

SEDCU

Supporting the Education of Disadvantaged Children in Uganda

January 2023

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Newsletter 18

Welcome to SEDCU Newsletter No.18 covering the period August 2022 – January 2023

In this newsletter we provide an update on the challenges being faced by the Ugandan population, set within the global context. We are fortunately able to reassure our supporters that the schools, colleges and universities attended by our 33 sponsored children appear to be operating reasonably normally, although we will be able to verify this during a visit to Uganda planned for March. SEDCU remains in good health, and we continue to be extremely grateful for the generosity of our supporters in these difficult times.

Challenges for Uganda in the year ahead

As we enter a new year, every country in the world is facing challenges; some are common to all countries while others are more specific. In his New Year address, President Museveni spelled out what he saw as priorities for Uganda. These were to deal with commodity shortages and consequent inflation caused partly by the war in Ukraine; to tackle crime more effectively; and to reduce 'okukongora' which apparently translates as idling around when others are working. Regarding commodity shortages, Uganda has taken a neutral stance concerning the war, and remains hopeful that there will be a negotiated settlement, but meanwhile it has chosen, for example, not to purchase cheaper oil from Russia. The shortages are also partly caused by lower than normal rainfall and the President argued for more intensive use of irrigation.

Turning to education, the main challenge as reported in the media would seem to be the impacts of the 82-week school closures imposed as part of the COVID lockdown, the longest in the world. It is estimated that 30% of children did not return to school after the lockdown. Considering, in particular, the privately funded schools where SEDCU largely operates, nearly 3000 primary schools remain permanently closed. The children who dropped out will find it hard to find jobs in future. The schools that have reopened have had to increase their fees by typically 20 – 30% due to rising energy and food costs, making it impossible for some parents to continue sending children to school. UNICEF has estimated that there has been a serious impact on girls' education with teenage pregnancies up by 25%, and pregnancies among 10 – 14 years in particular up by 366%.

To add to this national picture, there is an additional problem in Kisoro District where the primary schools supported by SEDCU are located. The fighting in the Uganda/Congo border region, which we wrote about in the last Newsletter, is continuing despite international efforts to arrange a ceasefire, so Kisoro continues to be swamped by refugees.



Of course, SEDCU cannot insulate the schools and the children whom we sponsor from this very challenging environment, but we are proud to have been able to provide some support during the lockdown. Almost all of the children have returned to education throughout the 2022 academic year. While the economic position is tough in the UK, we hope that our sponsors will nevertheless be able to cope with the inevitable rise in the costs of sponsorships and that our supporters will continue their invaluable contribution, for which we thank you.

News from Kisoro Demonstration School (KDS)

The school has 136 children with various categories of special needs. These categories include children with visual, hearing, physical, epilepsy, autism, dyslexia, health problems and other children living under difficult circumstances.

Their aim is to provide quality education to children with special needs especially children with hearing or visual impairment. Aiming at improving educational skills that will enable them to live independently and become role models in their communities. The school also aims to improve their health and welfare while they are at school.

Remedial teaching is also available in the evenings and over the weekends for those with special needs. SEDCU contributes to the salaries for the support staff helping the school in the upkeep of the learners with special needs.



All special needs children are fed at school and their menu is supplemented by other healthy foods. Children have the opportunity for agriculture lessons and practical work on the school farm and they benefit from adaptive technology to enhance their IT skills, as illustrated.



Children participate in a variety of other activities such as arts and crafts, sports, scouting, music, knitting, dance and drama. There is a separate article about the scouting events elsewhere in this issue.

Home visits are made termly by teachers of special needs children, and effort are made to improve the communications between children and their parents/families, for example through helping parents of deaf children to learn sign language. We are now eagerly awaiting the results of the P7 exams which will determine the future paths of the 3 deaf candidates who sat them.

Update on KDS teacher's degree course

In addition to sponsoring the children at KDS, SEDCU is supporting one teacher. N has completed the first year of his course: a Degree in Special Needs Education at Kyambogo University in Kampala, one of the largest Universities in Uganda. He has reported for the first session of the second year.



N at the University gates

Meeting Challenges



J is a member of the Mgahinga community. He was an excellent student at Kisoro Vision School and was rewarded for his hard work with a place at the Uganda Christian University campus in Kabale where he is studying for a degree in Social Work and Social Administration.

Recently J had a work experience placement in Kisoro, in the office of the Community Development Office. J found this challenging - he said, "it exposed me to a lot of knowledge" and he saw at first-hand how NGOs and Community Based Organisations fit in to the bigger picture.

Unfortunately, on his way home one evening he was attacked and left injured and shocked. Thankfully, he has made a good recovery.

A number of our university students have a smartphone as well as a laptop. These keep them in touch with family, tutors, friends and in some cases, sponsors! Thank you, WhatsApp!

