

SEDCU

Supporting the Education of Disadvantaged Children in Uganda

January 2021

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Newsletter 14

Welcome to SEDCU Newsletter No.14 covering the period August 2020 – January 2021

The Ugandan Government closed all schools, colleges and universities in March 2020 to limit the spread of the corona virus. In October, as part of an easing of restrictions, schools and colleges were allowed to re-open but only for the year groups that were due to take national exams. There was also an exemption for special needs pupils. As a result, six of the thirty children sponsored by SEDCU were able to return to school. In this issue of the newsletter, we provide an update on how children and their families and schools have been coping over the last six months and a possible the outlook for 2021.

Back to School for Some

After taking rigorous precautions and being passed as safe both KDS and MCJS opened their doors once again to a minority of pupils in October. At MCJS it was only the P7 candidates who could return.

At KDS, as well as P7 pupils, those children with disabilities were able to return including five sponsored through SEDCU. Prior to the pupils returning to school parents were invited to attend a socially distanced meeting about “sensitisation” addressed by the Head Teacher.



Deaf students wearing masks and socially distanced in a classroom.

The SEDCU sponsored deaf students were all able to stay at the school over the Christmas and New Year holidays to minimise travel back and forth to their homes.



Here we see F laden with her “requirements” on her return to KDS.



Special needs children all received COVID19 messages at a general assembly.



Our sponsored blind boy, G, who should have been starting his University course, is shown here sitting at the front of the class at KDS assisting with braille, IT and other skills.

We are delighted to report that just before going to press we heard from our contact in Kisoro that G, who was waiting to hear about his future at Makerere University had had some interviews and, whilst not being accepted for the course in Law for which he hoped, has passed the interviews for Government Sponsorship to study for Bachelor of Education.



And to College for Others...



One young lady, shown here, is completing the first part of her course and will take exams, so she was able to return to her Vocational College.

At Kisoro Vision Secondary School one of our sponsored students taking his A-levels was also able to return to his studies.

Another student emailed us to say that her University was going to repeat the year *“We're not studying online we are just at home; we just made a dead year so we're to start where we stopped”*

In total, only six of the thirty young people sponsored by SEDCU have returned to school.

For the Trustees and sponsors it has been a relief to know that the children are all physically well - although we and the staff at the schools are all very aware of the responsibilities we have towards safeguarding these vulnerable young people not only physically but mentally and emotionally. Our trusted contacts have been most assiduous in providing foodstuffs, making contact wherever possible in person or by telephone and endeavouring to ensure the safety of all the young people involved and we applaud their dedication.

Continued Support for Schools and Staff

SEDCU continued to provide some financial support for teachers laid off without pay at Mgahinga Community Junior School (MCJS), Kisoro Demonstration School (KDS) and Hornby High School (HHS). In October, MCJS were given permission to re-open the school, but only for the top (P7) class whose pupils will be taking their leaving exams. This was also subject to their required precautions against COVID infections being approved by the relevant authorities. However this created a financial problem as explained in the email we received from which we can quote:

“ The challenge we have got is the budget to run the class for two remaining terms due to a number of pupils in school vs the teaching and non- teaching staff, where we've got only 9 pupils being served by 3 teachers (including head teacher), a cook and a night watchman. Also, one of the government procedures is that every school must choose to be either a day or boarding. ”

Although none of the P7 class students are SEDCU sponsored, the trustees decided to provide the sum requested (about £1250 after taking account of local contributions) to enable the class to function and the P7 children to take their exams. All 9 pupils are boarding and are staying within the school to minimise contact with others.

Lockdown Continues for Most

All schools and colleges were closed as part of a strong national lockdown which was implemented on March 20th last year. There was some easing of restrictions during the Summer, and at time of writing the reported statistics show that Uganda has been far less impacted than many other countries. By the third week of January there had been 38,800 reported cases and 316 deaths. We must, however, recognise that despite all the precautions, the situation in Uganda might worsen as the virus spreads across the African continent.

