

It was so lovely to be able to visit Matiya at his home last week. It has been three years since my last visit pre-COVID. When we arrived he was just preparing some tea . He changed into his traditional clothes and we sat and talked. He is a little frailer now and finds digging the garden harder and he lives in a swamp area so could not have a latrine built. He is now 87 years old and so grateful to be chosen by ROTOM and his friends in Canada who love him and support him. He thanks God for them.

He was charging his new solar light, so he showed us how helpful it has been since receiving it from his friends in Canada. There is no need to buy kerosene and there is no smoke inside his small house now. He also uses the metal trunk he received the previous years to keep his clothes and papers clean and safe from moisture and rodents. He thanks his friends so much for their kindness.

I learnt more about Matiya and how his parents brought him and his siblings from Burundi in the 1940's to Uganda because there was a plague of locusts that had destroyed all the crops and trees and they had no food. The population was starving. Many Burundians came and there became an enclave of them in this community. Some returned back to Burundi in 1998. We have a gentleman filming the seniors this day called Joseph, and he spoke to him in Kirundi, and Matiya spoke back to him very well. It was a happy reunion indeed.

Also on this visit was Elizabeth, our field officer, and Jane, the field nurse, who came to check his blood pressure and ask about his health. She told me he had been having pain on the right side of his ribs and she has provided a balm to rub on the area and some pills for the pain. He does take medication because he has high blood pressure .He is very good at remembering to take his pills. He enjoyed seeing everyone and even though he is a shy and quiet man he really laughed a lot. The field nurse is such an essential part of health care preventing the need for hospital visits. Elizabeth, our field officer, coordinates with volunteers in the community who check Matiya often and report to her.

Matiya was married in 1955 and they had 6 children. Sadly 4 died. Two girls were babies, one son died from poisoning at the age of 7, and the last son died older, but not sure how old he was. Sadly his wife died in 1967. He has never taken another wife. His family lives in the area and does visit.

Matiya used to grow cassava and potatoes on his land but not now. ROTOM provides food security each month to sustain him. Small fish that he can out into posho. It just takes boiling water. Charcoal is just expensive to buy to cook other food. Food has increased in price after COVID. I brought gifts for him of tea, sugar, rice, maize flour, soap and posho. He was so grateful. He was selling onions for a neighbour as he is on a small road that people pass by.

I look forward to attending the Fellowship this week and seeing him again.

In Gratitude

Linda Hallett

Volunteer ROTOM Uganda

