

The power lines and the tarmac ends but the red earth road continues onwards into north-east Uganda. After thirty miles or so you are in one of the poorest parts of one of the world's poorest countries. People are herding cattle and goats, opening up small fields with simple hoes and living in the clusters of round thatched huts made of earth brick. Nothing much appears to have changed for generations. But in the middle of a flat landscape there is a 200 foot high rock, on top of the rock is a 150 foot radio mast and at its base a diesel generator (a British made Lister Petter for those who wish to know) throbs out electricity. This is the unlikely home of JoshuaFM.

JoshuaFM is a community radio station. It broadcasts local news, it runs programmes on agriculture, on health matters, on community and human rights issues interspersed with music ranging from the traditional local music to the latest popular artists. Above all, however, it is a Christian radio station. Every morning starts with prayers, local priests and pastors comment on issues of the day, Mass or the Anglican communion service are broadcast on Sundays and the station has a quite different feel from the morning to night pop music or hard evangelistic radio stations which dominate rural Africa. In an area which has recently suffered internal conflicts as well as armed attacks from terror groups, it is a voice of peace, of progress and of development.

JoshuaFM was funded by generous gifts from members of St Simons (CofE) and Corpus Christi (Catholic) parishes in Portsmouth. At present advertisements (yes - unsuitable ones are declined) fund the staffing and day-to-day running costs but new equipment still depends on donations. Using its present equipment the station can be heard up to fifty miles away but, if a strong signal is to be heard in the areas nearer to the frontier with Sudan, money will have to be raised for a more powerful one kilowatt transmitter. Until then the generator will continue to throb, the presenters will try to keep the local baboons away from the studio and the mast, and programmes will encourage local people to work together to build peace and prosperity.

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Joshua FM is non-profit making (limited by guarantee). It is run by Grace Akello, the Uganda-based wife of Councillor Hugh Mason of Portsmouth. The current transmitter is 300 Watt, built by Broadcast Warehouse of Croydon.
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