



Uganda Humanist Schools Trust

# Mustard Seed School, Busota, Kamuli

## November, 2013



Senior 2 student using algebra to calculate areas

### National examinations centre



In 2012 a generous grant from a UHST supporter made it possible for Mustard Seed School to convert its main building into an examination hall (above). This involved removing temporary internal walls, concreting

the floor, plastering walls and fitting and glazing windows so that examinees would not be disturbed by wind and rain. The hall has been furnished with exam desks and stools and the site has been fenced to keep out intruders. In recognition of the generosity of the donor the hall has been named the Geddes Hall.

The first O-level exams were held there in November 2012, and the school was approved as an A-level centre in 2013. The ability to take their examinations in the Mustard Seed School, rather than in a centre 20 miles away, is less costly and more convenient for students and has contributed to an increase in grades. Exam centre status is, however, a huge responsibility for the school.

I met Moses Kanya, the Mustard Seed School Director, in Kampala, where he was searching for a source of sticky-backed plastic to protect student photographs and thumb prints on exam identity cards. One copy of the card is held by the student and an identical copy is lodged with the Uganda National Examinations Board (UNEB). They are an essential part of the procedures which have been introduced to prevent candidates being impersonated by better educated stand ins. Examination fraud has been a problem historically in Uganda but it is now being made more difficult to carry out. Every student must show their photo id when they present for exams and it must match the exact copy held by exam invigilators.

While Mustard Seed School is a recognised exam centre, the school's staff are not allowed to invigilate their own examinations. Instead invigilators are brought in from other schools. Furthermore, Uganda National Examinations Council, the body that supervises UNEB, employs a team of inspectors to carry out spot checks on centres to ensure that examinations are conducted correctly. Question papers are held at police stations and have to be collected by schools a few hours before the examination. Completed scripts have to be handed in to the police station within an hour of the end of each examination. They are then taken under police guard to the marking centre. These are secure hotels where markers remain in residence, out of contact with the outside world (no mobile phones!) until all the papers have been marked and moderated. It is difficult to imagine a more rigorous process.

After lodging the Mustard Seed student identity cards at UNEB in Kampala we drove to the school – a journey that took 6 hours, twice the normal time due to heavy traffic and a torrential rain storm which made driving hazardous. As soon as we arrived at the school Moses was confronted with urgent issues concerning the examinations occurring the next day. With only a day's notice, the examination board had sent the list of chemicals required for the A-level Chemistry

practical exam. While the school has some of the chemicals required it now had to procure 21 additional chemicals by the following day. After a few calls to colleagues in other schools, Moses secured a supply of the missing chemicals at a cost of 100,000 Uganda Shillings (£30). The Head of Chemistry was despatched on a motor bike taxi to bring them to the school so they could be made up in the correct dilutions for the exam the next day – this required him to work late into the evening.

The computer studies teacher, whose exam was also the next day, appeared with problems of his own. It was the first time this national computer practical exam had taken place, and the school was taken aback to discover that 6 marks were allowed on the exam paper for students producing a hard-copy colour print out of their exam work. The school had no colour printer and the black and white laser printer was out of toner! Moses made more calls. However, after procuring a colour printer there was no suitable driver to enable the printer to work on their Linux operating system, so they had to submit student work without a print out, and each student lost 6 marks before the examiner started work. The exam board's printing requirement was unrealistic in a setting where many schools have no electricity and many have few or no computers. Yet in 2013 this computer studies practical exam was made compulsory for all students!? I am sure that UNEB will have received many complaints from schools and they may in the end have to waive the 6 marks and the printing requirement.

Despite these last minute problems, both exams went ahead as planned the following day. The consensus was that the exams were challenging but students did not seem distressed and their teachers felt they had probably done enough to pass. Let us hope their confidence is justified and that student performance continues its upward trend when the results are published in January.

## Student destinations after O-level

I asked Moses to give us an idea of what happens to school leavers once they have completed O-levels. On the basis of feedback he has received these are his estimates.

% of leavers	Destinations after O-level
30%	A-level courses at Mustard Seed or other schools.
15%	Vocational courses e.g. building, carpentry, catering, hair-dressing.
40%	Unskilled jobs in shops, cafés, cleaners in offices and petty trades e.g. market stalls, motorbike taxis.
15%	Return to help out at home and on subsistence farms

The first students completed A-level courses at Mustard Seed School in 2012. Since that time, three students have joined Kampala University (Jinja Campus); one taking a degree course in Personnel Management and the other two on diplomas in Hotel Management & Hospitality and Librarianship & Information Science respectively. Three students have joined Kaliro National Teachers' College for diplomas in secondary education.

I was introduced to Ivan Bulagambire, one of



the first students to go through the school, at a time when there were few books and teachers were poorly qualified. Despite this, he gained 7 O-levels and A-level passes

in Fine Art, Geography, Economics and Agriculture. He has gained a place at Kampala University where he is in his first term studying for a degree in Human Resource Management. Unfortunately Ivan's father died and his mother, who is a subsistence farmer, is unable to pay his university fees. During the week he labours on the land to

help provide food for his mother and he has chosen to study full-time over the weekends. Unfortunately he has not yet paid his first term's fees (£400 a term) and he faces being thrown off the course at the end of term. Ivan shares the predicament of so many school leavers who go on to university without having gained a prized but scarce government scholarship and have to find ways to meet the full costs of their tuition. At UHST we have decided that we must concentrate our resources on building up the schools. We are unable, at the moment, to take responsibility for students when they leave school though we would like in future to look at the possibility of establishing school-linked enterprises.

