

Uganda Humanist Schools 2028 Sustainability Appeal

This report follows my recent visit to the Humanist schools in Uganda, accompanied by Peter Kisirinya, Chair of the Organisation of Humanist Schools in Uganda. The 20th Anniversary of UHST occurs in 2028, less than 4 years away. We intend to use the intervening period to help the schools to become more self-reliant and sustainable. The focus of this 2028 Sustainability Appeal is on completing remaining infrastructure needs. It must be remembered, however, that a substantial portion of donor funds are used to meet these essentials:

- provide scholarships to enable needy children to attend the Humanist schools,
- buy books and learning materials,
- resource practical science education, field trips and the arts,
- support girls with sanitary pads and hygiene measures,
- facilitate the activities of Humanist clubs,
- help schools to cope with unforeseen, adverse events,
- network with other schools in the Organisation of Humanist Schools of Uganda.

Humanist Schools: Building a Joint Legacy



Teachers at the 3rd Humanist School Conference in August 2023

Over 16 years, UHST has forged a groundbreaking partnership with the Humanist schools and the communities they serve. Each school has its own unique challenges, but all have had to face endemic poverty, resistance from religious communities, Covid pandemic and Ebola epidemic shutdowns. UHST supporters help when problems are encountered, but schools survive largely due to their own remarkable resilience. Despite facing many problems, the progress made by the schools has been inspiring.

Isaac Newton School, which nurtured 30 HIV/AIDS orphans in 2005, now provides liberal Humanist education for 1,000 children, from the time they enter kindergarten at the age of 3 to when they move into jobs or further and higher education after 18. It has risen from being a struggling start-up school to become the top performing school in Masaka City region.

Katumba village school arose from the need to educate orphan children, following the deaths of 100 young men and fathers in a failed insurrection. It has become the pride of its community, giving the hope of a better life to 750 children and their families.

Kanungu School rose like a phoenix from the ashes of a cult massacre. It educates 220 children despite a boycott of the school organised by local churches.

Kasese Schools have developed since 2013 with low but consistent levels of financial support from well-wishers around the world. Their strong Humanist ethos shines through and UHST is very happy that they have become our newest partner.

Mustard Seed School started with support from the *Rationalist Association/New Humanist Magazine*. It is in a poor area which experiences food stress and occasional starvation, but it has already transformed the life chances of many young people in the area. Their former head girl, for example, has recently gained a degree from the top law school in the country.

Eagle's View School was founded recently by a former Mustard Seed School student. It demonstrates how the Humanist ethos can radiate outwards from small beginnings. The school, which has temporary classrooms made from corrugated iron, gives young people an alternative to child labour in sugar cane plantations.

The Humanist Schools movement in Uganda is growing. The schools we support educate over 4,000 children each year. Humanist Schools do not discriminate on the grounds of religion, as do so many other schools in Uganda. They welcome children from all belief backgrounds and none and provide an inclusive education based on reason, compassion and tolerance. The schools bring hope of a better life for future generations in some of the most impoverished rural communities in Uganda.

Isaac Newton Humanist Primary School



Old site with unsafe buildings (left) New site with fine new classrooms (right)

Recommendations

UHST will try to raise funds to meet the following needs of this recovering school:

- A school hall for exams and for other school and community functions.
- Staff rooms, toilets & rainwater collection.
- Making safe and restructuring buildings on the old site.

Rationale

Isaac Newton's takeover of this former Evangelical Christian school, which failed financially during Covid, has been transformational. In two years, pupil numbers have risen from 40 to 414. Academic performance has improved. As a Christian school only one child had ever gained a first grade in their Primary Leaving Examination. Today up to one-third of the cohort gains first grades. With help from supporters in St Louis and Crete, the school has constructed fine new classrooms for Primary 1 to 7 children. Once these new classrooms became available the school was able to adapt a couple of the old rooms to provide boarding for needy children (25 boys and 42 girls).

Local people are delighted to have such a fine school within their village. Fees are willingly paid, and few families fall into arrears. A supportive Parent-Teachers' Association has mounted a fund-raising campaign to build 3 houses to provide decent free accommodation for the Headteacher, Deputy Head and senior Mathematics teacher.

Building a hall will enable the school to register as an examination centre and eliminate the need for children to travel 19 miles to Masaka City on examination days.

