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## **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

### **Pigs, Politics and Africa**

**Anne Mignone**

*Australian Science and Mathematics School*

Pigs, Politics and Africa is the unfolding story of a group of Adelaide high school students and the community in Uganda that they are determined to help; it is an initiative that was birthed at the Australian Science and Mathematics School in 2010, but with its beginnings dating back some four year earlier. The seeds of Pigs, Politics and Africa were sown in 2006, when a young, enthusiastic and inspiring young woman arrived in Adelaide to share her story and that of the electorate she had just recently been elected to represent. I remember sitting in a room of Old Parliament House in Adelaide with approximately fifty other women, all who were equally captivated by the story of Susan Matovu Nakawuki, Uganda's youngest Member of Parliament. Susan spoke of the challenges she faced in seeking to be elected, the hopes and dreams she held for the community she served and the practical ways she was working towards making those dreams become a reality.

As a final year law student Susan was nominated as a candidate in the upcoming elections in Uganda. Susan had decided to stand for election to represent the poor community of Busiuro County East in the Wakiso District (northwest of Kampala), but it was not without its challenges. Susan faced assassination attempts on her life and that of her husband, as well as being offered bribes not to run for election. In spite of this Susan continued her campaign and received the overwhelming support of the Busiuro County East electorate in the 2006 election, thereby making her the youngest woman elected to the Ugandan Parliament.

Susan's election as an MP came at a high cost to her electorate – as a member of an opposition party, government services to the area were cut. In spite of a lack of government support, Susan was determined to alleviate poverty in her area and provide ways for her constituents to improve the quality of their own lives. To achieve this Susan established a number of initiatives, including the 'Three Little Pigs' project; Susan bought 100 piglets that were distributed across 30 of the 180 villages in her electorate. When these piglets grew and had given birth to approximately 10 piglets, the mother pig and two piglets would be left while the rest of the litter would be taken and redistributed to other

families. This helped to provide both food and income thereby helping a number of people to work their way out of poverty. A similar initiative was established with chickens. Susan also established a village bank, setting aside money from her own salary to provide unsecured loans to people so they could establish their own businesses that would benefit themselves and their local communities.

At the end of Susan's presentation I felt overwhelmed by the enormity of what one so young had already achieved. I knew that unlike Susan I would not be prepared to enter into politics to improve the lives of others, but felt that someone who was willing to risk what Susan had deserved the support of others in helping to improve the lives of the impoverished. In awe of a woman my own age who was willing to risk and sacrifice so much personally, I determined then that I would be one who would support Susan's initiatives, but as a final year teaching student was not yet sure of how I would achieve this outcome.

Fast forward three years to 2009 – students at the Australian Science and Mathematics School (ASMS), where I now worked, were involved in community action projects that they themselves planned and executed over the period of a semester. I was encouraged by the enthusiasm and the creativity of students in championing causes and helping others less fortunate than themselves. Consequently I decided to offer my students a means of helping the people in Susan's community, which is characterised by poverty, high illiteracy rates, HIV/AIDS and child headed families. I was convinced that young people do want to make a positive contribution to society and that by providing students with an opportunity to first learn about the needs of the Busiuro County East community and then to take action, that great things could be achieved.

I attempted to contact Susan via email and despite some initial communication challenges, I did eventually receive an email outlining a number of projects that Susan had already established or was involved in. These ranged from chicken and pig farming initiatives to sponsorship of children and families, to providing microfinance to women so they could establish their own businesses. Given that this was a new venture and I could not yet gauge the level of student support I would receive, I decided against sponsoring children and families, as this would need to be a very long term commitment. The other projects however all sounded promising, and so began planning for what would become 'Pigs, Politics and Africa.'

In 2010, with the help of a colleague, I launched 'Pigs, Politics and Africa' as an elective subject that was open to Year 10 and Year 11 students. Students could select to be part of this class, which would run initially for eight weeks. I had hoped to attract ten to fifteen dedicated and enthusiastic students, so was a little overwhelmed when thirty students signed up to be part of the first eight week rotation. Their reasons for joining were varied – from wanting to help others, to learn more about Africa or to feel good about themselves – but the students were united in a common purpose. The aim of these first eight weeks was to gain a greater understanding of the community we would be working with, to understand some of the challenges that faced Uganda as a nation and to raise money that could be used to support the pig and chicken farming projects and microfinancing projects. Pigs, Politics and Africa was so popular that it ran for a further two rotations. Throughout 2010 students were fortunate enough to host the Ugandan Assistant High Commissioner, Margaret Kedisi, at the ASMS, learn more about Ugandan politics in a guest lecture from Dr Tanya Lyons (senior lecturer and specialist in African Studies at Flinders University) and learn more about South Australia's political system through a visit to Parliament House. Students also organised a range of fundraising activities at the ASMS and raised awareness about challenges facing people living in Susan's electorate.

Much has been achieved in our first year – students gained skills in fundraising and event management, students increased their understanding of the issues facing a local African community and importantly we were able to raise more than \$US3100 for the Busiuro County East community. Furthermore the Pigs, Politics and Africa class was awarded a Vinnies Social Justice Award in recognition of the work we had undertaken. As we look to the year ahead we are planning to focus on the issue of access to safe drinking water and develop skills in water testing that could be applied in Uganda. We also hope to raise money to provide for wells in Busiuro County East, whose only access to safe drinking water is three boreholes in a community of more than 200,000 people. We don't yet know what challenges we face in achieving our goals, but like Susan, we are committed to working with others to find ways that will continue to improve the quality of the lives of the people living in the Busiuro County East community.