

RWANDAN UPDATE

Tom MacGregor September 2008



Dear Friends,

This month I celebrated completing my first year in Rwanda but in all honesty it feels like I have only been here a few days. On this anniversary edition of my newsletter I would like to say a special thank you to each one of you for walking with me on this journey. It has been an amazing and life changing experience but without your support and prayers it simply would not have been possible. To say that I am extremely grateful for this opportunity would be a gross understatement of exactly how I am feeling – but I hope you get the picture.



Over the last few months I have not just been busy with work but I have also been entertaining a few friendly faces from back home – my parents (whose main purpose was to check on the health of their increasingly hairy son) then a group of three friends from South Kent Community Church (SKCC). It was good to be able to spend time with my family and friends, to show them what life is really like here and also to catch up on all the news from back in England. However, the visitors did not have it easy because I not only got

them helping me out with my work but we also linked up with a couple of the local Rwandan Churches (that SKCC have been friends with for years) and gave them a hand with some of their projects. This included, among many other things, nursery school teaching, some building work, and helping out with feeding and nutrition programs. It was great to see what other work is going on around the country and it is really encouraging to see so many of the Rwandan Churches getting stuck in and helping their own communities.



Even with the forced labor of unsuspecting visitors the pace of work keeps on picking up with lots of new opportunities and challenges. The website is progressing well but we have had to put its launch on hold for a little while until we have finished registering a trading company. To help our small businesses projects become self sustaining we are buying and then selling their products. The idea is to help them to get access to a much wider market; however, if we do this as a charity in Rwanda it is difficult for us to meet all the tax and other legal requirements. Therefore we decided to set up a separate trading company dedicated to buying and selling products produced by the rural communities where we are working. It is the first time I have set up a company from scratch but, praise God, so far

it is going well. All the paper work has been completed and we just need to get the registration documents signed by the officials and then we can launch the business - Azizi Life (I believe Azizi is a Swahili word that means excellent or treasured). I guess it does not sound that exciting to most people but I have loved being involved. What I like about this project is that we are creating a structure that will not only help with development of communities now but it will eventually be self financing allowing it to continue, hopefully, long after we have left.



Although busy with a ton of paper work we continue to find new customers keen to buy our Rwandan made products. We have a group in the USA who want to sell a range of handbags and another who will be working directly with some of our communities to make some very high quality woven baskets and bowls. Whenever we find a new market one of the biggest problems we face is of logistics. How do you get the product from the village to its final destination – particularly if that destination is thousands of miles away? If we are going to be able to compete with the other products that are already available then this is a conundrum that must be overcome on each shipment but, it is well worth the headache. Connecting a rural community with a new market (whether they are in this country or overseas) is absolutely the best part of my job - I just love to see the communities generating their own income and the satisfaction and empowerment that comes to each individual from earning their own money is priceless.



Over the last few months the main logistical problem that has been giving me sleepless nights is how to get 3,000 beautiful banana leaf greeting cards & envelopes made and delivered to the UK by the middle of August. It is with a certain amount of righteous pride (if there is such a thing) that I can confirm that we did it! However, as much as I would like to, I can not really take any of the credit for this success. The communities producing the cards worked their socks off to get the job done in record time and my kind friends and family shipped everything back in their cases. In reality my only part was fervent praying that none of the luggage would get lost and thankfully God took care

of that. So the cards are now all in the UK and available to anyone who would like to buy a pack. I know it's a bit early but in all honesty I do not think your Christmas will be complete without them, so you should get in early ☺ I have attached the appropriate order form if you are interested.

Prayer Requests

1. During the coming month Rwanda is having parliamentary elections. As in every democratic country elections can be a tense time as people choose who will best represent them. Good leadership is imperative to Rwanda's stability and development and therefore I would ask that you pray for continued calm at this time and that the right people are elected.
2. As the opportunities for exporting Rwandan products increase we face bigger and bigger logistical challenges. These need to be overcome if we are going to really see a change in the areas where we are working
3. It is almost unbelievable that I have been here for so long with relatively few health problems. Please continue to pray for my health and wellbeing because it is really making a difference.

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 postal address **PO Box 146, Gitarama, Muhanga Rwanda**. Also remember to visit my page at www.facebook.com if you would like to see more photographs.

Many thanks,
Tom