

Welcome to SEDCU Newsletter No.13 covering the period January – July 2020

The Ugandan Government announced their lockdown on March 20th, and all schools and colleges were closed with immediate effect. They remain closed today. Meanwhile, the UK has been in lockdown from a similar date but is just starting to emerge from it. SEDCU's work has been seriously disrupted. In this issue, we report on the positive developments in January/February, at the very start of the school year. We also provide information on what has happened since then, and actions we have taken to mitigate impacts on schools and children - at least to some extent. We can only hope that life in UK and in Uganda will soon return to a 'new normal', that education can resume in Uganda in the coming Autumn or Winter, and that meanwhile all our sponsored children, their families and teachers and communities stay safe.

Exam successes

When the Trustees were in Uganda last October all the pupils in Year 7 were working hard towards their Primary Leaving Exams (PLE). Uganda Certificate of Education (UCE) O and A level students were also applying themselves and revising hard. They took their exams a few weeks later in November and in December the schools broke up for their "long" holiday of the year. School returned in February and by mid-February all the P7 candidates learned their fate. Happily, for those sponsored through SEDCU there was much satisfaction and joy. Their hard work had been rewarded.



Two blind boys from KDS had achieved excellent results and had gained places at Hornby High School in Kabale. Provided with all the necessary items for their new school lives they were settling in as the photo shows.

Three sponsored pupils from MCJS also achieved very high marks and were offered places at Kisoro Vision Secondary School. Here they joined other pupils sponsored through SEDCU. All would be boarding.

J, a deaf girl at KDS, was able to take up a place at Vocational College. A few weeks later O and A level results were announced. A, a blind girl who studied at KDS and then Hornby High School and took her O Level exams was awarded a place at Primary Teacher Training College.

G, another blind boy, had taken his A - levels and his results ensured that he will probably obtain a place at University in Kampala. Final places are awarded after interview. Lockdown was in place before this could happen.

All these young people should be congratulated on their achievements. The Trustees of SEDCU are enormously proud of them. Their results show their grit and determination to make best use of the opportunities sponsorship has offered them.

However, they have had their new school and further education careers cut short by Covid-19. After only a few days the Lockdown imposed in Uganda meant they were forced to return home to their families or guardians. Their disappointment and all the uncertainty must have been immense.

At this time of confusion, those who care for their well- being faced an extra load as they had only just prepared their students for their new lives.

These students are about to be returned to their homes after only a few days at Vocational College. Their faces say it all....



COVID 19 Pandemic closes schools

We were informed by contacts in Uganda that, on 20th March, the President of Uganda announced the decision to close all schools, colleges and universities in Uganda as one of many measures designed to prevent a corona virus epidemic. The closure was for 30 days in the first instance, but has since been extended several times, and is now indefinite. Airports and borders were closed with immediate effect. Subsequent announcements have included all forms of transport within the country being banned except for the most exceptional circumstances, also a night-time curfew. With almost all SEDCU sponsored children being boarders, the closures have meant that with no notice, transport has had to be organised for all children to return to their homes or to homes of family members as appropriate, in some cases involving long journeys. We can only hope that they and their teachers will all be safe, and that this will be helped by the remote location of their homes. However, with lack of sanitation and clean water in so many areas, the prospects for the Ugandan population, as a whole, could be dire.

As the lockdown continued, we became aware that the teachers at Mgahinga Community Junior School had been laid off without pay, and without access to any form of social security support. The SEDCU trustees decided to send funds to the Mgahinga Community Development Organisation (MCDO) to support the teachers and they are now receiving part of their salaries and have met either at the school, or by phone, to plan for the day when it might reopen.

Ladies working on face masks



We were also told about a plan for the group who produce sanitary products in the community to produce face coverings at the school for the community, and we decided to pay for the materials needed to get this work underway- here they are with some of the results in front of the school.

In a separate initiative, MCDO have launched an appeal for money to help feed the community members who have lost their ability to earn income due to the lockdown restrictions. On May 28th, MCDO donated Covid-19 relief items worth 6.5 million shillings (£1500) to over 300 vulnerable households in Muramba and Nyakinama sub-countries in the Kisoro District.