Families are delighted with the school's inclusive Humanist ethos.

Isaac Newton Humanist High School



Recommendations

The high school has good basic infrastructure. However, work is needed to improve the water supply, replace toilets, finish the playing field and carry out essential maintenance.

Rationale

As the longest running Humanist High School in the world, Isaac Newton High School is a beacon for Humanism. It has gained a reputation for high standards of education and welfare and for having an interesting programme of Humanist development through its pioneering Humanist Club.

The school developed from a small struggling school doing its best to educate 30 AIDS orphans in 2005 into a large school that today educates 781 children (470 girls and 311 boys). Based upon examination performance, it has become the top performing school in the Masaka City District and is the school of choice for many families in the area. Its success has enabled the school to attract more students while gradually raising fees to improve viability.

95% of children are in boarding, where they pay termly fees of £124 for O-level and £137 for A-level. Over 60 bright children from challenging circumstances are supported on scholarships offered by UHST supporters. 40 others have assisted places funded by the school from overall fee income. The school is largely self-sustaining. It covers its day-to-day running costs while undertaking self-funded infrastructure projects, such as the construction of a third boys' dormitory. Higher fee income has enabled the school to raise the basic monthly salary of part-time teachers to £65 plus £33 for travel, and that of full-time teachers to between £109 and £141. The headteacher and site manager earn £326 and the head bursar £163. A virtuous circle is being realised: high standards of welfare & education have led to higher recruitment and fee income which, in turn, has boosted salaries and staff morale, this has fed back into improved educational outcomes, and the process continues.

Katumba Parents Humanist Primary School



Original timber school on wet ground (left) New brick school on dry land (right)

Recommendations

As school income grows, we will be able to scale back the level of monthly cash-flow support that UHST provides.

Continue to pay tuition fees to enable the school Director to gain a necessary Postgraduate Diploma in Education.

Seek funds to help the school to construct boarding for 40-50 children who currently sleep on mattresses on staffroom floors. A small boarding house will give Primary 7 students decent living and learning conditions in the run up to their Primary Leaving Examinations as well as housing local children in challenging home circumstances.

Rationale

The school is doing well. Enrolment rose to 750 – although recent floods, which damaged road access, have cut 120 children off from the school (the children will return once the cash-strapped local authority repairs the roads and bridge). The old wooden school has been vacated and children are now taught on an attractive new site.

They have 18 teachers. Class sizes are 40-50. Due to very good Primary Leaving Examination results, parents are willing to pay £48 per term in fees – compared with £22 when the school started. There are few arrears! Teachers' monthly pay has increased from £33 to £44. The headteacher receives £87 and the Director earns £98.

The school Director is learning much from his Postgraduate Diploma in Education course and is full of ideas to improve the school. He also has ideas for developing the future role of the Organisation of Humanist Schools in Uganda.

Developing Katumba school has been a huge success. The school has given hope to a remote, forgotten and destitute community.

Kanungu Humanist Primary School



Recommendations

Continue monthly cash flow support to help the school to pay teachers and provide school food. Scale this down as fee income rises.

Try to raise funds for an examination hall.

Rationale

Like Katumba school, Kanungu is a success story. An early boycott by local evangelical churches kept recruitment down to 50 children. Since gaining the only first grade in the Primary Leaving Examination among schools in the area, and winning the national primary school football championship, parents have been willing to break the boycott, and recruitment has risen to 220 children.

In the early days 50% of children failed to pay fees. Having the confidence to send non-payers home, made parents realise just how good the school had become, in comparison with under-funded government schools nearby. In 2024 enrolment rose and almost all parents manage to pay monthly fees of £24 (slightly increased this year from £22). The school has a well-spaced and clean boarding section with 41 boys and 12 girls. Boarding fees are £58 per term.

The appearance of the school site is a credit to the Director and his staff. It has neatly trimmed lawns, flower beds and trees for shade. There is a school vegetable garden. Classrooms are well made with good floors. Rooms are clean and tidy and classroom walls display educational posters made by the teachers. 7 teachers lodge in the school – in a building originally intended as a community clinic. The availability of on-site accommodation has helped the school to retain teachers. The school has a small library and a few computers. There is mains water and power with solar backup.

