



Berna lives in the town of Rakai in Southern Uganda. She lives there with her grandfather and seven of his grandchildren. Seven children is a lot to look after for a grandfather, and so Berna has become the head of the household at age 15. She does not go to school and is about the poorest out of all her friends in Rakai.

Berna has grown up fast and looks after the younger children – she acts like a mother to them. When they get back from school Berna makes them all dinner, if there is enough food. The town's people usually eat savoury bananas, but Berna's family often have to eat maize meal and end up just drinking tea when there is nothing else. They have planned ahead though by planting some maize, beans and cassava to eat once it is ready to harvest.

The younger children help with the jobs by fetching water and going to get things. Occasionally they go and work on coffee plantations, when possible, to earn some badly needed money. It doesn't go very far though; it costs 500 Ugandan Shillings (about 15p) to feed the family one meal and they earn about 2,000 Ugandan Shillings (about 60p) a day at the plantation. It doesn't help that they have to pay for secondary school as well. As food is the most important thing for them they can't afford to buy any other everyday expensive things like new clothes and soap - Berna has trouble sometimes getting the children to wash at all. The house has leaks and needs some attention to the walls and when the children are ill she can't buy medicines, so she uses herbs, which only help a little.

Things have been difficult for Berna since her parents died, her mother in 2001 and her father in 1996, but she does her best to look after everyone. Even in the district where she lives her family are seen as poor. Everyday is a challenge to keep the family healthy and alive.

### Facts about Berna's Family:

- *Berna's grandfather is 90 years old*
- *Her parents died of AIDS*
- *Rakai is a poor area*
- *The children are aged between 10 and 13*
- *A charity called World Vision has provided medicine for the very ill*
- *Berna sometimes cooks using paraffin, but there often isn't any*
- *They all have poor diets and not enough food*



Berna has now been given some help in her difficult situation. Send a Cow is a charity that provides farm animals for people like her. They gave her a male goat, two females and six chickens.

She was very happy about receiving these gifts. It means that she can breed the goats and sell kids (baby goats) for 30,000 Shillings each (about £10). Not only that but the manure that the goats produce is good for the soil, so now they use it on their vegetables and banana plants.

The chickens live around the house in the corners of rooms, which is quite lively! They have to do this so that no one steals them. Instead of eating the eggs straight away, Berna is letting them hatch so that they have some chicks. She hopes to have a flock of 15 chickens when they are grown up - the eggs laid by the flock will be really healthy for them and they can start selling the rest of the eggs. Chickens also make a lot of mess but that is good for the soil, so all of their crops should grow really well.

With the eggs, vegetables and manure for the crops, Berna's family will be healthier and not need medicine so often. Also, when they sell kids and eggs Berna will be able to afford to send all of the children to school. There is work to do though, the children have to look after the animals and fetch fodder from the fields. Mango leaves, other fruit leaves and banana plant stems have to be cut up for the goats.

All of this is great for the family, as they know how much the animals will benefit them. There will be better food and soil and some money coming into the house. One of the other good things is that they agreed to give away their first female goat to someone else that needs it. Then those people will also give away their first female born. This way they can all pass on the gift throughout the village over the years.

Things are still hard, but looking much better for Berna and her family. One of the children even says that he wants to study hard so that he can become a teacher!