In the education sector, as already reported, there was a very limited relaxation of restrictions in mid-October when exam year students taking P7 national exams for entry to secondary school as well as O and A level students were allowed to return to schools. Children with severe disabilities or other special needs were also allowed back, which has been helpful for some of our sponsored children, and some vocational colleges re-opened, again just for exam year students. The October to December period has been classified as term two, and the third term began on January 18th and will run until March/April when exams will be completed.

An article in a National newspaper explained the thinking and highlighted some concerns. The following is an extract:

“Overall, global evidence suggests that young children have lower susceptibility to infection compared to adults, with susceptibility generally increasing with age, and that children are less likely to be main transmitters of infection. However, where the virus local transmission rate is more prevalent or where safety measures cannot be universally implemented like the case of Uganda - because of crowded classrooms, lack of water, sanitation and health (WASH) facilities, crowded school transportation services, or insufficient and, therefore, shared teaching and learning materials and a prevalence of households that include elderly people as well as children – decision-making becomes more complex. In spite of the risks of opening schools as already observed above, it is very clear that continued closure of schools does more harm than good. The longer the children are out of school, the less likely they are to return. When classes were reopened for finalists, some students were not been able to return. We have already seen girls being out of school have also increased the risk of teenage pregnancy, sexual exploitation, child marriage, violence and other threats on top of causing stress and anxiety due to loss of peer interaction and disrupted routines. Even those doing remote learning are not doing any better. As parents of children affected by school closures will know, remote learning has not been a good substitute for in-person instruction.”

At time of writing, we do not have news of when schools, colleges and universities will be allowed to fully re-open, nor what requirements they will have to comply with for this to be possible.

During the last nine months, all we have been able to do as a charity has been to help relieve the impacts of the severe poverty caused by the pandemic as it affects our children and their families and teachers and schools in a country where there is no real social security system, no unemployment benefit - and no furlough scheme! We have kept in close contact with the key people in the schools and communities where they are located. We have been very grateful for donations from supporters. These have boosted our reserves which must stand ready to cope with all sorts of needs which are bound to emerge once Uganda starts to return to more normal life, including the full re-opening of schools, colleges and universities.

Support For Communities While Protecting Wildlife

The following article entitled **“Eyes on the Prize for Ugandan poachers turned Conservationists”** for The Times written by Patrick Meinhardt appeared in the National press in December and referred to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park which is some 40 km to the north of Kisoro as the crow flies

Bernard Katungi is chairman of a reformed poachers association in Uganda. “It is easy to return to old ways when you are hungry,” he says.



Resisting the urge to hurl a spear at a passing bush pig or a buck is still a struggle for Petero Tibategeza. Hunting in Africa’s oldest rainforest was his life for half a century. “My arm twitches when I see something running,” he admitted, jerking his stick in a mock throw. “It comes like breathing.” Mr Tibategeza, 62, was finally persuaded to surrender his traps and snares four years ago by his local association of reformed poachers in Nkuringo, on the edge of Uganda’s Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. In return for taking an oath not to plunder the natural assets of the forest, the group’s 150 members are helped to establish alternative, sustainable incomes without the need to poach or log.

Around the same time the following article was posted on the Mgahinga Community Development Organisation (MCDO) Facebook page:



“On 7th December 2020, MCDO team was happy to be hosted by the Chairperson of the Mgahinga Reformed Poachers Association (MRPA) at its onion growing project which was supported by MCDO. The group members have finished transplanting the onion seedlings from the nursery bed to the main garden. They are taking much care though much rain but so far so good.... What motivates all of us more is to see the group members putting more efforts in agricultural activities than they used to put in poaching. "Helping people and wildlife"!!!!”

Fundraising News

Fundraising has been tough for most charities this year, and we are bound to recognise that the majority of people in the UK have been particularly keen to support health charities and also those that cater for the needs of people in this country most severely impacted by the pandemic. SEDCU has been fortunate that it has a loyal band of supporters who have not failed us in this difficult year. Despite all the obstacles we have been able to pursue some modest fundraising activities.

