

# SEDCU

Supporting the Education of Disadvantaged Children in Uganda

January 2024

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Newsletter 20

## Welcome to SEDCU Newsletter No.20 covering the period August 2023– January 2024

As we welcome 2024, we are pleased to be able to report that SEDCU is in good health and our sponsored children have mostly continued to achieve objectives and to realise their potential. Despite the troubling world situation, and continued fears of terrorism in parts of Uganda, we are pleased to be able to celebrate the achievements of sponsored children of all ages, and to look forward to implementation of plans which the Trustees have developed for the next two years. Our focus will continue to be enhancing the quality of education and seeking to broaden the children's horizons, and we take this opportunity to salute the teaching staff and community members for their hard work and relentless commitment.

### Environmental Education Study Trip Opens Childrens' Eyes

Following a pilot trip in January 2023 for disabled scouts from KDS, we have decided - in conjunction with the schools - to initiate an annual environmental study trip for the older (P7) children at both primary schools supported by SEDCU (KDS and MCJS). The purpose of such trips is to broaden their horizons and educate them (and the accompanying teachers) about the world around them and more specifically about the environment, wildlife, vegetation, and the Ugandan geography.

In late November, the first such trip took place over 4 days involving 28 children from KDS (8 disabled and 20 able-bodied) plus 4 teachers and the headteacher. They visited Entebbe Zoo where they saw animals they would never have encountered. Despite living in Africa, very few children have seen the big 5! They then travelled across the equator and stopped there to understand its significance. After that they visited a rehabilitation centre to be exposed to different skills such as shoe making, carpentry, tailoring, vegetable growing, and keeping goats and pigs. Another visit was to a farming institute where they learned about viticulture, sprinkler irrigation, rabbit rearing and other farming activities.

Children and the teachers visited Entebbe beach, on the banks of Lake Victoria

To bring alive the impacts of the trip on the next page are some quotes from the children themselves, as reported by their teachers (which were not just about wildlife!).



By the time we reached at Chuya (Bamboo) forest she said that before reaching Kanaba at the check point, this is where Kisoro District Ends. *"I thought this is where world ends"*. She used to stand in Kisoro and think that there is no any other country after Kanaba. So, the tour had opened her eyes ahead.

*"Educational Trip has made us like Kisoro Demo the more because of the tour which enabled us to be exposed to the world."* Special Needs children has made us known by the world, some of the pupils said.

One of the pupils said, *"When I grow and get money will give back to Kisoro Demo School for the opportunity got in life"*.

*"Before the educational Trip, I used to hear of the 6-15 storied houses, traffic lights and also knew Lake Victoria from the textbook and the teachers as the biggest lake in Uganda but now we have seen it with our eyes"*. The children will now engage in structured learning to embed what they have learned during the trip.

The next such trip will be for pupils at MCJS , provisionally planned for February 2024.

### Year ends well at KDS

Term 3 ended at the beginning of December and staff and children are on their winter break, apart from a few children who live at KDS year-round. There were 145 children enrolled with various categories of special needs and vulnerabilities, of which 6 are sponsored through SEDCU. KDS also manage 6 blind and deaf children in secondary school and vocational college. Children with hearing or visual impairment are given remedial teaching in the morning, evening and over the weekends.

Children with special needs receive education tailored to their needs and are also taught vocational skills, i.e. computing, tailoring, knitting and gardening which may help them to live independently in their communities in future. They may also be involved in scouting, music, dance, drama, sports and athletics.



There is a school farm where they grow spinach, cabbages, sweet potatoes, maize and beans. Children learn agricultural skills such as nursery bed preparation, seed planting, crop planting, weeding, ploughing, harvesting and storage. Here you can see a vegetable nursery bed prepared by I; the seedlings will be transplanted and grown this month.



### ALUMNI

The school keeps in touch with SEDCU sponsored children after they leave education (SEDCU Alumni) and is particularly proud of the achievements of G and S. S has obtained a government funded position in the Ugandan health service. She has been testing refugees for Covid. We have written elsewhere about G achievements in the field of sport. The school talks about them as role models for the other sponsored children.

