



Uganda Humanist Schools Trust

International Friendship Visit Mustard Seed School, Busota, Kamuli June, 2017



Main admin site (right), upper school site (above), new classrooms on playing field site (below)

First Impressions

UHST Trustees aim to visit the Humanist schools in Uganda once and, sometimes, twice each year. Every couple of years we open our visits to supporters who would like to visit the schools to work with the teachers and students in different ways. We make this our International Friendship Visit.

This year the group visiting Mustard Seed comprised three UHST Trustees, Steve and Hilary Hurd (Chair and Scholarships Manager respectively) and Glenda Miller (our legal adviser); Glenda's husband, Derek, who is also

a lawyer and a long-standing supporter of the charity; and Renate Bauer, Chair of the German Humanist organisation, who is also a Humanist speaker and celebrant in Pfalz. This was Glenda, Derek and Renata's first visit to Africa and they were looking forward to the many new experiences that come from such a visit.

We arrived at Mustard Seed School on a Tuesday afternoon to be greeted by Moses Kanya, the school Director, Annet Kasuubo, the long standing headteacher and her

deputy, Awali Maledhu. After being introduced to the other teachers we were welcomed by the headteacher in front of the whole school, which had been waiting patiently in the school courtyard.



Below are Renate, Glenda, Hilary and Derek with Moses and Annet by the main gate, at the start of a tour of the three school sites.



We were all struck by how clean and tidy the school was. The grass had been cut short and there were new attractive flower borders around the school buildings. This made for a very good first impression.

We were taken to see the science lab, newly fitted with sturdy benches and store cupboards, and stocked with scientific equipment and chemicals bought with a grant from UHST. The bookstore had just received a new allocation of books, and we brought additional books to support the Reading for Pleasure Project. The computer room was being prepared for the arrival of 10 more Zotec Z-Box computers, each loaded with a

huge range of educational material to support subject learning.



We were taken to see the girls' and boys' hostels, both of which are becoming seriously overcrowded, due to the rise in student numbers brought about by the growing popularity of the school.



Despite the general availability of mosquito nets, some students choose not to use them because they feel they reduce airflow. We expressed health and safety concerns about overcrowding in the hostels, but the school feels it is under pressure from parents to take

more and more students. It is evident that two more hostels are needed, but, in the meantime, the school may have to consider restricting recruitment to stay within the bounds of the existing infrastructure.

Following a second year of good exam results, which placed the school 5th out of 25 schools in the district, there was a huge increase in recruitment at the start of the year. When inspectors visited the school, they saw that class sizes had reached almost 100 and demanded that the school must either build more classrooms or send students home. Although, this had not been planned for, UHST felt pressured into finding the money to build a new block of 4 classrooms, with additional rooms for teaching and admin staff. The nearly completed classroom block is shown on the front page of this report.

On our tour of the school we were pleased to see small groups of students collaborating on private study tasks. It was good to see boys and girls and students of different faiths working together.



We came upon a group of Fine Art students making intricate objects from clay.



All in all we were pleased to see students around the school looking happy and occupied with purposeful pursuits.

Local Community Tour



After touring the school Awali, the Deputy Headteacher, arranged for three day students, Edith, Nuriat and Paul (above). to take us to their homes and to find out how the community makes a living.

Edith's home was a long way from the school so she lives with 3 of her siblings at the nearby house of her older brother, Joel, who had a good camera and made money taking wedding photographs. Joel had a small plot of land where he grew food crops of maize, cassava and sweet potatoes and a few vegetables.

He grows coffee as a cash crop and explained how little money it was possible to make from this. Being a small producer he had to sell his coffee to middlemen who gave him, for unprocessed beans, as little as 700 Uganda shillings (15 UK pennies) per kilogram. In a typical year he gathers 200 kg of coffee beans, yielding an income of 140,000 Ug shillings (£31). He could raise his income to £40-50 a year if he dried the beans in the sun before selling them – but this risks having the beans contaminated or stolen. As this might be the typical annual cash income of a small farmer in the area, we can see the difficulty that families have paying school fees for their children. Typical day fees in a simple rural school are 100,000 shillings (£22) a term and local boarding fees are as high as 350,000 shillings (£77) a term. On top of the tuition fees families also have to find money for school uniforms, food and examination fees plus other incidental costs like pens and exercise books.