Christmas Hamper

SEDCU was delighted to have the opportunity to raffle off this beautiful hamper in December 2020. The hamper contained some original Ugandan crafts and produce that the trustees brought back from their last visit in 2019 along with lots of yummy treats, a perfect addition to anyone's holiday season! In an appropriately socially distanced manner, the lucky winner was presented with her hamper on Christmas Eve. The raffle raised £148.



Where there's muck there's gold!

Fundraising for overseas charities has been particularly difficult, but the need to continue to provide funding for the children and schools we normally support in Uganda is as strong as ever.



One of our supporters keeps horses and suggested that we might like to bag up and sell their output with the proceeds going to SEDCU. A brilliant idea for fruitful activity during lockdown! Here you can see Ben bagging up well - rotted horse manure, assisted by Nicola whose horses produce the raw material. This looked like a practical way for the local citizens to perk up their roses while also helping disadvantaged children in Uganda.

We are pleased to report that this venture proved very successful – Jan took quite a few orders and the customers were so pleased with the product they have already placed orders for Autumn 2021!

Selling Lake District Paintings

We reported in the last newsletter that SEDCU had been in receipt of a collection of about 150 original watercolours to be sold in aid of the charity. They feature landscapes in the South and North Lake District, the Pennines, Yorkshire Dales – as well as South of France, Canada and Sri Lanka. Two gift shops and two galleries have agreed to display some pictures, but sales have not been helped by retail shop closures forced by the pandemic; we will hope for better times in 2021.



Water In Uganda



Recently, tucked inside a weekend newspaper, was a leaflet from the charity WaterAid with some amazing facts and figures. Its headline paragraph stated that, for the first time in history, 9 out of 10 people in the world have clean water. Even so 800 children, under 5, will die today from diseases caused by dirty water and poor sanitation.

Since SEDCU has made Water Tanks and the Sanitary Block at Mgahinga priorities for fundraising, I determined to find out more about the facts and figures and the situation in Uganda today. The WaterAid website was very comprehensive and I learned that:

1. 21.9 million people still do not have clean water – that is over half the population. Much of Uganda is open water and swamp land but this is undrinkable. Meanwhile high demand and poor management lead to shortages of clean ground water – facilities are under strain in towns and cities, and the springs and wells that rural communities rely on are mostly used up.
2. 8 out of every 10 people don't have a decent toilet. That's 35 million people without this basic necessity.
3. Over 3,000 children under 5 die a year from diarrhoea – caused by dirty water and poor toilets.
4. WaterAid is working with the Ugandan Government towards their ambitious goal of reaching everyone with clean water by 2040.

With your support SEDCU has, meanwhile, played its part too, and for that we all thank you. Jan

Future Outlook

The future outlook for SEDCU in 2021 is entirely dependent on decisions taken by the Ugandan Government on re-opening schools, colleges and universities while still combatting the COVID virus and protecting the health of the population. We cannot presume to second-guess these tricky decisions. The present situation is that only exam year classes are continuing, so around 1.2 million pupils out of 15 million are in school as we go to press. A recent newspaper article reported that talks were continuing between the Education and Health Ministers on school re-opening weighed against the risks posed to public health. Of course this is very familiar territory as similar issues continue to be debated in the UK.

As a charity, SEDCU must be flexible and stand ready to assist as best we can. As mentioned elsewhere, we have been providing some support to teachers and schools over the past 10 months, and this support may well need to be continued. Alternatively, if schools are allowed to reopen, there may be conditions to be met which might require an input from SEDCU to achieve this. We do have some financial reserves and we are also confident that our supporters will continue to demonstrate their commitment to SEDCU and what we stand for. We will be sure to keep you all updated on the latest developments.

Thank you to our sponsors, donors, supporters and all who take an interest in SEDCU. Together we can continue to make our stated mission a reality. If you wish to donate you can do so through the website or by cheque made out to SEDCU and mailed to Lowstead, Highford Lane, Hexham NE46 2DP. Or you can pay online into the SEDCU account, sort code 20-74-81, account number 83561356.

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