At Kisoro Demonstration School (KDS), with the lockdown continuing, the decision was taken to organise the distribution of food to the families of sponsored children who are in a difficult situation. Here are pictures of food delivery to some remote family homes.



We have also recently become aware that at KDS, and also Hornby High School (HHS), there are also teachers of disabled children who were laid off without pay and the SEDCU trustees decided to send some funds so that they, too, could be paid part salaries.

We are aware that the Government has taken various steps to seek to ensure children can continue to learn through home schooling, and we have seen advice issued to schools encouraging them to facilitate this. We understand there are centrally produced home- schooling broadcasts on radio and television. However, our contacts have commented that, for the vast majority of children living in remote parts of Kisoro District, access to such broadcasts is impossible as they live in dwellings with no electricity and no TVs or radios.

New Kitchen and Dining Hall at MCJS

We are delighted to inform readers that the new MCJS Kitchen and Dining Hall (which will also act as a hall for Assembly) has been completed. This project was part funded by SEDCU through our payment for the foundations and walls, with the roof being funded by a Swedish charity. Thank you to all our donors who made this possible.

Meeting with MCJS staff in the Dining/Multipurpose Hall



Here are pictures of an external view, and of a staff meeting being held in the Hall during the lockdown, with evident social distancing. We understand that the kitchen cooking stove is being assembled and commissioned.

New Sanitary Block at MCJS



We are very pleased to announce that this project is largely completed. A year ago, there were just architect's drawings, now the building is complete. They are just waiting for some of the equipment from Kenya, which is needed for the bio energy septic tank, and which has been held up due to the lockdown.

As the school has continued to grow, this is a truly vital facility for the health and well-being of pupils and staff. This project has been almost entirely funded by SEDCU (apart from a community contribution) and thanks go to the generosity of donors who made this possible.



The death of Rafiki, the Silverback, and mountain gorilla conservation in Uganda



Some of our readers may have read of the death of Rafiki, the Silverback, and group leader of the famous Nkuringo Group in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. Rafiki was killed by hunters who illegally entered the forest in search of game meat. SEDCU joins with MCDO in condemning this evil act of killing innocent animals. MCDO commented: “The death of Rafiki reaffirms threats to mountain gorilla conservation are still a significant concern. The coronavirus pandemic has added another layer of complexity since local people who depend on ecotourism are no longer getting the much-needed revenue. MCDO is very determined to continue working with Uganda Wildlife Authority and other conservation stakeholders to simultaneously protect the endangered mountain gorillas and improving livelihoods of households adjacent to the gorilla parks.”

New Head Teacher for MCJS



We were pleased to be informed that MCJS’s new head teacher, Kwesiga Julius, started work at the beginning of the new school year in early February. He had been settling in well but sadly he did not have a lot of time at the school before the lockdown began in March. He is keeping in touch and is, we understand, keen to get back to work

Skye's birthday gift to SEDCU

A young lady by the name of Skye Holme, daughter of Jan and Ben's former neighbours, decided she would like the children invited to her 7th birthday party to donate to SEDCU instead of buying her presents. Her parents set up a JustGiving page and we were absolutely bowled over by the result – donations totalling £500!!!



Here is Skye, looking gorgeous in purple at her party.

THANK YOU SO MUCH, SKYE!

When Lockdown is over we will meet with Skye to hear her ideas for how she would like to see 'her present' spent..... watch this space....

Gift of Watercolours

The late father of one of SEDCU's supporters was a talented artist and geologist by the name of David Almond. In his years of retirement, he painted rural landscapes in watercolour, mostly of his beloved Lake District. His family wanted to give his collection of some 150 original watercolours to charity (two examples shown below) and have agreed they be donated to SEDCU with the intention of raising funds for our activities in Uganda, where David had spent many happy years of his career and where his children had enjoyed part of their childhood. Once the lockdown is fully lifted we will be exploring how best to achieve this.



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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