Dr Frank Mugisha is the only dental surgeon at Ruhooko Hospital in south-western Uganda, and during the three years he has been there, extractions are the only treatment he has been able to offer (apart from scaling) as a few forceps are the only other instruments he has.

Although the hospital is government-funded, repeated efforts to obtain a fully equipped dental surgery have been fruitless. Oral health is not given any priority in Uganda and has been largely neglected in national programmes, possibly because the majority of dental disease is not seen as life-threatening.

Records show that Ruhooko Hospital Dental Department receives around 1,000 patients each month; only those requiring simple extractions can be treated while others have to be referred to Mbura Hospital, which is 200km away.

Dentaid offers help

Dr Mugisha has approached Dentaid for help in providing equipment and instruments to enable him to offer a full range of services to the local people. He particularly wishes to be able to conserve carious teeth rather than extract them; to be able to provide surgical treatment and fracture management; and to offer scaling, endodontics and orthodontic procedures. All treatment is free of charge, and if a Dentaid surgery is received, Dr Mugisha estimates that 300 patients could be treated each week.

Suction by turkey baster!

Silvia Morales is a Mexican dentist, who, for the past five years, has been providing free treatment to poor children and their families in Nicaragua through local charity, Pro-Dental Mission Service.

She says: ‘Our objective in creating the dental mission is to reach people who are too poor to afford dental care. Many live on the rural outskirts of the city and cannot pay the added expense for transportation. So we go to them.

‘For this reason, we would value portable equipment as well, so that we can move it easily from the established clinic to more remote areas and back again. We use rudimentary dental equipment and improvise in many ways. For example, the light that we use burns very hot which means we can only use it for a short while. While it cools, my assistant uses a battery-operated flashlight as well as headlight.

‘Since we do not have adequate suction equipment, we use a turkey baster which we sterilise between patients. This, as you may imagine, considerably slows the process and we are not able to work on as many patients’ teeth.

‘Our industrial air compressor, which is exceptionally loud, requires our technician to remain nearby because the hoses leak and provide inconsistent power – at this moment it needs new parts.

Can you help?

Each of these projects requires funding of around £4,500 to cover equipment, crating and air-freight. If you, your practice, company or local group would like to help towards these worthwhile projects, please contact Dentaid, Giles Lane, Landford, Salisbury, Wilts SP5 2BG; call 01794 324249 or email info@dentaid.org.

If you have redundant equipment or instruments that could be given a second lease of life in a developing country, please contact Richard Grapes on 01794 625148 or email projects@dentaid.org.