E, who is deaf, attended Vocational College after leaving KDS, then returned and worked at the school making uniforms for another year, to gain experience. She now has her own workshop back in her home village. We wish her every success with her venture.





## KDS TEACHER GAINING DEGREE

As our supporters will know, the Trustees are very keen to support teachers at KDS and MCJS with upgrading their qualifications and acquiring new ideas to improve their teaching – and their enjoyment of their chosen profession.

Currently Niyonzima Nestor (KDS) is embarking on the last year of his course which he will complete in January 2025. He tells us he has:

“so far achieved great improvement in braille reading and writing and improved his knowledge of assisting learners in assessment of brailled work.....acquired knowledge in braille equipment repair and maintenance...improved his knowledge of the computer and use of devices like the embosser and calculators”.

Most importantly, he has:

“improved on methods and acquired new other methods of handling Special Needs learners....sharing acquired knowledge with other teachers so that they also get the knowledge of assisting special needs children in their classes.” This work is challenging at the best of times, and we applaud Nestor for using his holidays and spare time to improve his teaching and work with these special children and wish him well with this final year.

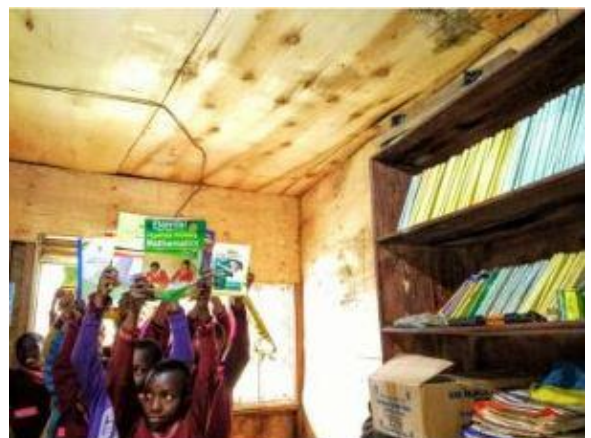


**Nestor with Alex the KDS Welfare Officer and sponsored child Y.**

## Textbook Library Project completed

We are delighted to report that the 2023 MCJS textbook library project is completed! The school had identified 62 different titles they were seeking to purchase with quantities mostly of 5 or 10 of each leading to a total of 420 books. These were purchased from an educational book wholesaler together with a new school laptop and scanner/printer for a total of about £2,300. We are grateful to several individual donors who provided much of what was needed, together with the Lions Club of Hexham who enabled us to reach the total in October.

The unpacking of some of the long-awaited books!



## NEWS FROM MGAHINGA

When we visited the school in March 2023 there were 180 pupils registered at the school. When it closed in December, at the end of the school year, there were 195 on roll. The success of the pupils in the P7 Leaving Exams is becoming well known and more and more parents want this quality of teaching for their children. This year there were 12 pupils in P7 sitting the exams. In February, when the school opens for the new academic year, we understand there will be 20 on roll in P7. We wish all the staff a highly rewarding and successful year.

The increase in pupil numbers means that part of the dining room is now being used as an additional classroom. To make it soundproof the builders have inserted a partition to divide it in two and create a soundproof working environment. This now awaits painting then it will be ready to receive P7 in February! Other good news is that the Sanitary Block bio-gas system has been completed and is now fuelling the stove in the kitchen! MCJS wrote:

“We are happy and thankful that the final touches were installed by July 2023, where throughout the mentioned challenges, the project is finally declared complete. As expected, the bio-gas is not meant to cook big volumes of meals for bigger numbers of people but can cook small volumes including boiling some water and other simple cooking tasks. The main reason for the system was to improve the sanitary block from being smelly hence conducive environment therein, by extracting the gas for another usage. Many thanks to SEDCU and supporters for such a great achievement!”



