As part of an ongoing project, dental health charity Dentaid is aiming to raise enough money to help provide Kitongo Hospital in Uganda with a fully equipped refurbished dental surgery. This will allow for a significant expansion of the school and community outreach services they can offer by providing a referral centre within the hospital to which more serious and complicated cases can be sent. Kitongo Hospital was originally a community health centre, however in January 2007 it was upgraded to hospital status when new departments, including a new dental department were introduced. The renovation of the centre has not yet been complete and plans to put in a theatre and increase the number of buildings are underway. The reasons for this change of status came about due to the high population and poverty level of the area; people could not afford to travel long distances to the next hospital and sometimes emergency cases were not reaching hospital in time.

Uncomfortable surroundings
Dental services were introduced to the hospital in January 2007, but due to lack of equipment extraction is the only service offered. Dental procedures are carried out in an office chair, which makes the work extremely uncomfortable for both dentist and patients. The instruments are sterilised using a boiler as there is no proper sterilisation equipment.

There is currently one full-time dentist and a dental nurse who are supported by volunteer students from the community who help out at chairside and with the community outreach programmes. Treatment is carried out for free as the hospital is supported by the Government, while wages and consumables are provided by Government funding.

The Government, however, does not give oral health high priority and there is no funding put aside for any kind of promotion of oral health care services in the district communities. Dr Angel, the full-time dentist for the Kitongo Hospital dental department has instigated outreach clinics which take place in schools and local community centres once a month. Volunteers are also used for these clinics. The school outreaches are undertaken for children aged between six and 15 and priority is given to the most rural schools where the population would struggle the most to receive dental care.

Filling the gaps
There is no national provision for dental health care; it is up to these kinds of dental centres to fill this gap until a national strategy comes becomes reality. Dentaid is also involved in attempting to make changes at a higher level through its advocacy strategic priority. However, changes won’t happen in the near future and oral health problems at the grass roots need to be addressed now. The project has significant support from both the community and the government.

If you are interested in sponsoring this project, contact Dentaid to find out more about the costs on 01794 524249 or by emailing info@dentaid.org.