Nuriat is pictured (top) at the door of her home with her little sister and brother. Her father (middle) rents a motorbike taxi (*bodaboda*) from his uncle for 10,000 shillings (£2.20) a day. A typical passenger pays 500-1000 shillings – so he has to pick up 15 fares a day just to cover the rental, and petrol and repairs have to be paid for before he has surplus money for his family. It is not easy to make a living in a small, impoverished rural community, where few people have cash in their pockets.

Finally, we visited the home of Paul. His mother and father are subsistence farmers, and his father is a lay preacher.



They were busy weeding their sweet potato plot (above). The plants looked healthy but the weather is precarious. Last year the rains failed and the harvest withered so there was severe hunger in the area and some local people died of starvation. This year the rains had continued for a little longer, but nobody will relax until the harvest has been gathered. The family's only source of income is the sale of surplus food. When there is no surplus, there is no cash to pay for school fees or other essentials.

We are very grateful to the students and their families for giving us an insight into how precarious life is in this area. They are feeling the impact of climate change. Rainfall is more variable each year. When it comes, it is often in severe storms and causes flash flooding, and the drought periods between the rains are getting longer.

Operating in such an area puts pressure on the school. Many students find it hard to raise the money for fees, so the school is constantly offering discounts. If the rains are late, then the school has to accept late payment of fees. When they fail, students are unable to pay schools fees or to pay for their exam fees. For a number of years UHST has been called upon to provide emergency funding to cover exam fees and teachers' salaries.

Water Problem

Initially the school drew water from a well in the grounds of the nearby Catholic Church. However, when the school refused to allow the catholic priest to lead prayers in the school, their access to the water was restricted to evenings and overnight.



To alleviate the problem Caspar Melville, the then editor of New Humanist, raised money through an appeal to drill a borehole. Unfortunately the first attempt failed to reach the water table and a further grant from UHST was needed to bring back the drillers before water was found at a depth of 60 metres and a lift pump installed (above). At a later stage the hand pump was replaced by an electric pump, which took the water to a newly

constructed overhead tank, which fed the water to stand pipes around the school.



However, the water, while safe to drink, was discoloured and had an unpleasant taste, and after a few years of drought and extraction the water table fell below the level of the pump and the well ran dry.

Three years ago the school took advice from a hydrologist and UHST funded the drilling a new borehole half a mile away on the edge of the swamp. This yields good water using a hand pump, but has to be carried in jerry cans back to the school. Now the school has well over 400 students, half of whom are in boarding, it has to organise a rota of students to bring water through the day. This is clearly disruptive of learning and leaves the students with insufficient water for personal hygiene, washing clothes, cleaning floors and for food preparation.



A new piped water system to supply the main town of the area, Kamuli, 9 km away, was announced two years ago. The source of this water is a new pumping and purification station on the River Nile 15 km away. This will

bring high-pressure piped water to Kamuli and the local MP and Speaker in the National Parliament, Madam Kadaga, promised to ensure that the water would be distributed by pipeline to Busota, a nearby sugar factory and the school. In preparation UHST provided money for the school to construct an underground concrete reservoir. Unfortunately, the pipeline coming from Kamuli towards the school was diverted to another village, with no sign that it would be extended to Busota and the school.

One advantage of UHST visiting the schools regularly is that we can see for ourselves the situation on the ground. It made it possible for Derek Miller to go with Moses to the headquarters of the regional water authority, to see if anything could be done to bring water to the school. An engineer came out immediately to size up the situation. He proposed that, if we could find the money, he would arrange to take a spur from the diverted pipe to the school. This would involve laying a high-pressure rubberised plastic pipe a distance of 1.5km from the village with the water to the school. This, with the construction of a reinforced concrete water tower to support two 5000-litre tanks to feed water around the entire school site, could be done for £5,700. After consulting UHST Trustees by email we approved the allocation of money to the project and the work is due to start within weeks. We are hopeful that this will provide a permanent solution to the school's water problem, at the cost of having to pay water rates.

Friendship Visit Activities

Following the initial tour of the school and community we planned a programme of talks and activities involving visitors, staff and students:

"Evolution and the History of Life on Earth"
(Senior 1, Hilary)



"The World Under the Microscope: how to use a compound binocular microscope" (Senior 5 & 6, Hilary)

"Growth & Development in Uganda" (Senior 5 & 6 Economics Students, Steve)

"Talking About Ugandan History" religious rivalries, colonialism and recent political developments (Senior 4, Steve).



