

The background image is a photograph of a busy outdoor market in Uganda. In the foreground, a man in a light blue shirt is riding a red motorcycle. The market is filled with people, colorful umbrellas, and various goods. In the background, there are buildings and power lines under a hazy sky.

MediaCom's Trip to Uganda — CO2 offsetting and community outreach

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“There’s one of our clients,” someone said, pointing to a bright billboard as we pulled away from Entebbe airport after an overnight flight from London to Kenya to Uganda. At first we pointed out familiar sights scattered throughout this unknown country, but even those few comforting elements slowly dissipated as we travelled further North, past Kampala and up to Lira. The posters became hand-painted signs and the concrete buildings gave way to dense greenery and traditional earth huts.



MediaCom has worked with the carbon offsetting company [CO2 Balance](#) for over 10 years. Businesses commit to CO2 targets, and any emissions beyond that level are offset by funding projects that benefit communities and the climate. In Uganda, MediaCom and CO2 Balance have rehabilitated and maintained boreholes that benefit villages with clean water. Drinking water stops the need for inefficient boiling on traditional fires, thus reducing carbon.



At the end of September, six MediaCom employees were chosen to travel to Uganda (with flights offset), and see the projects first hand. We were picked through a company-wide competition. Between us we had interests in the environment, sanitation methods, the country and its history. We spent hours together in a minivan, travelling between villages and schools over pot-holed roads that threatened to tip us out into the red African dirt, and witnessing the difference that MediaCom's contribution had made.



“We used to share our water with animals,” explained one villager, his words translated for us with the help of a company representative. “Now we have water whenever we want”.

Everywhere we went we were met with celebration – jumping women in their brightest clothes, smiling families, a thousand singing schoolchildren who lined up to greet us.

People without shoes or adequate clothing offered us hospitality and gave us crates of fizzy drinks and biscuits that they couldn't afford and we therefore couldn't refuse. We heard how the clean water meant typhoid and sickness rates had dropped, while hygiene and sanitation had improved. It was wonderful to see how the company had brought a little piece of relief – a basic human right extended to those who had been dispossessed.



The people of MediaCom themselves had grouped together to donate to one of the schools CO2 Balance works with. We arrived in Uganda with books, underwear, clothing and sports equipment. When we landed we were worried that the books looked a bit dog-eared, and one of the t-shirts had got wet through a suitcase. The children didn't care. They were delighted by every sticker and clamoured for each item we passed around. The school football team wore their variety of football shirts with pride – even the Chelsea one. The hardest part was distributing some of the clothes fairly, as there wasn't enough for the full thousand. I personally tried to give to the children who looked poorest, whose school uniforms were only just held together, but how do you choose which few should benefit out of a group?

Uganda is a country of incredible beauty, but it struggles with poverty and corruption. It is impossible to fix with outside help alone, and for every village that MediaCom has benefited, there is another which lacks water, or whose people don't have shoes. One MediaCom representative tipped two children the equivalent of 10p each for carrying some bags, and worried she hadn't given enough until the girls threatened to overwhelm her with hugs and delight. Wikipedia states that in 2012, a third of the population lived on less than

\$1.25 a day, and Transparency International rated Uganda's public sector as one of the most corrupt in the world. Climate change has affected crops and rainfall and made life more difficult for ordinary citizens. Millions of refugees, fleeing conflict in South Sudan, have moved into a country the size of the UK. We visited the site of a massacre perpetrated by Joseph Kony and the Lord's Resistance Army only a few years ago, and we were aware that Uganda has a terrible record with human rights, particularly for LGBT citizens.

Our visit was just one line in a vast story, and our remit was to see the good that MediaCom had done. We focussed on the welcome of the people we met, and the beauty of the country's nature. Donning some bright wellingtons, we walked through marshland in search of rhinos at a conservation ground. We found six who welcomed us with gentle flatulence and then settled themselves underneath the bushes for a doze. We dodged tsetse flies and sleeping sickness to marvel at the world's most powerful waterfall at Murchison Falls. Our car lurched around the savannah in search of buffalos, giraffes, elephants and hyenas. We even enjoyed a Nile beer on a Nile river cruise in the company of hippos and crocodiles.

This trip was a wonderful experience that created some strong friendships, and highlighted just how connected MediaCom is with many parts of the world. MediaCom will continue in future to support carbon offsetting, climate change relief efforts, and corporate social responsibility, with the aim of benefiting those in the greatest need wherever they are. As a Connections and Communications agency, we are aware of how our actions in one place can affect those in the world around us. We volunteers crossed hours of difficult terrain and at the end were places and people that MediaCom has directly benefited – and that felt truly special.

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