My experience with ROTOM grannies while in Uganda

By Linda Hallet

Today the early morning rain and thunderstorm was a pleasure to listen to. Despite some rains over the last few weeks, the country has had a dreadful drought due to excessive sun, heat and no rain.

As I lay listening to the falling rain, I reflected on my past week. I have been helping proof read the Christmas letters that are going out to donors in Canada, USA, and UK. The seniors sit down with volunteers in their villages and communities and tell them what they would like to say. Most seniors do not read or write. The number one thing they say is always immense gratitude for the help they have received that has lifted them out of some very desperate times. They now receive medical support and fellowship meetings twice a month. These meetings come with a hearty meal that includes some meat; something they rarely eat.

The staff and volunteers keep close watch over them all. The seniors also receive gifts at Christmas each year that sponsors pay for. This year it has been the traditional dress for their region and I had the honor of handing these out at several Fellowships, and was treated to a fashion show at one! You will see the beautiful blue dresses from Muhanga, in Kabale district.

Other years they received a small solar lamp so they no longer need Kerosene lamps that would mean an expense and a fire hazard. They have also received charcoal mini stoves to cook, blankets and mattresses.

The letters open up a window to the lives of the elderly here in Uganda. They talk of loss of their husbands or wives. How many children they may have had and how many have since died. One lady told of her 17 children and how only seven survived. Sadly, many will say they carry the financial burden of looking after several grandchildren too. Some of these children have been abandoned while others live with their grandparents while the parents find work.

The main theme this year was the drought and the lack of crops. The people here grow crops in small patches of land they hand till. They eat some of the vegetables, and dry and store others for later in the dry season. Sadly, this past year there were little if any crops as they burnt in the sun so there will be no stock to rely on. That is why I am happy to hear the rain on my roof.

Other stories the seniors tell are of their abandonment by their family, seemingly...
forgotten by their children. They are forced to find school fees for the school aged grandchildren who have been left for them to raise. When you have nothing even for yourself that can be impossible to do.

They are so grateful that someone cares enough about them that they send gifts and letters via ROTOM and that they are no longer alone. We all know that we need companionship and community to survive. These seniors are no exception.

In their letters, the seniors do not mention Christmas presents from their family or friends; these gifts from their supporting friends are usually the only ones they have received. They hope to make a good meal on Christmas Day, visit church and pray that someone in their family will visit them. Some who are alone have been invited to visit another senior and share a meal. Next weekend there will be a gathering in Kabale District for the seniors to come and celebrate the season with staff. There will be another gathering (of course with dancing!) on Dec 16th here in Mukono. I am so lucky to be here to celebrate both. My time to leave is soon approaching and it will be hard indeed. I grow to love the staff at ROTOM more each time I visit Uganda and just adore the seniors and their incredible spirit. I have said it before, and I say it again: they are my heroes.

For only UGX 80,000, US $30, UK £20, €30 or CDN$35 a month, you can support a senior in Uganda. Your friendship allows seniors to:
- Hear a clear presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ
- Participate in regular Christian support fellowship
- Receive bi-weekly home visits from volunteer counselors
- Receive free regular medical screening and treatment
- Receive support to enable improvement in income and food security
- Access safe and healthy water and housing

Friends receive a photo, update report and two letters every year from the senior they sponsor.

For only UGX 80,000, US $30, UK £20, €30 or CDN$35 a month, you can support a senior in Uganda. Your friendship allows seniors to:

A BIG Thank You from ROTOM

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all our supporters, partners, friends, board and staff for your contribution in the past year. Your gifts have enabled us to meet our objectives. Your unwavering support is what puts a smile on our seniors’ faces and those under their care.

In 2016, we supported 917 seniors and 268 grandchildren. We are grateful for the monthly support, general donations, extra gifts to seniors, prayers and so many others. Because of you there has been increased access to health care, more seniors sharing the love of Christ, new shelters being built, supported children graduating from school, to mention but a few.

Your generous giving towards the Christmas gift gave a chance to every senior to dress well in their cultural dresses and they all celebrated Christmas in a special way.

We thank you again for your continued support and shared commitment to our vision of older persons living dignified and fulfilled lives.

Edith Kazimba, ROTOM Uganda, Country Director