Kanungu has the best staffroom of all the Humanist schools. It is clean and tidy with marking desks and chairs around the room. It has a TV and radio to keep staff in touch with developments in the wider world. The school has a good kitchen but, with no

external flues, it fills with smoke. The school intends to make alterations to duct the smoke externally. Dormitories are sprayed every holiday to prevent bed bugs and to keep down malarial mosquitoes.

With help from a small grant of £300 from UHST, the school has created a popular children's adventure playground using old tyres.

Using commercial ventures to support the school – The school has been trying to set up commercial ventures with the aim of subsidising the school. A community clinic was built but they could not get permission from the Ministry of Health to employ a nurse. A piggery struggles in the face of anthrax and a local ban on meat sales. They are currently trying to build a small snacks factory – peanuts and Gonja (banana crisps), but its money-raising potential is untested. The school Director keeps the finances of such commercial ventures separate from those of the school.

Kasese Humanist Schools



Kahendero fishing village primary school

Recommendations

The Kasese Humanist Schools (3 Primary & 1 High) wish to attract more day and boarding scholarships to bring bright children from deprived backgrounds into the school, improve cash flow and raise teachers' pay to acceptable levels.

UHST wishes to help the schools to extend the programme of refurbishment and improvement from Rukoki (the main schools site) to Kahendero (a fishing village school) and Muhokya (at Bizoha orphanage).

Rationale

The school Director manages to do much with very limited funds. This started when the *Brighter Brains Institute*, the school's first major sponsor, secured \$1,000 donations to build simple classrooms (using locally made bricks, held together with daub rather than mortar, no plaster on the walls, earth floors and no windows and doors.)

However, low educational standards continue to depress enrolment. Communities around the schools are poor. Termly primary fees have only recently been raised to £26,

with secondary at £61. Substantial fee arrears keep school revenue low. Consequently, Kasese has the lowest paid teachers of all the Humanist schools. Provision by UHST in 2024 of 10 day-scholarships, which gives the school an extra £240 per month, has made it possible to raise teachers' pay from £33 to £39 per month – still very low, but a welcome improvement.

Kahendero is the most run down school site. Elephants demolished the outer wall of the school during the Covid shutdown. Classrooms are small and have earth floors, so parasitic diseases can spread through the children's bare feet. There is insufficient furniture. The site has mains water and power. There are no computers and no library. It has 180 children.

Muhokya is better. Only 3 classrooms remain with earth floors. There is water on site but no power. The school's headteacher is a very effective young woman (who upgraded her qualifications from Certificate to Diploma and finally to B.Ed with UHST help). She is a very good leader and has built a strong team around her. The site has attracted 320 children.

Rukoki is the main site. It houses a primary school and the Municipal High School. It has mains water, power, a decent library, a room with 4 computers, a science lab and an examination hall. Rukoki primary has 370 children. The high school has struggled to attract students - enrolment is currently 110.

The main challenge in all the Kasese schools is to improve staff pay and morale, improve standards of education and welfare, and raise enrolment and income.

Eagle's View Humanist Primary School



Corrugated iron classrooms at Eagle's View School

Recommendations

Encourage the school to network with other Humanist schools and to participate in the activities of the Organisation of Humanist Schools of Uganda (OHSU). Provide books and learning resources. We should help the school to improve its

infrastructure, starting by building 4 new classrooms for Primary 4 to 7 classes. However, the scale of the school's needs is daunting and beyond the current resources of UHST.

Rationale

One of the school directors studied at Mustard Seed Secondary School and he nurtures at Eagle's View a strong, inclusive, Humanist ethos. The school is operating in temporary classrooms made from corrugated iron. The iron radiates fierce heat in full sun. Lessons are disrupted by heavy rain which sweeps in through the open sides. The wooden poles that support the structures are being eaten by termites and risk collapse. The school's needs are great.

Already costed at upwards of £120,000 are requirements for 10 new brick-built classrooms, toilets, library and computer room, and examination hall.

However, the school is in an area with a scattered rural population. Children walk 5km or more to school. Over 100 are already boarding. Girls have a purpose-built dormitory. Boys sleep in unsuitable and overcrowded conditions in staffrooms. The school needs a dormitory for boys and has asked for a bus to bring in children from afar.

