



Uganda Humanist Schools Trust

17th Annual Progress Report 2023

Teachers at the 3rd Humanist Schools Conference



Inquisitive children at Katumba Parents Humanist Primary School



December 2023

<https://ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org/>
UHST Charity Registration Number 1128762

Cautious widening of support

As we approach the end of another momentous year for the Humanist school movement in Uganda, there is much to celebrate that gives hope for the future. Supporters of Uganda Humanist Schools Trust have donated over £2 million since November 2008, when our charity was established. This money has enabled our supported schools to construct brick classrooms with a standard of finish which is rarely found in rural areas. The schools look good and are a source of pride in their communities. We have also given them the means to achieve decent standards of education and welfare.

Schools recognise the importance of teachers. Pay is lower than in urban schools, so they look for other ways to improve morale. Small things matter, such as paying teachers on time, helping where possible with local transport, rent and family crises (such as contributing to the costs of funerals for close family members). End of year parties and occasional outings help to foster a team spirit.

Staff of the Humanist high schools include a quarter who were former students. This makes for a strong community commitment and motivates staff to do their best for local children and to pass on the caring and empowering Humanist ethos which the teachers experienced when they were students in the schools.

In the early years, UHST focused our limited resources on creating a couple of good secondary schools to serve as beacons for Humanism in Uganda and across the world. Isaac Newton and Mustard Seed Humanist Schools have led the way in this. Children in these schools are happy and perform well in national examinations, and the schools have sufficient classroom space to cater for

the high numbers of children that wish to attend them. As the infrastructure needs of these pioneering schools diminishes, it frees up resources to help other schools. However, we are determined not to spread our resources so thinly that their impact is lost. We want instead to establish a small but enduring family of mutually supporting Humanist schools in Uganda as a model that could be replicated in other countries.

In 2018 we started to support our first Humanist primary school at Katumba, in a troubled area close to the Congo border. Humanist Aid in Sweden helped with funds towards the school fees of over 100 single orphan children, whose fathers had been killed in disturbances in 2016. Between 2020 and 2023, with substantial help from a UHST Trustee, we funded the construction of a fine new primary school for the Katumba community.

During the Covid years of 2020 to 2022, we completed the construction of Kanungu Humanist Primary School, in a community where, in the year 2000, 800 men, women and children had been murdered in a church by a 10 Commandments preacher. Also, during Covid, thanks to a successful appeal to UHST supporters, we rescued two former religious schools, which started new lives as Humanist schools. The first was a bankrupt run-down Evangelical Christian school, which is now thriving as Isaac Newton Humanist Primary School. The second, a Muslim School, is now operating as Mustard Seed Humanist Primary School. At the end of 2023 we give substantial support to 6 thriving Humanist schools - 2 highs and 4 primaries.

In 2024, if we can raise extra resources, we would like to include the four Kasese Humanist schools founded by Robert Bwambale within our support network.

Robert is a prominent figure in the Humanist movement in Uganda and has worked closely with Peter Kisirinya and Moses Kamyia in spearheading the schools' *Humanist Ethos Project* and the newly instituted *Coalition of Humanist Schools of Uganda*. The addition of the Kasese schools will create a complementary network of Humanist schools, comprising 3 secondaries in distinct regions of Uganda and 7 feeder primary schools.

In the absence of a major windfall of funds, we are unlikely to be able to extend support beyond this manageable core group of schools. We will continue to extend a hand of friendship to new Humanists schools and, wherever possible, facilitate their participation in inter-school workshops and conferences. This will enable them to network with and learn from existing Humanist schools. However, they will need to rely for funding upon local sources or other Humanist individuals and organisations.

In 2023 UHST helped the *Coalition of Humanist Schools of Uganda* to become officially registered. This was an important outcome of the highly successful 3rd *Uganda Humanist Schools Conference* which we facilitated in August, with the goal of fostering sharing and cooperation across the Humanist school network.

2023 has been a year of tremendous progress in the Humanist school movement in Uganda, but it has also brought new challenges. Climate change has increased the frequency of droughts and the ferocity of tropical storms in Uganda. Every Humanist school has suffered costly material damage from freak wind and rain. Crop damage has reduced harvests, depressed farm incomes and left the Humanist schools to cope with growing fee arrears.