**MCJS teacher (and future pupil?!) in class P3.**

On our last visit to Kisoro in March 2023 we were interested and impressed to see that the Metropolitan University of Uganda had established a centre in Kisoro. This January, the Head Teacher of MCJS, Iragena Innocent, will begin a degree course in Education there. We wish him good luck with the initial reading, the projects and orientation - and will follow his progress with great interest. This will be quite a challenge on top of his role as Head Teacher!

## Congratulations to Festo!

Festo Kamanzi, our primary contact at MCDO since 2011, has been recognised for his achievements by the Center for Peer Driven Change (PDG). The citation says *“The Center is recognising nine wonderful global citizens as Peer Change Fellows 2023....(this) recognises unsung, unrecognised leaders. Festo promotes self-reliance and mutuality as well as continuing to teach and provide opportunities to youth and women. He seeks to act as a ‘fulfillment agent’ connecting his neighbours to the resources they need to improve their lives”.*

The SEDCU trustees have long appreciated the wonderful work Festo has done in changing young lives within the MgaHINGA community. We are delighted by this well-deserved global recognition.



**Festo (on the left) together with Philip (Chair of Governors), Innocent (Head Teacher) and Jan.**



## SEASONS FOR WOMEN

Period Poverty is a topic being discussed worldwide.



In 2019 the Trustees visited a room in Mgahinga where a group of ladies had just established “Seasons for Women” and were making sanitary pads with the aim of distributing them to school age girls and young women to prevent them from taking time out from school every month. They were dependent on donations of fabric and from well-wishers. Since they started, they have distributed more than 1,500 reusable pads in schools and to some community women. Well-wishers support them with materials.

Four years later, they still operate from the same rooms but have trained 25 young women/girls! Currently 2 are employed full time as trainers, the other 23 are contracted as part time workers when they are making sanitary pads in large quantities. The founder, Patricia, is employed by Mgahinga Community Development Organisation (MCDO), as the administrator and there is a field co-ordinator. In 2023, they sold only 35% of the pads, distributing the others for free. Their projection is to sell 60% of the pads for sustainability of the project through investing more in sensitisation and marketing.



Both MCJS and KDS have benefitted from this scheme. 300 pads were distributed to girls at KDS at the beginning of the first term. Here a trainer is demonstrating how to use and care for the pads at KDS. Note that boys are being educated alongside the girls.

The girls with their pads!  
SEDCU salutes Patricia and her teams!



## SEDCU Strategic Plan and Priorities

SEDCU is 12 years old! We have come a long way but there is always more to do! The Trustees have spent some time reflecting on what has been achieved and where we should go from here. We are proud to be able to recognise the achievements of children and young people of all ages who have benefitted from education they might otherwise not have had, or which has surpassed what could have been available for them. We can also reflect on all manner of enhancements to school buildings, training of teachers, and supporting children of all ages to gain broader perspectives through trips, for example to attend national sporting and scouting events.

The Trustees have recognised that, as children have progressed through the educational system, many have been able to go on to secondary schools, to vocational colleges or to university. Others are heading in the same direction, so a charity that was almost exclusively supporting children up to age 13 in primary schools has now reached the stage where some 50% have moved on from primary to other institutions, and this percentage will continue to rise. The cost of sponsorship for older children tends to be much higher, so a greater proportion of SEDCU income is now devoted to sponsorship. We are very relieved that we founded the Bursary Scheme which has proved its value in providing equipment and scholastic materials for older students and topping up sponsorships where required. In 6 years' time, all those sponsored children currently at primary school will have left and the majority will have moved on to secondary or tertiary education. We also have first examples of young people who have graduated and are starting out on their careers. We wish them every success!!

Meanwhile we will continue to fund important projects to support and enhance the primary schools, with our main focus moving away from bricks and mortar to teacher education, environmental study trips, national sports and scouting events for disabled children and other projects to enhance the breadth and quality of education.

The future for SEDCU is bright and we have no lack of ambition, but of course all this will only be possible thanks to the continuing generosity of our sponsors and donors!



