



Uganda Humanist Schools Trust (UK)

Report on Visit to the Mustard Seed School, Bukota

Sunday 21st and Monday 22nd March 2010

Steve Hurd

Introduction

The Mustard Seed School is in the small village of Busota, which is three miles from Kamuli, one of the three main administrative towns of Busoga (one of the ancient kingdoms of Uganda). It is close to the geographical centre of Uganda. The region is important for the cash crop coffee though, in recent years, food production for sale has become more profitable. The area supplies corn (maize) to the cities of Jinja and Kampala. Per capita incomes in the area are low and many families rely on pure subsistence. The area has many orphan children who cannot afford school fees.

The visit started on Sunday afternoon. It was a non-teaching day but there were a few boarding students around doing coursework, revision, reading and chatting. Moses Kanya, the Headteacher, gave me a guided tour of the school and told me about general progress, new developments and the most pressing needs of the school during 2010. I returned to the school the following morning when students were in class.

Staffing

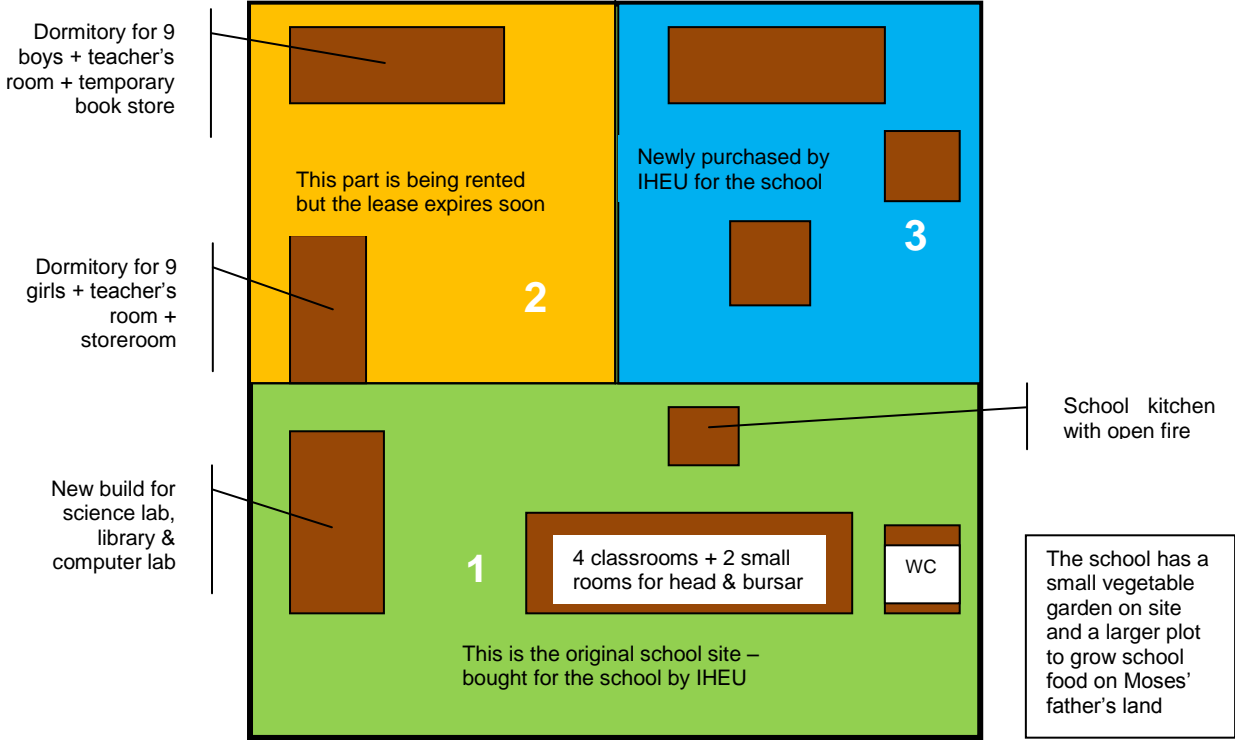
At the moment Mustard Seed School employs 5 full-time teachers and 5 part-time teachers, 4 of whom are government registered. The part-time teachers generally work 2 days a week for the school, teaching 10 lessons each. Pay levels are low with part-time teachers earning 33p a lesson, and full-time teachers earning £3.50 a week. In addition the teachers receive breakfast and lunch and the school pays for daily transport using a motor bike taxi (a boda boda). Moses Kanya, as headteacher, gives 6 classes of history each week to the Senior 3 and 4 years students, who are preparing for their O-levels. David Makoma is the Deputy Head Teacher. He is one of the full-time teachers and is responsible for teaching Geography.

The school also employs a librarian (Jamira Kwagala), a bursar (Monica Musubika), a cook and a caretaker. I also met, during my visit, Daniel Isabirye. Daniel is a member of the Board of the school, who brings experience from teaching in another secondary school in the district.

