



RWANDAN UPDATE

Tom MacGregor June 2008



Dear Friends,

It has been another busy couple of months; full to bursting with Cows, Coffee, Basketball Players & Banana leaves. I know that sounds like a bit of an unusual combination but, as Fryer Tuck says in the all time classic movie 'Robin Hood Prince of Thieves,' - The Lord truly moves in mysterious ways! I must admit that I do not really remember what I was expecting my life to be like before I came here however I am sure I never imagined anything as good as what my reality has become. I praise God & thank you for your prayers & support that have led me on such an adventure as this.



I am not a fan of cows; I find them to be large, smelly & quite frankly scary animals. I know it sounds a little bit irrational but if you had been there when, as a young boy, I was chased by an entire pack of these beasts you would understand. Unlike me the Rwandan people LOVE cows. Partly this is because of a history & tradition that goes along with the animal but mostly because they provide milk, manure & ultimately meat. One of the programs that FH is involved with in Rwanda is identifying the poorest families in a community & then providing them with a cow & training on how to look after it. The manure means they are able to improve the yield

of crops from the land, the milk provides nutrition & then by working with other cow owners in the area they are able to breed the animals & obtain a good source of income. If properly managed the ownership of a cow can not only lift a family out of poverty but it can benefit the whole community. So I guess not all cows are bad.

Another thing I am not that keen on is coffee but, what I do like about it is the ability it has to improve people's lives. Last month I was fortunate enough to travel to Burundi to help work on a proposal FH were putting together to build a mini coffee washing station (the old building opposite is the proposed site). The quality of coffee is greatly improved if you reduce the time from picking the cherry to the time when you wash it. By having mini washing stations the farmers will be able to wash their own coffee quicker & so increase its quality and consequently their income. In the first year the idea is for FH to run a mini washing station and use it as a platform to train the local farmers. If this is successful then the farmers will take ownership of the mini washing station & the model can then be reproduced in another area. I understand that all the funding has now been secured to run the first washing station & I would just like to say a huge thank you to FH UK & all those who help raise the support because I have no doubt that this program will greatly improve the lives of the people in Burundi.



My work with the Small Businesses continues and I am pleased to say that we have started to see some real progress on the exports side of things. We not only have an order to supply a large number of Greetings cards to the UK but also other orders in the USA for Banana Leaf Sandals and Rattles. We have even had a one off order for a pair of the Sandals from a famous American Basketball Player. You never know our Banana Leaf Sandals may be the next 'Nike-Air.'

We have also purchased a web address which is in the process of being made into an ecommerce website. Hopefully in the not too distant future you will be able to purchase all the authentic handmade Rwanda products you may desire, directly from us. Once we are up and running I will let you know the address however, it may be a little while as I am attempting design the web pages myself which, with my IT skills, is a bit of a steep learning curve. Along with the technical problems we are also facing some logistical problems, we need to work out the best way to export the products quickly whilst keeping them competitively priced. These are some of the challenges we face but I am sure that they can all be overcome.



A new Mayor has just been appointed in the little town of Gitarama where I live. She has an impressive CV and appears to be keen to not only see the town improve but also all the surrounding rural areas. When the Mayor was appointed she took the opportunity to outline some of her plans for the coming year and if she manages to achieve even half of these it should be an exciting time in the development of this area. Not only do we now have a new Mayor but the town also has a new Football team – Muhanga FC. I have been to most of their home games and I am pleased to announce that we are sitting proudly in first place of the second division. I do really enjoy going to Muhanga's football games; it has been great to see how the town has slowly but surely grown to love their team. I know it sounds silly but over the last month, as support has grown for the football team, a very positive change in the atmosphere of the whole town has occurred. I guess it could be a coincidence but I do not think we should underestimate the positive role that sport can play in improving people's lives

Prayer Requests

1. Please pray for the wisdom of the new Mayor and the other Leaders of Rwanda – if we are going to see any lasting change in this nation it is imperative that the Country has good and above all honest leaders.
2. Please pray for the work we are doing with the small businesses. It is exciting to have exporting opportunities but there are a number of practicalities that need to be worked out if the projects are going to be successful and above all sustainable in the coming years.
3. Over the next few months we have many people visiting us here in Rwanda, not only our families and friends but also a number of interns who I will be working with as they undertake research into improving the FH small business program. Please pray not only for the safety and wellbeing of all the guests but also that each one will have a positive affect on the communities that they meet and that they will both enjoy and learn from their experiences in Rwanda.

I thank you once again for your interest, support & prayers. It is all really appreciated. If you do want any more specific information please do not hesitate to contact me via my email which is tmacgregor@fhi.net or by regular mail to my new postal address **PO Box 146, Gitarama, Rwanda.**

Also remember to visit my page at www.facebook.com if you would like to see more photographs.

Many thanks,

Tom