News from Mgahinga Community Junior School (MCJS)

In this newsletter we are sharing with you the perspectives of our two key contacts in Mgahinga using their own words.

Overall Update – Festo Kamanzi, Programme Coordinator, MCDO

“In 2006, the members the local Farmers Association decided to support and promote the education of young children from the community by initiating a nursery school with the aim of providing these children with a better education. MCJS started as a day-care facility with about 20 children and later developed this into a formal school with support from various stakeholders.



Early days

The school now has two sections which are Nursery and Primary. Nursery comprises of three classes starting at 3-4 years of age. Primary has 7 classes starting from age 6-7 years. After primary year 7 exams, children can join a secondary school far away from this community. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the school enrolment has decreased from 180 in 2019 to 154 in 2022. There are 79 boys and 75 girls; 59 children are in the nursery and 95 in the primary school.

In 2012 SEDCU began contributing towards a number of projects at MCJS, such as funding school fees for a number of needy pupils, developing classrooms, kitchen/dining hall, water catchments, bio-toilets, solar system, library, teachers and community relief support especially during COVID-19 pandemic. All this was done with the aim of creating a better learning and teaching environment, and our heartfelt gratitude goes towards SEDCU and its supporters for being one of MCDO's major supporters.



MCJS today

The school has 11 teachers including the head teacher, 2 cooks and 1 night watchman. The former head teacher Mr. Kwesiga Julius is now in Kampala for university studies and he was replaced by Mr. Iragena Innocent, who holds a diploma in secondary education with vast experience in heading primary schools. The school is under some tension due to the COVID-19 pandemic: this has tipped school proprietors and parents into extreme poverty. Also, the Ukraine vs Russia and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) wars: these have caused shortage of basic essentials which have caused inflation of prices for everything, including food and fuel.

Also, when it comes to the DRC insurgencies, the M23 rebel group fighting with the Congolese Army has posed a very difficult time to people in Kisoro, with more than 40,000 refugees crossing the border nearby. Some were hosted in the Nyakabande Refugee Transit Camp while others have been staying in public open areas, peoples' verandas, rented houses and with relatives and friends, until they were forcefully taken to the Transit Camp. During peaceful time, many people in Kisoro have been getting food from DRC through farming and cross border business transactions. At the moment all that has stopped and this is accelerating food shortages. “



“In the first place, allow me to give thanks to the Almighty that has pushed us this far under His care and protection to both our partners (SEDCU) and our general community. I strongly believe by the grace of God, my devotion to MCJS and the role played by other stakeholders, we shall continue to achieve more! My sincere appreciation also goes to you for your continued and generous support in fostering the education and developing skills of this young generation”.

Here below are a few achievements, for the year just passed:

- *A wildlife club has been formed and is actively participating in conservation activities like planting trees and flowers in the school compound. Our pupils are being trained in farm skills by the head teacher who stays at school mostly in the weekends and so far we have harvested irishes [potatoes] which the pupils really enjoyed! In growth now, we have spinach and sukuma wiki vegetables. Great progress!*
- *Children and teachers are being fed on a balanced diet including vegetables from our small school garden.*
- *The girls in upper classes aged 10 and above are provided for with sanitary pads and health education. This has helped them a lot during their menstrual seasons.*
- *We hope to launch girl guides and boys brigade club this year. This will build a spirit of patriotism, helping and sharing both within at school and in the community. Our young boys managed to play quarter finals in a football championship at Muramba at district level.*

I'm devoted to creating a learning community which ensures all, including disadvantaged pupils, are well supported to reach their personal potential, and are equipped with the necessary academic, social, and life skills to ensure they become effective citizens of the community.

Positive highlighting of good behaviour and attendance is also my target. Everyone is encouraged to treat others with good respect and good manners and show concern for each other and our environment. Strategies have been put by staff to help pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs by guidance of Head Teacher.

I encourage inclusive quality teaching for all pupils through setting high expectations, monitoring standards and sharing of best practice. The training and development of staff is a key target through formal training and also organized workshops and seminars. It is my dream to pursue additional studies in primary education at University.

At MCJS, together with other stakeholders, every member is held to account for pupils' progress and protection. Everyone's rights are respected through regular academic and discipline meetings, signing child protection forms, and staff appraisal.

On another note, I would like to thank Kate [SEDCU trustee] for being so generous and offering to sponsor our Library. No words could possibly express how happy our children will be after receiving the text books! Your generosity for this young generation encourages me to be optimistic

Because of SEDCU's financial contributions, MCJS has become a better place to learn and the dreams of pupils turning into reality! Amidst all economic challenges, thank you so so much for being the people we can count on every now and then! We couldn't do anything without you! Most neighbouring schools have closed due to current economic situation. We continue to request parents to bring more children to MCJS. We strongly need and appreciate your help to continue pursuing our mission – **“Empowering for Generations”**.

