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The students of Orvalle among the small farmers of Tororo

Orvalle, a high-school for girls in Madrid, celebrated its 40th anniversary last year by co-operating with a training programme for eighty Ugandan women under the auspices of the NGO, Harambee.

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In the offices of Harambee Spain the phone rings. It is a call from **Orvalle**

High School. This year they are celebrating 40 years of life – 40, a round figure denoting maturity- and they want to celebrate it big-time but seriously, with an outreach project that will take them through the year and bring together the whole school community: teachers, parents, students and ex-students. Let's all work together!, which is what *Harambee* means in Swahili.

“The school's major activities are fixed at the beginning of the school year. This is a special year that we have decided to dedicate entirely to promoting women, and this is what we have told the PTA. We didn't want to do simply a fund-raising, and that was it” said Claudia Rivera, the school's spokesperson. “Instead, we decided to join forces for one single project, and give what we receive here to those who need it most.”

The publicity above reads:

Training of small farmers in Tororo

Training and resources

Many women in this area subsist from a small plot of land in their village. All have received little or no formal education. They are enterprising people who want to acquire and learn basic technical skills and use them to improve their agricultural output.

The women want to work together and learn from one another as “small farmers”. This project involves volunteers who will help the women to develop skills and learn new techniques.

Who stands to benefit?

Eighty women from the village, many of them in poor health, and members of self-help groups, such as Elizabeth Group, Gandhi Women, Thatcher Group and Clinton Group.

“Go the extra mile!”

During the phone call, Maria Pilar Cuesta, the main coordinator of Harambee Spain, lists the various projects for the year so they choose the one they want. These projects are very specific and follow a well worked out budget.

Orvalle was praised for its programme training eighty small farmers in Nyakalado, near Tororo in Uganda, a district with a very low level of education, where most women are carriers of HIV, and support their families cultivating a small plot of land. The objective is to teach them to read and write, together with new techniques of farming and sustainable crop cultivation, and how to irrigate and produce higher yields on their land which is parched by drought.

The school adopts this project and gets down to work. The target is

10,000 euros: 300 euros for each of the 36 classes, 100 euros per class per term. But it is not all about raising funds. Between Tororo and Orvalle there are invisible ties. At one end, the school-girls with their solidarity; at the other, the Ugandan women with their example.

In July, Marta Bodes, a teacher at the school, went to Uganda and filmed the conditions in which the families live, work and rest, in order to create awareness. Each class took note of the needs of the small farmers. Later, Veronica Arrechea, representing Harambee Spain, explained the project from her standpoint, and how best to make it work. In addition, the girls had the chance to speak with Chiaka, an African woman who could put their concerns to rest.

“Marta showed them some photos comparing the lives of Ugandan

children with children here: the roads, houses, school classrooms, etc.” adds Mercedes Garcia Sainz, deputy director of formation. “They were shocked by the lack of running water and that the children had classes in the open. At the same time, it helped them see the cheerfulness and self-possession of these children. They realized that their contribution was not just a matter of money, but rather had to be the result of their personal effort”.

The small farmers of Tororo are very present in Orvalle, thanks to a methodology of work by projects. The older students studied economics, the social profile and geography of Uganda; they even made out a draft budget in their Maths class. The younger ones in Primary put drawings of thermometres in the classes to show how much money had been collected. And in the kindergarten

they put notices on the doors where the children put stickers in the shape of large bread rolls and different foodstuffs indicating every time more money came in. “They love to be able to help, and it is a way of distracting possible tantrums”, says Claudia.

Harambee were very happy with this initiative. “They have taken the project to heart and are doing it very well. They have already asked for a volunteer project for the coming summer”, says Maria Pilar Cuesta.

There is much to celebrate on this 40th anniversary. The comparisons between the two countries are displayed on two-metre tall posters in a prominent place in the school as a permanent reminder that Tororo is not far from Madrid, and that they have to be generous and grateful.

During these months, the students have developed a surprising capacity

for business: breakfasts, plays, charity teas. The Secondary students are making biscuits and selling them for Uganda. The high-school girls bring food and sell to the little ones. Some have even told their parents that for Christmas or their birthday what they would really like is an envelope filled with money for Uganda. They have really taken to heart that the boys and girls they are helping are their brothers and sisters, and they have a responsibility and obligation towards them.