Over 60 countries have enacted anti-gay legislation and yet [international press coverage](#) has chosen to focus on Uganda's tightening of the former British colonial laws against homosexuality. This has led to devastating cutbacks in development aid to the country and possibly contributed to the failure of our recent international [Teacher & Child Appeal](#). The Humanist Schools suffered collateral damage as the Ugandan tax authorities imposed arbitrary tax penalties on individuals and organisations, including the Humanist schools, in an effort to replace the lost international aid.

With these new financial challenges, UHST has needed to divert money earmarked for school improvement to meet weather-related repairs and shortfalls in school income.

Ever hopeful, I keep buying National Lottery tickets in the hope that a big win will secure the future of the schools! Fortunately, we are managing without this, thanks to unstinting help from our loyal supporters to whom we extend a huge vote of thanks. The results of the efforts we have made together to nurture the schools are becoming plain for all to see. The Humanist Schools are transforming lives in desperately poor communities and emerging as some of the best schools in their Districts.

Achievements of 2023

1. Supporting 6 Humanist Schools

In 2023, funds donated by UHST supporters educated 2,680 children attending the following Humanist schools (with enrolment numbers):

Isaac Newton High School (750)
Isaac Newton Primary School (250)
Mustard Seed Secondary School (550)
Mustard Seed Primary School (160)
Katumba Parents' Primary School (750)
Kanungu Primary School (220)

The schools are all in rural communities that have suffered extreme poverty and the additional challenges of HIV/AIDS, hunger or sectarian violence.

2. Future Inclusion of Kasese Schools

Robert Bwambale has worked tirelessly to establish 3 Humanist primary and a secondary school in the town of Kasese in Western Uganda. His Facebook page attracts donations from around the world, but he needs further help to raise educational and welfare standards. UHST already provides books for the Kasese schools. In 2024 we will try to raise additional money for day scholarships to enable his bright primary leavers to attend the Humanist secondary school and more general assistance for the schools.

3. Inter-school Collaboration

In August, UHST was delighted to be able to facilitate the 3rd Humanist Schools Conference. This followed two postponements due to Covid and Ebola. Peter Kisirinya hosted the conference at the Isaac Newton Humanist Schools and two UHST donors gave money to cover speaker costs, travel expenses, accommodation and food for 60 teachers

from 14 Humanist Schools, including 4 fledgling schools:

Eagle's Nest Humanist Primary School
Classical Humanist High School
Star Classic Humanist Primary School
New Hope Humanist Primary School

On arrival, host teachers showed conference participants around the Isaac Newton primary and secondary schools. Peter and I gave a talk explaining how, over 18 years, the high school had transformed education and living standards in an area that had lost half of its working age population through HIV/AIDS. Experienced National Examiners for the Primary Leaving Examination and Uganda Certificate in Education led workshops on improving exam performance and promoting effective learning. A workshop from the *Raising Voices Project* presented strategies for promoting mutual respect and positive discipline within the classroom and safeguarding members of the school community from physical, sexual and verbal abuse.

The last day of the conference set out to foster a shared understanding of Humanism and its application in schools. School Directors described their strategies for promoting self-reliant learning and critical thinking and shared stories of the challenges they faced as Humanist institutions in a sea of Christian and Muslim Schools.

The conference ended by approving the constitution and governing council of the *Organisation of Humanist Schools of Uganda*, whose aim will be to represent the interests of the Humanist Schools in public forums, foster professional development, promote collaboration, and

raise the status of the Humanist Schools and their teachers.

4. **Sharing Good Practice**

We sent each school that attended the 3rd Humanist Schools Conference a sum of £300 to provide food, sodas and a small cash allowance for teachers to attend a follow-up workshop in their school. This enabled conference participants to share information on strategies for raising educational standards and developing the humanist ethos with their colleagues. Those new schools, with few learning resources, used part of the money to buy textbooks for staff reference and preparation.

5. **Katumba Parents' Humanist School**

In 2023 we finally completed the construction, begun in 2019, of Katumba Parents' Humanist Primary School. More toilets were installed for staff and students, washrooms to enable girls to change discretely, and a multi-purpose hall. As well as being used for assemblies and cultural events, the hall will be used for national exams and avoid children having to travel 15 km to an external centre.

After much soul-searching, we have abandoned the idea of building a secondary school at Katumba. The primary school needs time to settle in and more resources to improve educational and welfare standards. Furthermore, it is difficult to see how a secondary school could attract enough fee-paying children to make it viable. The area is extremely remote. The mountain roads are rough and tortuous. The population is dispersed and suffers absolute poverty. Few would be able to raise sufficient school fees to pay for the specialist teachers and resources needed to run a successful secondary school.

