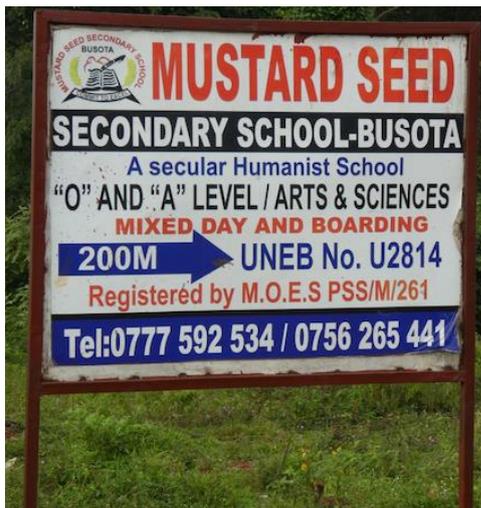




Uganda Humanist Schools Trust

Mustard Seed School, Busota, Kamuli

July 2019



Secular Humanist School sign and torrential rain

Climate Crisis hits Mustard Seed School

Unusually, during our visit to Mustard Seed School the rains were in full swing. Like the Lake Victoria area, this part of Central Uganda has most of its rain after the March Equinox, which is the main growing season. A second short rainy spell, following the September Equinox, allows a second harvest, but yields are much lower. Travelling north and east from Entebbe, average rainfall declines until the climate become semi-arid in parts of Karamoja in the extreme north-east.

The main rains normally start in March and continue until early June. This year they did not arrive until June, too late to save the wilting maize crop, which was lost. As maize is the staple food, it will have serious consequences for food supply and for income which come

from selling surplus food. This will, in turn, reduce families' ability to pay school fees and reduce Mustard Seed's fee income next term. The fact that the rains eventually came, albeit in heavy flash thunderstorms, will avert disaster. Yields of reserve root crops, such as sweet potatoes and cassava, should be good and these will help to make up the shortfall in carbohydrate in the diet. The situation is better than two years ago when rainfall was so much below required levels that people went hungry and a few died of starvation.

The community around Mustard Seed School is quite poor, even in normal times. So, their capacity to pay school fees is limited and late payment is high, making it difficult for Mustard Seed School to manage its cash flow. From time

to time, even the school is forced to cut back on food rations for the children.



The cook outside the school kitchen

exercise books, washing materials, food snacks and some sweets and drinks.



An assembly in the new school Hall

School Site Developments

Owing to the generous response of our supporters to UHST's 10th Anniversary Building Appeal, we have been able to fund substantial infrastructure work at Mustard Seed School over the past 18 months. The large new teaching block is finished, giving the school an extra 4 large classrooms and two small staff rooms.



New teaching block with newly planted trees

A large multi-purpose Hall accommodates the whole school for assemblies and separates using dividers into 3 classrooms at other times. At the front of the Hall there are 3 small rooms – one suitable for small group A-level teaching, another used by senior teachers and a third is operating as a tuck shop selling pens, pencils,



Mustard Seed tuck shop

Kamuli, the nearest town is only 7 km away but, although it is the regional administrative centre, it is small and does not offer much choice of builders. The school has had little alternative but to make do with those available. When we fund building work, UHST asks the school to obtain 3 quotations, and we do not necessarily accept the lowest one – trying to get some indication of competency. We ask the builders to commit to a fixed price contract with payments in 3 or 4 stages. We also hold back a final payment of 10%, which is intended to be given a month after satisfactory completion. Despite these measures overall outcomes at Mustard Seed have left much to be desired. Builders have consistently underestimated the cost and complexity of building work they have bid for. They have

fallen behind at each stage of construction and pressurised the school to release additional funds to allow building work to continue. The final retention payment has also been extracted early on the promise of the builder completing the work according to the specifications.

The new teaching block and hall are imposing buildings, but floor and wall finishes are sub-standard, and windows and doors of poor quality and ill fitting. Corrugated sheets used for the roof of the classroom block are already rusting. Furthermore, the builders left the site before surface imperfections were made good and without painting the walls. As the two buildings took a significant part of UHST's funds last year, we are disappointed by the result. While the buildings are perfectly functional, they do little to enhance the appearance of the school and are unlikely to leave staff and students feeling proud of the result.



Entrance to new girls' hostel in woodland glade

St Louis Ethical Society provided substantial funds towards constructing a second girls' hostel. This building is almost finished. It is a well-proportioned building with large rooms that take 16 girls in double bunk beds, with plenty of space around the beds. The hostel will accommodate 100 girls with a live-in warden. Owing to the fact that the girls were sleeping in inappropriate and overcrowded classrooms, the school has allowed them to occupy the hostel before ceilings, washrooms and toilets have been finished. Work is

continuing apace on the latter yet, in the meantime, girls are having to make do with toilet facilities across the playing field.

