

Hi,
I have been very inattentive and haven't sent an update for about 5 months, largely because of what is outlined below.



We have just received official certification of a 50 year lease for our land, so the next few months will continue to be extremely busy as we start to construct our first buildings. A Youth Centre will be furnished with a TV, Music system, games etc so that the Youth (14 – 29 year olds) can engage in recreational activities. There is currently no alternative to bars and shabeens, so we will be strongly enforcing the rule of **no alcohol** for the many youth that want it. Alcohol abuse is a big issue in Botswana and in the fight against HIV / AIDS, and it's important that an alternative is provided. The Sewing Room will be furnished with sewing machines and will be a place for us to teach the community how to use them. We have sent some people on a Fabric Dying course, a Weaving course, and have also been teaching members of the community how to make jewellery and how to print T-shirts. All of these skills will be used in the sewing room so that the community can make stuff to generate an income for themselves and TOP Banana.

The logistics of this project are very time consuming and are not made easier by the massive cement shortage and the ongoing problems that Tshesebe faces with the supply of water. Furthermore, we do not have our own transport and have to ferry building materials 50kms from Francistown to Tshesebe.

We have recently been given enough funding for these buildings (I hope) from the local Women's Institute and from a trust patroned by the Vice President (of Botswana) We also held a fun day at a local shopping centre which consisted of activities for the kids and fundraising events which raised around P6,500 (£600). The local community is still keen to construct the buildings and is keen to be paid in a mix of cash, food and clothing that was donated from the UK.



We are still making applications for funding for the construction of future buildings such as a crèche, computer room, a playground, library, office etc. Our greatest need for funding however is for running costs (salaries, transport, communication etc). It is not desperate yet, but is becoming a concern. Sadly, there are very few funding organisations that are prepared to fund these costs (most are only keen to fund tangible items) and we are waiting for decisions and for dates to be able to submit applications to them.

We are doing something about this. In addition to the aforementioned ideas for generating an income, we have solar cookers and a solar phone charger that are being tested. Tests for these are going better than expected and we will continue to progress these with a view to being as self sufficient as possible, but will still be reliant on the international support we are getting. Many thanks go to all those who have been helping.

In addition to these preparations, we have been continuing with our after school activities and have trained all of our carers as sports leaders. Some of the kids do not go straight home after we knock off, and are telling their parents that we are delaying them. As a consequence, some of the parents are not happy with us because the kids are not doing their household chores (like collecting water, gathering firewood etc), but we are aware of it and are telling the kids that they must go straight home, or they will not be able to play sports after school.



Furthermore, we have finished the massive task of training 63 people from Tshesebe and across the North East District as HIV / AIDS educators and counsellors which lasted a total of 19 days and included the provision of food and transport for them all. They are all being Monitored and Evaluated and are using their training to increase awareness about the virus in their respective communities. Knowledge and awareness about HIV / AIDS is still surprisingly low and we trying to do something about this. Education and information is there, but is not reaching the community as much as it should, nor is it having as much impact as it needs to.

The TOP Banana netball is doing very well and is continuing to convincingly beat many of the teams from other villages in the district. They will be playing a team from Masunga (the main village of the district) soon and, if they win, will need to consider playing teams from further afield for stiffer competition. Chess and traditional dance are still very popular and very good. A few of the 16 year old boys always want to play me at chess because they know that they can beat me.

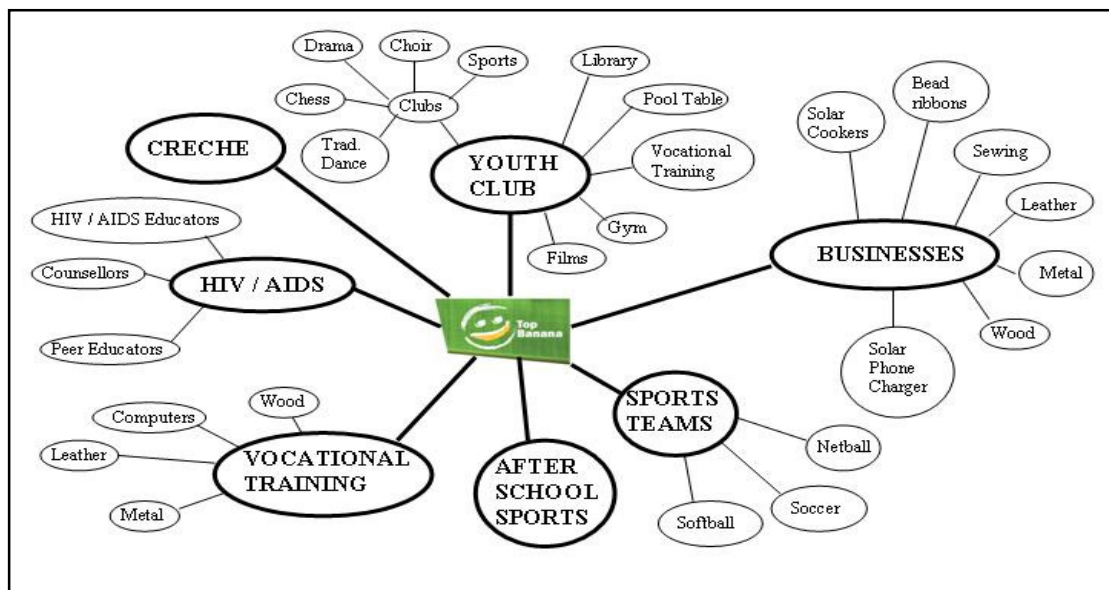


To make all of this a bit easier to understand, and to give you an overview of what TOP Banana is all about, I have attached a Bubble Map. It seems to be forever changing, but should give you a better idea of how everything we are doing has its place.

There have been lots of highs and lows over the last few months and it continues to be an exhausting, turbulent journey with many unexpected twists and turns, but its still lots of fun and hugely satisfying. The attached photos should articulate that. That's it for now. I'll try to drop you another update at some point soon. Hope to hear from you in the interim, even if it's just a postcard of your home town – Box 117, Tshesebe, Botswana – The kids really like to see pictures of other places around the world!!

Warm Regards

Rick



At TOP Banana, we are always looking for international Volunteers.

If you are interested please contact infotopbanana@yahoo.co.uk