

Ten years of life-changing work in Uganda

By Andrew Dubock

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Viva's partner network in Kampala, Children at Risk Action Network (CRANE), is celebrating a decade of changing the lives of children and families for the better.

In addition to a well-deserved party this weekend, the network is reflecting on its significant development and impact in areas such as **family reintegration, education, child empowerment and maternal and child health** over the last ten years.

A new evidence-based research report is helping CRANE to consider the shape of future work while also helping Viva to assess how it can deliver even greater strategic impact in Uganda and in its worldwide networks.



CRANE currently has 136 members impacting the lives of 30,000 children.

Successes include the reintegration of **289 children** back into their families since 2011; the empowering of **1,300 families** to provide for their children; and sharing messages about child rights and community advocacy to **more than 13,500 children** through Child Ambassadors.



Being accepted as part of the British government's Girls Education Challenge programme in November 2013 was a big step for CRANE and Viva. The programme aims to benefit **9,715 marginalized girls through 20 Creative Learning Centres in 20 communities.**

Viva's partnership at all stages of the network's development has contributed to enabling the network to deliver capacity building programs such as the Quality Improvement System (QIS).

Miriam Friday, Viva's Network Consultant for Uganda, says, *"It has been a privilege to watch the growth of CRANE. **Some of the inspiring people from ten years ago are still driving us on to work harder for the sake of children.**"*

"Individuals, organizations and the network are operating at a much higher, more complex level now than they were a decade ago, and many of those individuals are now regularly knocking on the doors of government officials asking for greater investment in children and for greater transparency. They can only do that because they have learned to walk that journey themselves."

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CRANE is an example of how Viva's **three-phase model of network development** operates in practice, and shows that this model has the potential to effect city-wide change for children as networks move towards developing solutions to key problems facing children.

Although other networks of secular and faith-based organizations exist, CRANE is unique in bringing together Christian organizations and churches of all denominations for children's issues with a city-wide focus. One network member stated, *"I have joined CRANE rather than other national networks as I know the value of networking and I have confidence in CRANE."*

CRANE's influence in Kampala has especially grown in the last five years. The network has demonstrated a focus on working for **wide-scale change for children's wellbeing across the city**, under the theme of 'keeping children safe' and has built strategic partnerships with government ministries, police, probation officers and social workers. **In 2013, more than 495 such decision-makers were influenced through CRANE training.**

AIP Mfitundinda Gad, a Child and Family Protection Officer, says, *"CRANE is the only network that has full-time programs that can be seen in the community. Its members are more trained and more compassionate than other organizations. They have a heart—they don't treat it as a business but as a passion."*

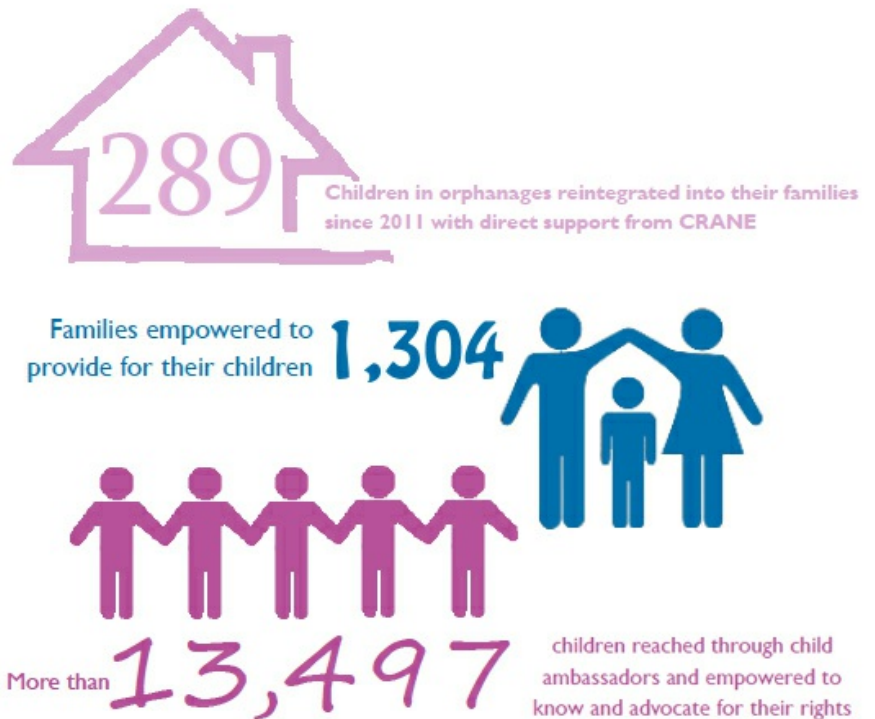


Miriam acknowledges that while ten years is a success for CRANE, it is, in many ways, just the beginning of tackling issues facing children in Uganda – a country in which **94 per cent of children are classed as 'vulnerable', where eight in ten children in orphanages have family and where nearly half of all girls are married by the age of 18.**

She says, *"Even with all the apparent success and thousands of children's lives that have been impacted, we sometimes think we are only out of the starting blocks!"*

"One member said to me just yesterday, 'We have been at this work of child advocacy for years now and helped so many children, and yet you hear more cases of child abuse and it feels like you haven't been working at all!'"

"At such times we need to encourage each other and inspire each other to continue on. We are now looking at the next 15 years up until CRANE's Silver Jubilee in 2029. We can begin to see that milestone but I know it will take even longer than that to see that Uganda is a safe place for children to be raised."



As significant anniversaries come and go, Miriam (*pictured right*) is already expressing a desire to be at the centenary of Uganda's independence in 2062!

"I will be days off my 93rd birthday and probably smiling through gappy teeth, leaning on a walking stick, but, one way or the other, I aim to be at that celebration and know that together we have achieved much more by working together than we would have done otherwise – and surrounding us oldies will be children who have come across our paths year after year."

*"But for now, I am smiling at the years that have past, knowing that **God has kept us and helped us to help countless children – and that is a task that is worth every ounce of energy in me!**"*