Girls in the new hostel were given the opportunity to choose the name of a distinguished woman, ideally a humanist, after whom to name the hostel. The list of candidates included:

Wangari Muta Maathai renowned Kenyan social, environmental and political activist and the first African woman to win the Nobel Prize.

Greta Thunberg (born 3 January 2003) Swedish climate activist.

Mary Busingye Karoro Okurut (born 8 December 1954) Ugandan educator, author and politician, and founder of the Uganda Women Writers Association (FEMRITE).

Zora Neale Hurston, accomplished writer, anthropologist and atheist. In her novels and poems, she drew inspiration not from a higher power but from the uniqueness of human experience and culture.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali born 13 November 1969. Somali-born Dutch-American activist, feminist, author, scholar and former politician and advocate for the rights and self-determination of Muslim women.



Counting votes to choose the Hostel name

After shortlisting the first three of these, the girls rose as one and asked why they should have to choose from the names of people they have no connection with. They insisted that Hilary Hurd's name be added. They knew that Hilary was a humanist who visited them every year, inspired them and cared about their education and welfare. In a secret ballot, the girls unanimously chose to name their new building the Professor Hilary Hurd Hostel. Hilary was delighted, if somewhat embarrassed, to have been chosen against a distinguished list of international women.

In addition to the formal school buildings, there is a growing amount of private enterprise initiative on the school site. Two local ladies come onto the site to sell green vegetables, such as cabbage and spinach, cassava chips and kabalagala (banana buns) as treats for those students able to pay for them.



Local ladies with daily treats

Another lady has opened a kiosk in the school selling fruits, such as mangoes and watermelon, and a range of other provisions.

Two young men have competing stalls selling, for 1,000 Uganda Shillings (22pence), Rolex, a local delicacy consisting of an omelette rolled up in a chapati. The availability of such extras has raised the issue of whether orphan children, without families to help them out, should be given a pocket money allowance. The school is looking into this.



The "Rolex" stall

Students Love Mustard Seed School

Mustard Seed School intends to stabilise at about 600 students, with equal numbers of boys and girls, two classes in each year (East and West) each with 50 to 60 students. Currently the school has 329 boys and 271 girls in total. S1 has 88 boys and 78 girls, S2 has 83 boys and 60 girls, S3 has 81 boys and 72 girls, S4 has 45 boys and 56 girls, S5 had 21 boys and 02 girls while S6 has 11 boys and 03 girls. There is a large drop out of girls after S4, when pressure on them to leave school to help at home or to marry become considerable.

Each time we visit the school, we interview scholarship students. They are increasingly positive about the school. This year the high level of satisfaction was particularly evident as the following student case studies reveal.

Joanex Christine Mukisa



The fact that Joan added "ex" to her name, two years ago, is evidence of her desire to stand out from the crowd. She was born on 14th February 1999 in Iganga, one of three regional centres in the ancient kingdom of Busoga. Joanex left school last year after gaining the best A-level results in her cohort. She received a boarding scholarship from UHST throughout her secondary education. Without this, as a girl, she would not have been sent for secondary

education. She believes that receiving the scholarship made her work all the harder and she is very grateful to her sponsors for giving her this life line.

When she joined the school in S1 she looked very young for her age, but older students took good care of her. The Director, Moses Kamyra, and her teachers were very nice too and she soon settled into school life. Joanex feels that the school is one big family. She was very happy there and when she was at home in the holidays couldn't wait to get back to school. Her primary school education was not great and so she was a behind when she started and had to catch up year on year by working hard. Joannex's father died a long time ago. She has been brought up by her mother, who is very excited about her going to university. Joanex has two brothers and three sisters. Her younger sister Jacky, who is in S2 at Mustard Seed, dreams of becoming a climate scientist. At A-level Joanex studied the set combination History, Economics and Divinity.

