposa Elders, translators, and drivers. Published and edited by Gabe Hurrish, Maryknoll Lay Missioner. January.2023 All photos the property of HTPVK)