We will do our best to raise funds for scholarships to enable bright Katumba children from the neediest families to study at one of the Humanist high schools. By bringing the Kasese schools into our network, we hope to offer scholarships for a few children each year to attend Kasese Humanist High School, which is a local bus ride away from Katumba.

6. **Scholarships**

UHST supporters funded 163 full secondary boarding scholarships in 2023, the largest number ever. They enabled bright children from challenging circumstances to attend Isaac Newton and Mustard Seed Schools.

Such scholarships are life transforming for the young people concerned. Many go on to further and higher education and return to make a real contribution to their communities.

7. **Books and Learning Resources**

We continue to give high priority to providing the tools that children need to improve their reading and become independent learners. We have opened accounts for each school in the major national bookshop chain so that books and materials can be chosen that best meet children's needs.

2,680 children require a lot of books and, with the addition of the Kasese Schools, we need them for 750 more. The reformed Uganda national curriculum emphasises competencies rather than pure knowledge. This switch has made many of the old books obsolete, so buying many more books will continue as a priority in 2024.

8. **Afripads**

A pack of Afripads, costing about £4, contains a set of sanitary pads which girls can use for different phases of their

periods. The pads are comfortable to wear and can be washed and reused for a year. Since the schools have issued them, girls' attendance has matched that of boys. There has been a corresponding rise in girls' achievement, which now equals and sometimes surpasses that of boys. Girls are hugely grateful to members of the Ethical Society of St Louis who have prioritised the provision of Afripads in their fundraising.

With more girls attending Humanist schools, we will need to ensure that even more Afripads are made available in 2024 so that no girl misses out.

9. Other Achievements in 2023

- **Fire safety** – Fire extinguishers, blankets and alarms have been bought for every school. Each year in Uganda, many children lose their lives in dormitory fires. We do not want this to happen in any of the Humanist Schools. To prevent them, the Humanist schools have implemented fire safety protocols, including the installation of electric lights and the banning of spirit burners in all dormitories.
- **Computers** – In Uganda secondary schools all children are required to become competent in using the Microsoft Office suite of software and their abilities are tested in a national examination. Isaac Newton and Mustard Seed Schools have good I.T. facilities, but in 2023 we bought each school 10 additional computers to cater for the growing number of students. IT is optional at primary level, but we have put 2 or 3 computers and a data projector in each primary school, so that teachers can use the computer to enhance learning.
- **Digitised accounts** - Every school bursar has been equipped with a laptop computer and accounting software. Our Ugandan auditor, Dan Kasanda, is guiding them in the process of digitising the school accounts. This will improve financial accountability and make it easier to produce and audit annual accounts. The Kasese schools are included in this initiative.
- **Kanungu Humanist Primary School** – As well as helping the school each month with funds to pay teachers and provide school food, we have given money to refit the kitchen with new large cooking pots and increased rain water storage capacity by providing an additional large tank.
- **Isaac Newton Humanist Schools** – Two of our Trustees have provided funds to level land next to the school to create a much-needed playing field. Up to now children have had to walk half an hour each way to a not-very-even village playing field on the top of a hill. Boys and girls from both the primary and secondary schools are active in district and regional competitions and the new field, once grassed over, will make life much easier for them.
- **Maintenance** – As we support more schools and the Humanist school estate expands, the need for a regular programme of maintenance and repair grows. In a number of schools we have had to meet the costs of repairs to crumbling concrete floors and broken windows and for painting to smarten up the buildings.
- **Climate change** - is causing unprecedented storm damage. This year at Mustard Seed School we had to

find unexpected additional funds to replace the roof and ceiling on the girls' dormitory, after the old one was ripped off in a near-hurricane. Storms eroded the surface of the new playing field at Isaac Newton School and has required substantial ground-levelling repairs. Funds are being sought to repair storm damage that eroded the outer concrete work of classrooms at Katumba and caused the collapse of the cess pit under the main toilet block at Kanungu School.