To celebrate Joanex's success at A-level the school organised a party to celebrate. She was presented with a goat, which has since given birth twice to twins, leaving her with five goats. Joanex's mother looks after them. Earlier this year, she sat a pre-entry exam for the law course at Makerere University which has the top law school in the country. Approximately 5000 students sat the exam and she was one of only 300 who were given a place. She has done remarkably well from humble beginnings. Joanex is very proud of her achievement and feels privileged to be able to follow her ambitions and dreams. She is guaranteed a job at the end of the course, if she completes it, because of the Law School's reputation. Her course starts in August 2019 and she will live in a hostel near the university campus. She knows Kampala only a little and, as with any other young student, part of the excitement of going to Makerere University will be to discover more about the city whilst attending the best law school in East Africa. She hopes that she does well enough to be able to afford to

sponsor other children who wish to attend Mustard Seed School. Whilst at the school Joanex was head scout, which gave her the chance to travel to scouting competitions around Uganda and in Rwanda. She enjoyed camping, especially in the bush where she learned survival skills. Her hobbies are reading and listening to music. She understands that when at university she will need to be self-motivated but has clearly had no problem with being so throughout her education.

Phiona Mugaya Wabibye



Phiona was born on 1 February 1999 and is from Mukono, a fast growing town to the East of Kampala. Her father died when she was young and her mother is still

alone, bringing up Phiona and three younger brothers without much help from anyone. Her brothers attend a free government school where the educational standards are poor.

The Mustard Seed School Director awarded her a UHST scholarship because she was obviously bright, but also from a very deprived background. The scholarship has transformed her life chances. Phiona believes that, without it, she would probably have had children by now, even though she is only 20. At A-level, Phiona is studying History, English Literature and Divinity. Her favourite novel is Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens. She came second in her year in the Reading for Pleasure competition. Phiona sleeps in the new and unfinished girls' hostel which she says is very pleasant, being light and airy. She is very happy at school. They are encouraged to work hard with an early start to the day, usually at around 5.30-6am for prep, with evening prep after supper until bedtime. She has lots of school friends, and they have a lot of fun together. Phiona feels a responsibility to be a good role model for

younger children at the school. She enjoys playing netball, which they now do in the new hall. She keeps fit and well with a nutritious diet and exercise. She likes music and watching movies, which they are occasionally able to do at school. Phiona would love to follow Joanex, her role model, in studying Law at university. She also has an ambition to visit the UK.

Tonny Kitumba



Tonny was born on 23 March 2003 in the Buikwa district where his family still live. He has a UHST scholarship, which allows him to board at Mustard Seed School. Tonny came to the school in 2017 because Mustard Seed offers the subjects he

enjoys, namely Chemistry, Maths, Physics and Biology. These subjects were not well taught at his previous school, but the science teachers at Mustard Seed know their subjects and work hard to help the students. The school has a good reputation in the district and does well in national exams.

Both Tony's parents are alive and live together. His father has a small business and his mother buys coffee which she sells in a shop and café she has opened. Although they both work hard, Tonny's parents are unable to pay school fees for him. Their family income is low, and he is one of 9 dependent children. Tonny says Mustard Seed School encourages children to explore and develop their talents. He plays for the successful school football team which, this year, won the CocaCola District Championship. He supports teams in the major European leagues: Manchester United, Juventus, Real Madrid and Paris St Germain. He finds it fun to watch such teams with his friends on the school TV.

Tonny also likes to read, both fiction and nonfiction and he won the Reading for Pleasure competition for S3 this year. He is happy at Mustard Seed School. The teachers are friendly, caring and teach their subjects well. He is very grateful for the support he receives from UHST supporters.

Future School Needs

Mustard Seed School is well respected, and the community is impressed by the pace of development of the school and the sustained improvement in educational outcomes and student welfare.

The construction works we have been able to fund from the 10th Anniversary Building Appeal have made a difference, but there is more to do:

1. The school would like a second boys' hostel as, at the moment, classrooms have been converted into temporary dormitories. This will cost almost £40,000, an amount which is currently beyond the means of our charity.
2. We are already providing additional funds to make good the unfinished work on previous buildings and to paint, fence and generally smarten up the school site.
3. The boys' toilets are insufficient for over 300 boys and a further £6,000 is needed to build more.
4. With the new Hall in operation, the school need funds to re-purpose the old hall to create two science labs, a prep room and a library and information centre with internet-enabled computers for learning. This will cost around £15,000.
5. The old science lab needs to be converted into a computer lab for the dedicated teaching of computer studies, which most students want to take as it makes them

proficient in the use of Office applications.
This will cost about £8,000.

If you feel you or your group would like to help us with any of these things, or to provide a full or half (£300 or £150) boarding sponsorship for a student, please contact stevehurd@uhst.org (01782 750338).

Donation and standing order forms can be found at:

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

Steve Hurd
Chair, Uganda Humanist Schools Trust
July, 2018

ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHS



At the main school gate



Original school site and old hall



Classrooms used as temporary boys' dormitories



Students using the computer lab



Senior 4 lesson in progress