## Student voice

The progressive improvement in facilities and standards at Mustard Seed School is strongly aiding the efforts to recruit more students and make the school more financially viable. The number of students of the school roll has increased from 200 in 2012 to over 300 in 2013. 47 of those students, roughly 10 in each school year, are funded by scholarships from UHST supporters. The school allocates scholarships equally by gender - 24 to boys and 23 to girls. 19 of the scholarships have been awarded to students who have suffered the death of at least one of their parents.

Just over a half of the students come from families of subsistence farmers, who gain cash income when they have surplus food to sell in local markets. The parents or guardians of 6 of the students are small scale traders, most have market stalls and one a small village restaurant. One parent is a fisheries supervisor and another has a fish stall. Another parent makes money from quarrying stone and three are primary school teachers.

I was able to get together all the students on UHST scholarships and to ask them to voice their opinions of the school. Below are some of the things they liked about their school.

*I like the friendly teachers, competition in classes and high academic standard.*



Scholarship students at Mustard Seed School

*My school has lots of textbooks and a good environment.*

*I like the girls' dormitory and compound with flowers.*

*I have good friends and good teachers who care well in case of any problem.*

*My school has good staff and administration.*

*Our lovely teachers.*

*I like the school library and laboratory. The school encourages the development of students' talents.*

*Everyone is given a chance, the freedom, to express themselves.*

*We have a nice school uniform. I also like our cooks at my school.*

*The school is improving and developing rapidly.*

*I like computer studies and our computer teacher.*

*I like co-curricular activities like scouts.*

*I like my school because of the discipline and respect among students and teachers.*

*The school has good security. The borehole gives us a good water supply.*

*I like our caring Director and my teachers are polite and kind.*

*I like the good performance and good games and sports at my school.*

While it is clear that much is going right at the school, like students everywhere, those at Mustard Seed are not slow to say how they feel the school could be improved. Here are some of the things on their wish list..

*We need even more books, science materials and computers with internet.*

*We need more classrooms and a dining hall.*

*We would like more games like cricket, netball and basket ball.*

*We need a water supply on the upper school site.*

*We need more mosquito nets and a nurse and sick bay for when we are ill.*

*We need a generator so we can use computers when the power is down.*

*We need a school truck and bus so we can go on trips.*

*The school should provide a more balanced diet.*

*We need a TV on each site.*

*Our games field needs to be finished.*

*We need more science teachers and apparatus for the laboratory.*

*The boys need a new dormitory like the girls.*

## Progress on infrastructure

We have provided the following grants for infrastructure projects at Mustard Seed School in 2013:

Boys Blair-VIP toilets and washrooms £6,500

The school now had additional and more hygienic toilets for boys and male staff on the upper school site.



Refurbishment of upper school site £3,750

The buildings on the upper school site have had new concrete floors, the walls have been plastered and painted and doors and glazed windows have been fitted. The work has made a huge difference and students are proud to be studying in such attractive buildings.



Constructing an A-level science lab £2,000

The picture below shows the foundations of the new A-level science lab, which is under construction and should be completed by the end of the year. In the background is the old

toilet block, which is reserved for the girls on the site.



Earth moving for sports field £7,200

There has been considerable progress on the work on levelling land so the school can have its own playing field (a Ministry of Education requirement as part of a national sports policy for secondary schools). Such work is costly and has been beset by unexpected problems. As a first stage the school employed over the weekend a digger which was being used during the week to upgrade the main road through Busota. They ran into problems when they hit bedrock and very hard, iron-rich laterite just below the ground surface. Shot firers from the road project had to be brought in to break up the rock. This had to be done in stages to minimise the disturbance to local people before a large digger had to be brought in to move the rock and soil to create a level surface.



They have now created an even slightly sloping area which is almost three-quarters of the length required (100 yards) for a football

pitch but there is then a step down to the neighbouring land. To complete the job, more earth has to be taken from the surface to build up the lower area, then top soil needs to be returned and levelled with a grading machine. A local quantity surveyor has estimated the amount of earth to be moved and the equipment requirements, including earth-moving lorries. The school will require about £4,800 to complete the work. We do not have the money for this at the moment but it is a priority to get the work completed. Creating a playing field is a major cost for most schools. One of the schools near Kampala paid £8,000 ten years ago to create a playing field by clearing a swamp. It is very impressive to see that Uganda, a very poor country, has a national sports policy and is pursuing it with vigour. The UK government by contrast allows schools to sell off playing fields with little concern for the health and sporting opportunities of future generations of school students.

### **Current priorities**

- Completing the school playing field (£4,800)
- Construction of boys dormitory, provision of water and electricity (£30,000)
- Constructing a school clinic and sick bay (£6,000)
- Books, science and other learning materials (£3000)

If you feel you or your group would like to contribute to meeting any of these needs then please contact [stevehurd@uhst.org](mailto:stevehurd@uhst.org) (01782 750338).

Donation and standing order forms can be found at:

<http://www.ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org/donate/>