



Awards 2014 Case Study

Award Winner

Chairman's Special Award

Kachumbala Widows' Cooperative Mill and Grain Store Uganda Project

There can be no greater sense of achievement than being part of something that brings positive change to the lives of those less fortunate than ourselves.



Dozens of construction industry apprentices across South Wales are being given just such an opportunity, through the involvement of the Carmarthenshire branch of Engineers for Overseas Development (EFOD) in a project designed to lift destitute widows out of poverty in the Ugandan town of Kachumbala.

And whilst it is clear that these women and their families derive enormous benefit from their efforts, it is certainly not a one-way process. For most who take part, it is a life-changing experience: it fosters new skills and talent, widens horizons and develops future leaders of the construction industry in Wales.

The Kachumbala Grace Farmers Group (KGFG) was founded in 2011 in one of the poorest parts of the world by the UK-based SaltPeter Trust. Members were funded for eight months to grow and harvest cassava - a nutrient-rich tuber - on their own land, the harvest providing sufficient food for 12 months with surplus to sell to fund essentials such as oil, kerosene, salt and soap.

However, the sale of grain at harvest time produces a poor return since the market is flooded. Storage was the missing link that would allow the Cooperative to release their goods to the market when prices increase

by a factor of three, significantly increasing returns to the group and providing insurance against drought.

EFOD Carmarthenshire was formed to take up the challenge of designing a mill and grain store structure, raise the necessary £40,000 and send qualified tradesmen to Uganda to supervise construction and pass skills on to local people. Under the umbrella of Constructing Carmarthenshire Together (a partnership between CCTAL, Coleg Sir Gar and Carmarthenshire County Council), several organisations including local contractors and SMEs, collaborated to complete the build sending out pairs of apprentices for two weeks each, either as part of their respective development training, or as a volunteering holiday. All of them have followed theoretical and work based health and safety scenarios and this knowledge is transferred to local workers enabling them to better risk assess construction activities.

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Anthony Rees.

EFOD representative and Cyfle Building Skills regional manager

To raise money for the project, two charity gala dinners have been held, raising £36,000 in the past two years. It costs £1,200 to send each apprentice to Kachumbala, some of it raised by participants themselves, with means tested support also available. To date, nine apprentices have made the trip, with an expansion of the scheme across South West Wales meaning that, in 2015, 18 people will be selected to experience a life in third world sub Saharan Africa that could not be further from their own home comforts.

“Even getting there is a challenge,” says EFOD representative and Cyfle Building Skills regional manager Anthony Rees. “It is a seven hour ride from Entebe to the town. Our apprentices work with a local team who are pretty skilled but have little work available. Our lads have to go back to basics as there are no power tools, so it’s definitely a two-way learning situation. Our intention is that this project has a long-term impact not only on Ugandan families but on tradesmen and the local construction industry in South West Wales.”

The winner of the CEW Chairman’s Special Award must make a contribution that not only raises the profile of the Welsh Construction Industry, but also highlights the contribution it makes to society. This means that the winner’s influence and work is likely to have an impact beyond Wales and upon organisations and individuals operating and working in Wales, possibly reaching out to young people, the disadvantaged, elderly or disabled. It must be an example that demonstrates what positive effect construction has on the lives of end users and Constructing Excellence in Wales must be able to track it and watch its development to share the progress with industry stakeholders.

Whilst the full effect and output result of the Kachumbala Widow’s Cooperative Mill and Grain Store project will not truly be known for

another few years, there is no doubt the project has given hope and assistance to the lowest in Ugandan society. It hasn’t simply been a case of providing financial support for the community today, but to give them the tools to turn around their own lives through their own hard work. The Group is thriving and growing, with a target of 150 members, and site workers’ health has also shown a noticeable improvement since income from the work provides food for them and their families.

Members of the KGFG have been inspired by the project to make their own investment in nutrition and housing, with plans to improve their milk and dairy products and agricultural capability by using bulls for ploughing, amongst other initiatives. Two other cooperatives nearby have now embarked on land acquisition to build similar grain stores, following the example set by EFOD for using ISSB to prevent the unsustainable firing of clay bricks. Lessons learnt from this scheme are being fed back into the first two widows’ cooperatives set up by the SaltPeter Trust.

And both the residents of Kachumbala and the Welsh construction industry look sure to continue to benefit from this mutually beneficial initiative. EFOD Carmarthenshire’s scheme for 2015 is to build a new £80k maternity ward in Kachumbala, following consultation with the local people and a visit to the existing, extremely primitive facilities. “We are guided by the people of Kachumbala and do not dictate to them,” said Anthony Rees. “Six children are born in the town each day and the current maternity facilities are diabolical.”

From the Welsh apprentice who had never before been out of the UK, to the mother in Kachumbala whose children now have three meals a day and school uniforms, there is no doubt that this project is having a huge and lasting impact right across the globe, and showcasing the Welsh Construction Industry at its very best.