"What Makes Good Law: enacting out a court case" (Senior 5 and 6, Derek and Glenda)





"Creating a Happy Society" (Senior 3, Steve)

Teaching the school choir (below) to sing *"Don't Worry, Be Happy"* (Steve) and *"I am Free in my Thoughts"* (Renate) – with a performance to the school.



In addition, Steve led a session with the teaching staff on how being a Humanist School influences styles of teaching and learning and the management of discipline.

Scholarship students

Hilary met all the students supported on UHST scholarships. Below she is pictured with a group of scholarship students from Senior 3.



All sponsored students at Mustard Seed School are expected to gain a first grade in their Primary Leaving Exam.

Brian and Flavia are typical. Brian is an orphan, his parents died in an accident. Their grandmother, who has a small plot where she grows food for the family, cares for him and his seven siblings. There is no spare money for school fees. Brian is the class captain and is in the football team. He likes science subjects best and would like to be a doctor.



Flavia's parents are alive and manage to feed their eight children by growing rice and maize and rearing goats. She is the school time keeper and likes to read books. She is in the music, dance and drama group



and helps to clean the compound at the weekend.

It was evident that none of the students could have afforded to go to secondary school without the scholarship provided by a UHST supporter. For these children the scholarships open up opportunities that their parents could not have begun to hope for their children. Joan Mukisa, the Head Prefect, has been supported on scholarships for 6 years. She gave us the following letter to express her gratitude to her sponsors:



Hello Sponsor,

This just comes to thank you for the help you have been extending to me through mobilising funds to pay my school fees for six years now. This is my last year in secondary level and I am really happy. In fact I believe that the most wonderful gift anybody can give another is education and you have given that to me, therefore I can help myself to earn a living with education. I would like to appreciate those who have been helping you get money to pay my school fees.

I have loved school very much because it has enabled me to learn a lot of things and indeed I have been able to realise my dreams and what I am capable of doing. I have been given chances to express myself freely even though I am a girl and some people would consider boys as their first priority. Being at school has helped me to improve on my leadership skills. That is to say I am currently the Head Prefect of the school and I have been the scouts leader for years now through which I have got a lot of experiences like the Rwanda trip. I have started and headed various clubs at the school including the Humanists Club, simply to help my fellows borrow a leap and I believe I have inspired many.

All these have been the result of your support, which has kept me in school and therefore I am really grateful. Thanks very, very, very much.

Your truly

Joan

Co-curricular Activities

What we call extra-curricular activities are very strong in the school and include:

Sports and games: Mustard Seed were the District champions again in Football and they also play Netball, Volleyball, Handball and Athletics. Below is the girls' football team in the District finals.



Scouts: For a second year running they hosted the District Scouting Competitions on the school playing field, and Moses Kanya has just been voted in as Chair of the District Scouting Committee, where he has set about creating a Humanist ethos for the scouting movement in the area. Mustard Seed girls are shown winning the District scouting cup.



Music, Dance, Drama: the children in Busoga are very musical and we have just agreed to support them by buying a set of musical instruments.

Humanist Society: This group is running a project to raise chickens in order to bring animal protein into the diet of the children in the school.



Entrepreneurship Club: These students are establishing school-based enterprises so they can complete the full cycle of running a business from preparing a business plan, obtaining funds, buying materials, creating and selling a product and producing final accounts. We spoke to a group that had decided to grow eggplants, which they felt would be of interest in local markets. The school's Head Girl, Esther Aliyinza, is pictured holding the first pickings.



Wildlife Club: The first major project of this group has been to plant and maintain flower gardens around the school in order to attract butterflies (below).



Debating Club: This group organise weekly debates on current issues.

Agriculture Club: This group have been given an experimental plot of land to try different growing methods for local foodstuffs.

Staff Conditions

The school has found it a challenge from the start to maintain sufficient cash flow to keep running. This is due to the fact that the local area is so poor. There is little capacity to raise fees and many families fall into arrears paying the currently very low level of fees charged by the school.

This has consequences for what the school can pay its staff. Salaries are very low, even by the standards of other private schools. Consequently the school finds it difficult to attract well-qualified, experienced staff and relies upon newly qualified teachers and students still undergoing training. It also suffers from high staff turnover.