Congratulations to P who has graduated from College and is now job hunting!

## Sad News of Terrorism in Uganda

In the last newsletter we reported on the attack on a school near the border with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) in June with a substantial loss of life. Unfortunately, there have been further attacks in recent months.

On October 17th, two British tourists and their local guide were murdered in the Queen Elizabeth National Park. This is the most popular park for tourists and is some 300 Kms North of the schools where SEDCU is active. As a result, the UK Foreign Office has advised against all but essential travel in the Kibale Forest and surrounding areas, which is having an adverse impact on tourism. The Ugandan Government has reported continuing military action in the area and on November 1st announced it had arrested an Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) leader and killed 6 others.

More recently there has unfortunately been news of two more attacks by ADF forces on Ugandan territory in Kamwenge with 10 people in one village near Kibale National Park killed in the first attack and 3 more killed a week later, on Christmas Day. Ugandan Forces are engaged in continuing operations to track down the guilty parties. (Source: Uganda Daily Monitor)

## SPORTING SUCCESS AND RECOGNITION



Once again, a SEDCU sponsored pupil has achieved sporting success. HORNBY HIGH SCHOOL participated in the 2023 Uganda Paralympics sports gala which took place from 2nd Oct to 8th Oct 2023. The school performed very well and managed to be second overall. Out of 28 pupils who participated, CW won two gold and two silver medals. He and another pupil were called for a national trial in November to prove their abilities in the races. If successful they will participate in East African Paralympics Gala in Kigali, Rwanda and the All-Africa games in Morocco in early 2024. Here he is posing with his trophy and medals at the Equator!

This same young man was voted to be secretary for PWDs (People with Disabilities) at district level UNSA (Uganda National Students Association)! Apparently, he surprised everyone! After grasping the oath he said it without reading it - while the sighted were failing to read it fluently!



## G is aiming high!

G is a blind young man who has been sponsored through SEDCU since 2012 and who is about to graduate from Makerere University with a degree in English. In parallel with his studies, he has been engaged in several sports and is aiming higher and higher. In August he came to the UK to participate in the International Blind Sports Association event which was being held in Birmingham. G had been selected to represent Uganda in Archery for blind competitors following his success in earlier heats. He did extremely well and came 4th overall, so just missed the Bronze medal. The Gold, Silver and Bronze medals were all won by competitors from wealthy European countries (Belgium, Italy and UK). G was first out of all the African nations.

G is now hoping to qualify to represent his country in running and is busy training in Kampala. He hopes to qualify through heats in UAE, but the competition is tough, so we are crossing our fingers that he manages to make the Paralympic Games in Paris! How amazing is that?





## **It was a long walk!**

In the last newsletter we announced that Chairman Ben was going to walk the length of Hadrian's Wall to raise money for SEDCU. This was duly achieved in mid-October with Ben covering the 84 miles in 7 ½ days and recording 251,200 steps! Ben reported "The weather was mostly glorious and the scenery spectacular. It was tough at times to keep going, but I was buoyed up by the tremendous support from sponsors and even complete strangers who donated along the way; all helped to keep me motivated and moving on." We are delighted to report that some 65 people generously donated a total of over £4,500 (including Gift aid yet to be recovered). Most of this has been paid into the SEDCU Bursary Fund to cover the more costly needs of children progressing to secondary or tertiary education in future years.



## **FUNDRAISING**

Apart from this amazing walk, many other fundraising activities have taken place!

In Northamptonshire one of our sponsors raised £100 through coffee mornings! The team at Whispers in Hexham again raffled a hamper and raised £117! In Corbridge, a member of Hexham Inner Wheel once again contributed to the annual Christmas Tree Festival decorating the tree with bundles of pencils, tiny notebooks, crayons, Ugandan flags and profiles of the sponsored children. As well as contributing financially all these raise awareness of the work SEDCU does, and we are so grateful to all of them.

As we went to press we received a substantial donation from the PCC of the Stodden Churches and another from Hexham Abbey PCC for which we are most grateful.

**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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