Priorities for 2024

At our 2023 AGM in November we set out the following broad priorities:

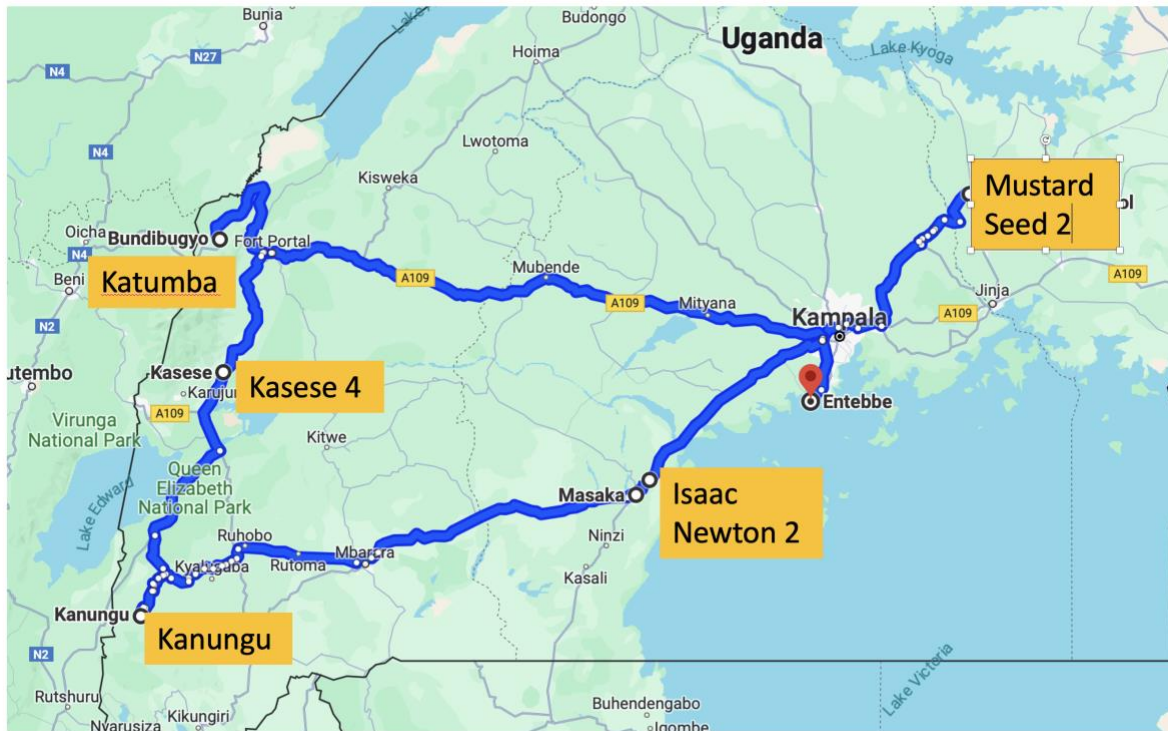
1. **Kanungu Humanist Primary School £2,600** to rebuild the toilet block following collapse of the underlying cess pit.
2. **Katumba Parents Humanist Primary School – £2,000** to repair of storm damage to concrete on classroom verandas.
3. **Kasese Humanist Municipal High School – £2,400** to provide 10 scholarships to enable bright needy children from the Kasese Primary Schools to move on to secondary education and to raise school income to improve the ability to pay teachers. Day scholarships cost £20 a month (£240 for a full year).
4. **Boarding Scholarships – £5,040** to offer 3 new full boarding scholarships to children completing their primary education at each of the following primary schools: Katumba, Kanungu, Isaac Newton and Mustard Seed. Boarding scholarships cost £35 a month (£420 in a full year).
5. **Cash Flow Assistance – £14,400** to help the new primary schools to cover the costs of teachers' salaries, school food and to help children falling behind with fee payments. 60 new donations of £20 a month will enable us to send £9,600 to Katumba School (£800 a month) and £4,800 to Kanungu school (£400 a month).
6. **Books - £5,000** is needed for additional books across all the schools. This is driven by rising numbers of children in the Humanist schools and by curriculum change.
7. **Science - £3,000** is the minimum requirement for science in the secondary schools. **£1,200** would enable us to provide a small amount of dedicated money for science in the primary schools.
8. **Computers and data projectors - £4,000** will enable us to increase access to computers in the primary schools.
9. **Learning and play materials – £2,000** will enable the schools to buy materials for play, music, art and sport.
10. **Welfare – £10,000** for essential welfare measures, including provision of Afripads (£7,500), hygiene, food standards and personal safety.

Should you wish to donate to help take forward the pathbreaking work of the Humanist schools in Uganda, please visit our website:

<https://ugandahumanistschoolstrust.org/donate/make-a-donation/>

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Locations of UHST supported Humanist Schools in Uganda



A road trip of 1,300km

Teachers and Children