In July this year, SEDCU provided the funds needed for 16 children from KDS to participate in the Ugandan National Scouting Jamboree to be held in Kaazi in August. We considered this would give those participating an amazing experience, but also to strengthen the message that children with disabilities can achieve so much if given the right opportunities. We are delighted to report that they were victorious in the relevant categories for disabled girls and boys. The local radio station ran the story and the following is an excerpt from the transcript:

"Kisoro Demonstration Primary School's pupils with disabilities emerged as national champions in the recently concluded competitions in Wakiso district. The school sent a delegation including boys and girls with different disabilities ranging from blindness, deafness, hearing impairment among others. In an interview with Voice of Muhabura, scout teachers at Kisoro Demonstration Primary School were excited to lead their pupils to a national success saying that it will motivate them to achieve more. They revealed that pupils emerged winners in both categories for deaf girls and blind boys and were given two trophies. They asked parents that have children with different disabilities not to hinder their abilities to compete in any competition including sports. They also applauded SEDCU, an organisation that provided financial and moral support to the team at the national level competitions. Voice of Muhabura spoke to one blind participant Niyonshima Talent who expressed joy for the milestone saying that he did not believe in himself before. He encouraged his fellow blind and deaf and those who cannot speak not to lose hope in their lives because disability is not inability"

As a result of these exceptional results, a team from KDS was chosen to participate in the East African event in Tanzania, representing Uganda. The costs were shared between SEDCU and another charity, and a total of 14 children were selected - 3 blind, 2 traumatised and 9 deaf children. In their uniforms they are all equal. The children were to travel to the campsite in Tanzania by coach via Rwanda, and they departed for this long journey on schedule. They had crossed the Uganda/Rwanda border and were travelling through Rwanda when news reached them that the Jamboree had been cancelled at the very last minute due to issues within the Tanzanian Scouts Association.



The children had to return to Kisoro; they and their adult leaders would have been bitterly disappointed. Part of our funds were used to purchase new uniforms, tents and equipment and we know these were put to use in Rwanda and will be used in future scouting events. We also know the children had some new experiences such as travelling into another country. Our contacts in Kisoro organised a one week educational trip as a consolation. This gave the children the chance to explore areas of Uganda they had never visited and to learn more about the environment. They visited the Uganda Wildlife Education Centre near Entebbe, the Uganda Museum, an Agricultural Research Farm and the Source of the Nile. Hopefully, this trip went some way to compensate the children. Unfortunately the change of plan gave them a lesson in life! Our thanks go to the staff who had prepared so meticulously for the opportunities and experiences to be offered in Tanzania, but whose care and consideration initiated this alternative adventure!.



Aiming for the Paralympic Games 2024

G is a blind student, sponsored through SEDCU, now studying for a degree in English at Makerere University in Kampala. Blind football is a growing sport in Uganda and there are now four teams. G is a member of one of the teams and has an ambition to be a member of the Ugandan team which might participate in the Paralympic Games in Paris in 2024. He was featured on national television (NTV Sport) where he explained that you need good listening skills to hear the bell inside the ball they use. He also mentioned the importance of good shin guards as blind footballers are particularly prone to injury. G is also seeking a place in the Ugandan Athletics Team. He told us that he has specialised in 500 and 1500 metres and hit the national time for the Uganda Paralympics. He hopes to participate in the All Africa Games in Malawi in 2023, and then he might qualify for the Paris Games too. We are very proud of him and wish him the best of luck!!

Graduation, Graduation, Graduation!!

A number of our sponsored students will graduate this year!

S will conclude her studies at ChemEquip Medical School in 2023. Prior to sitting her exams in November and December she did her field attachment at Lubaga Hospital in Kampala which has a rich history, having been founded in 1899. S has been studying for a Diploma in Medical Laboratory Technology and enjoying new challenges! S is described by people in Uganda as a "little person". She suffers from achondroplasia but she doesn't let that stop her doing what she wants!



A is blind and was a pupil at KDS and then Hornby High School. She studied hard and obtained a place at Bishop Wills Primary Teachers College. After completing her studies there and taking her final exams she is now awaiting the results. We are assuming she will triumph! Here she is with her mum!

The proposition which has been made by her teachers is that A should now return to KDS and spend the coming year refining her skills and spend a year teaching younger pupils to gain experience and an orientation to her future career. This seems very appropriate as KDS is called a Demonstration School because it accepts students for initial teaching work experience on a regular basis.



J suffers from familial deafness. However, she still has an amazing sense of rhythm!

J studied at KDS and then went on to St Bruno's Vocational College where she completed her two-year course in Tailoring and Knitting. She would like to study an advanced skill designing clothes. Like E who was previously sponsored before her, J will spend a year at KDS gaining experience and orientation in the world of work.