Land Acquisition, Charitable Status and Registration

Since I first visited the school in February 2009, there have been a number of significant improvements. The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU) had just given Moses a

grant of a little over £4,000 pounds to acquire the title to the school land, including a small amount of additional land adjacent to the plot, to allow for future expansion.



Area 1 on the site plan above is the original school site. It houses the main school building, which is a block with 4 classrooms and two small rooms for the head teacher and bursar. The picture on the right shows the construction of the science lab, library and IT room.



There is also a small “kitchen” where food is cooked over an open fire. The photograph shows a pile of logs which are chopped and used for the fire.

Area 2 on the plan is the part of the land which the school has been leasing from a landlord. This includes the use of two substantial buildings which provide two bedrooms for boarders, two rooms where teachers sleep, a temporary book store and two general storerooms. Unfortunately the landlord has given notice for the school to leave this plot as he wants to use it for other purposes.



Chris Wright, the lawyer on our Trust, prepared the legal statutes to make the school a “not-for-profit” company limited by guarantee. This has given the school a charitable legal status which allows it to exist in perpetuity, to open its own bank account and obtain a government license.

Area 3 is currently occupied by two local families. Their houses are shown below.



This is a picture of Jamira, the librarian, with her baby. To the right is the school's toilet block.



Students and School Fees

208 students are registered in the school, distributed as follows:

School Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Senior 1	20	10	30
Senior 2	20	25	45
Senior 3	25	35	60
Senior 4	10	15	25

In practice actual attendance totals are 30-40% below this as students fail to keep up with paying school fees or are absent through illness or the need to help with household work.

There is a strong demand for boarding in Uganda. Parents and guardians are often willing to pay boarding fees so their children can go to better schools away from their home district; have better access to study facilities in the evenings and at weekends; and escape the dangers that may exist during long walks to and from school (such as attacks on the girl students by local men). Boarding is particularly suitable for orphan children, though they can rarely afford it. The Mustard Seed School currently sets aside two small rooms in which 9 boys and 9 girls sleep. A male and a female teacher sleep in rooms next to the dormitories.

Below are photographs of students from Senior 1 and Senior 4 in lessons. The senior 1 teacher brings her baby into class.



Current levels of day school fees per term are 42,000 Uganda shillings (£14) for Senior 1 and 2 classes and 52,000Ush (£21) for Senior 3 and 4. The full boarding fees are 150,000 Ush (£50), but students can offset these by contributing food (maize and beans) from home.

New Developments

The school has recently obtained a government license to operate. However, within the next year it has to make a number of improvements if it is to meet the government standards for full registration. At the moment the school falls short of these standards in a number of respects. It is required to secure an on-site supply of clean drinking water. At the moment the school relies on water drawn in the evening from a well in the grounds of the Catholic Church. The school must also have a science laboratory, a library and a secure perimeter.

fence to ensure the safety of on-site boarding students. The school is also required to have a minimum of 8 fully-qualified and registered teachers.

As a result of a grant of £1,500 from the Norwegian Humanist organisation, HAMU, and an additional £400 from UHST, the Mustard Seed School has been connected to mains electricity. The lighting enables classes to start earlier in the morning. It allows activities in the evening and boarding students to read and do coursework. There are power sockets for computers and audio-visual equipment, though the school does not, as yet, have such equipment.

With the backing of the local education authority and using the land as security, Moses has obtained a bank loan of £9,000, which he is using to construct a science lab, IT room and library. A temporary barbed wire fence has been constructed, which will be improved upon in time.

Immediate Resource Needs During 2010

These are the really essential needs in the current year.

1. Providing on-site water for drinking, cooking and washing. The school used donor money to drill a borehole, but drilling to 60 metres exhausted the money and left nothing over for lining the hole and installing a pump. They have been advised that the most cost effective option is to collect rainwater from the roof in two large fibreglass tanks. This will cost £1,500.
2. Completing the new building to house the science lab, library and computers and repaying the loan of £9,000. Together with the Rationalist Association/New Humanist we are hoping to raise grants to allow the school to pay off at least a half of this bank loan.
3. Providing educational resources and additional teaching to improve the examination prospects of Senior 4. UHST has already bought textbooks for every student in Senior 4, and we have offered money to pay for additional tuition in the run up to O-level examinations. Better results will improve the prospects of the students and also aid the recruitment of new students.
4. We are discussing with the school a medium term staffing policy to raise pay levels, enable existing staff to improve their qualifications and to attract new fully qualified and registered teachers.
5. The school urgently needs additional books and equipment for science experiments. It has a laptop computer and would like a data projector to enable whole class teaching using the computer and DVDs.
6. The school would like to offer computer studies, so UHST hope to be able to raise money for a small computer network and a laser printer. The latter will reduce external printing costs and allow the teachers to prepare handouts.
7. Existing boarding arrangements are very basic and the school needs help to improve the boarding rooms, construct beds and install mosquito nets.
8. The school needs more money to enable it to buy the remaining plot of land, which will allow it to retain the use of the two buildings on Area 2.