UHST has been trying to help, by paying an annual bonus of one month's salary to staff that have stayed at the school for the whole year. Following the setback of last year, when Moses was robbed of the entire bonus, all teachers have opened bank accounts and their pay goes directly into the bank. Furthermore, most teachers now have formal work contracts and are enrolled in the National Social Security Fund. Teachers pay 5% of their salary into the fund and the school finds a further 12%. The money goes towards building up a personal pension. Both the annual bonus and the NSSF enrolment are helping to increase retention.

To help further, the school helps teachers by paying for rented housing and travel costs to the school. It also helps student teachers with their course fees, while they study for their Teaching Certificate or Bachelors in Education.

Teachers have come up with a plan to establish their own savings scheme. They have started to put away 10,000 shillings a month (about £2.50). From the fund being created they will be able to borrow sums of money for urgent needs – be it paying for a funeral or wedding or making improvements to their homes. It is clearly important that the money is kept securely in a dedicated account and



there are strict rules governing repayment and the receipt of interest.

In the picture (above) Derek Miller is consulting with the elected managers of the fund, Annet Kasuubo, Awali Muledhu and Kiiza Muzumiru. They had drawn up a draft agreement and Derek is going to help them to shape it into a legal document. They were very pleased to have this support.

Final Celebration

On the last day of our visit Moses invited members of the school's Parent Teachers Association to a celebration to mark the near completion of the new classroom block. We were entertained by students performing traditional dances and by the choir singing "Don't Worry, Be Happy!" – the song became so popular during the week that most of the students and some of the staff were singing it. Below is Steve leading the choir in the song rendition, and the school dancers.



The Headteacher welcomed students, staff and visitors to the event, which was held in the shady woodland by the playing field. She said how much the school had enjoyed

hosting the visitors and how it had helped to broaden students' experiences.

After the opening, prizes were awarded to the winning boy and girl in each class in the Reading for Pleasure competition. Each winner received a large dictionary, which was enthusiastically received and will be treasured. Below Annet is sitting ready to distribute the prizes.



The Chairman of the Parent Teachers' Association expressed the community's gratitude for the support received from UHST. He very much welcomed the construction of the new classrooms, which will allow the school to reduce class sizes.



Moses's father, John Babaire, (below) ended the proceedings by giving a touching speech expressing the thoughts of a proud father toward his son's achievement in founding and developing what was becoming a very well respected school in the neighbourhood.



This rounded off a very successful and enjoyable visit to Mustard Seed School. As a final reflection it is hard to surpass these words by Derek Miller:

"No amount of prior information could have prepared us for the wonder of our first visit to Mustard Seed School. That so much could be achieved with so little was beyond our understanding or imagination. In a darkened classroom without electric lighting high level mathematics was being taught via chalk on a blackboard to the children of subsistence farmers who devoured it with a dedication and discipline that many teachers in the UK could only dream of experiencing. We prepared a mock trial for sixth form students with 3 acting as judges and the remainder dividing into lawyers for the plaintiff and the defendant. We briefed them as best we could but so few were the questions and so quiet the response that we were anxious to say the least as the trial began. How wrong can you be? The "lawyers" argued with coherence, understanding and passion and the "judges" summarised with clarity and precision. They would have graced many U.K. lower courts. We went to the school with a belief that our sponsorship would provide the gift of a life enhancing opportunity to some children. Not for one moment did we realise that precisely that gift would also be given by them to us with the dignity of their acceptance of their poverty, a determination to improve not only their lives but also the lives of others and a capacity for joyfulness that moved this cynical 70 year old lawyer to tears. It was indeed a life enhancing gift."

School Priorities

Since our last visit Mustard Seed has made huge progress, but it needs further help if the school is to achieve what it wants to do for the children of families in this poor community. Over the coming years the school has asked for our help with the following:

1. Construction of a new multi-purpose hall on the playing field site. This will be used for examinations and for large meetings and music, dance and drama events. (Estimated cost £30,000)
2. Restructuring the old hall to create a Library and Information Centre, which will house books and computers to use for subject research and learning. It will also have tables and chairs where students can undertake independent self-guided study.
3. Additional boys and girls hostels in order to relieve overcrowding in existing hostels and to allow the school to expand.
4. The facilities for science practical work need complete overhaul and re-equipping.
5. On-site teachers housing. This is important to improve teacher retention but also now that over 200 children are living in hostels on the school site for 7 days a week.
6. Additional backup solar power capacity.
7. More people to sponsor boarding scholarships so the school can extend educational opportunities to more children from the poorest families.

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

Donation and standing order forms can be found at:

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

Steve Hurd
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