SEDCU IS SO PROUD OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THESE STUDENTS AND ACKNOWLEDGES THE IMPORTANT ROLE PLAYED BY THEIR SPONSORS AND SUPPORTERS

CONGRATULATIONS, Martin!

Hornby High School is one of only two secondary schools in all of Uganda that offers education to children who are blind and visually impaired. In September we received this email from the Head of Special Needs Education!

“Greetings from Hornby High School, I am very happy and extremely excited to thank you for the support you have always given to us whenever we called onto you. You supported us in 2019 to participate in the Uganda para-Olympics that was held in Mpigi. I was selected as the best Coach of that Year and I have been sent to the USA for a two week training in Adaptive Sports. It is from 18 Sept to 2 Oct 2022. We are currently in Colorado Springs at the US para-Olympic and Olympic Training Center. Next week we will go to Tucson, Az. All this has come to happen because of your continued support. I can only promise to continue doing my best for the good of the children put under my care.

Best regards,

Martin”

Kisoro International Vocational Institute KIVI

In our last Newsletter, we have referred often to the ongoing fighting in the northeast of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The Tutsi led group has advanced across the North Kivu province causing hundreds of thousands of people to flee in fear. In recent months refugees have poured over the border into Uganda and Kisoro District. Eyewitnesses said they looked exhausted, some carrying their belongings, others leading goats and cows. During the year we were approached with a request for support for the 30 students from DRC who were keen to learn but had very limited resources. The Trustees agreed to support this enterprise and were delighted with the outcome. In addition to providing foodstuffs, we could contribute to the necessities required for their courses in Tailoring, Food Production, Hairdressing, Plumbing, Building, Mechanics etc. among others. Well done, S, you deserve a round of applause!



Textbook Appeal

We are excited to be working with MCJS who are determining a list of text books that they require and we will shortly be launching a new fundraising campaign! We will be giving our supporters the opportunity to ‘buy a book’ and help Mgahinga stock their library with valuable text books which really enrich the children’s learning. These books will be purchased locally and are such a vital resource.



SEDCU
Build a library in 2022 campaign

A BIG THANK YOU

As we stated in our introductory paragraph, SEDCU has been the recipient of many very significant donations. We are extremely grateful to all those individuals who have been so generous. We also recognise the support of the **The PCC of Hexham Abbey, the JPCC of the Stodden Churches and Whispers of Hexham** and all our sponsors.

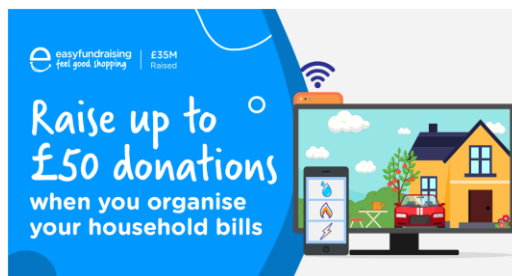
THANK YOU once again to the fabulous team at Whispers in Hexham for hosting the "A Taste of Africa" hamper and raising £100 for SEDCU! Congratulations to Mary, our Winner, pictured with stylist Sarah (who is proud to say it is always her clients who win!)



amazon

Once again we thank all our supporters who have chosen SEDCU as their Amazon Smile charity. To date we have received nigh on £120 !! Sadly, Amazon Smile, as we know it, is to be discontinued on February 20, 2023... It will concentrate "on continuing to pursue and invest in other programmes that we know will have more impact." It was good while it lasted!

As we have featured before SEDCU is now registered with **easyfundraising**, which means you can raise FREE donations for us every time you shop online! Please remember to use **easyfundraising** every time you shop online. Over 6,000 shops and sites will donate to **easyfundraising** raising money for SEDCU, including all the big names like eBay, John Lewis & Partners, Argos, ASOS, M&S and Just Eat! Plus, you could raise up to £50 donations when you use **easyfundraising** to save money on your household bills including car and home insurance, energy, phone contract or broadband. Uswitch, GoCompare, Confused.com and many more will all donate to us for FREE! We would really appreciate it if you could take a moment to sign up and support us. It's completely FREE and only takes a moment. You can find our easyfundraising page at <https://www.easyfundraising.org.uk/causes/sedcu> where you can sign up.



On the 27th May 2023, trustee Becky and three of her friends will be participating in the 5k colour obstacle rush. Becky is fundraising for SEDCU. If you would like to donate please use the following link or scan the QR code

<https://checkout.justgiving.com/c/2809308>



Unfortunately, Lee Coulson will be unable to run the London Marathon this year. He deferred his place in October 2022 to April 2023 but he is still unable to run. Lee is committed to supporting SEDCU through his running efforts so watch this space for his next event!

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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