Fundamentally, the school was built where there was affordable land, but with no nearby population centre or village. It can only survive as a boarding school and will require two boys' and two girls' dormitories. With these additional facilities the projected expenditure needs of Eagle's View School are way beyond the resources of UHST.

We would dearly like to help the school but if we chose to fully develop Eagle's View School, it would become the sole focus of UHST's fund-raising for the next 4 years.

We propose, therefore, to help the school to make a start by raising funds for a block of 4 classrooms for Primary classes 4 to 7. This will enable the school to demolish the 4 temporary classrooms, including 3 used by nursery children, which are subject to flooding. We would like to do more, but further support from UHST will depend upon the level of our income from donations and legacies over the next 4 years.

Mustard Seed Humanist Primary School

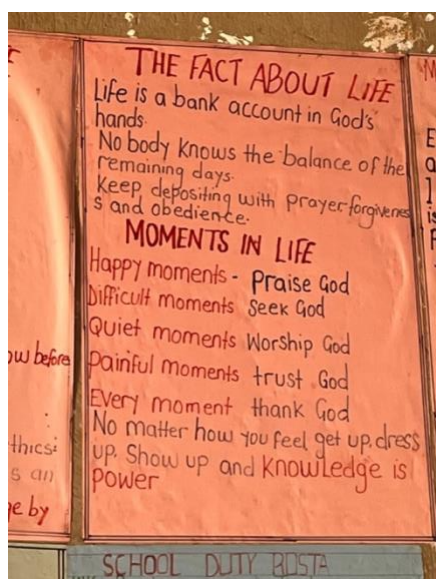


Recommendation

We should provide no further financial support for this school unless there are substantial changes in the school ethos and management.

Rationale

We raised £26,000 to enable Mustard Seed to take over this formerly Muslim school, which failed financially during Covid. We raised funds for a new kitchen and for general refurbishment. Although additional funds were given for furniture there remains a substantial shortage of desks and chairs in classrooms and there is none in the staffroom. The primary school has no water for hand washing, cooking or cleaning, not even rainwater collection – water must be carried from a pump that is a good distance from the school.



We were led to believe that the school would be able to cover its running costs from local fees. The secondary school would provide additional support for the primary school as required. However, there seems to be little connection between the two schools. The primary school is not allowed to use the nearby secondary school playing field. Funding shortfalls are covered by the secondary school on a short-term loan basis and there is a distinct lack of management oversight from Mustard Seed Secondary School.

We learned that the Primary Headteacher is a proselytising evangelical Christian and many of the staff that he has appointed are of similar persuasion. Together, they appear to be running the place as a

Christian school, evidenced by posters around the school site, such as the one here.

Mustard Seed Primary School is clearly not operating as an inclusive Humanist school so, unless there is a major change in management and ethos, UHST should suspend further support.

Mustard Seed Humanist Secondary School



Recommendations

Since the school Director turned his attention to campaigning for a seat in parliament, there has been a marked deterioration in the management of Mustard Seed School. Consequently, and with heavy hearts, we are pausing support for the school until effective management is restored.

Rationale

Mustard Seed poses our greatest current challenge. It is the first time we have had to cope with the potential loss of a school founder, who has committed a substantial part of his working life to his school. The Board of Directors of the school, the auditor and the Organisation of Humanist Schools in Uganda are working hard to find a new management team.

Failure to ensure that the bursar is proactive in collecting local fees has led to a dramatic fall in school income. This has made it difficult to pay teachers in a timely way and some part-time teachers have left the school. Classrooms and dormitories have not been properly maintained. Some children have been withdrawn from the school. Infrastructure projects have not been completed as funds have been diverted to pay teachers. Although the school has many books, they are not readily available to students and facilities for reading and private study have not been maintained. The school has suffered from an absence of day-to-day management and medium to longer term planning. In the past year there has been a marked decline in educational and welfare standards in the school.

Conditions for resuming UHST support for the school:

A new management with full financial control must be appointed. The new managers must be capable of restoring educational and welfare standards and restoring the confidence of staff while maintaining the school's Humanist ethos.

Thanks to UHST Supporters

We are very grateful to UHST supporters for helping us to facilitate the groundbreaking Humanist School Movement in Uganda. It is time to share a moment of pride in the schools' achievements.

In 2028, UHST will celebrate its 20th anniversary as a Humanist charity. To mark the occasion, we are planning a large event in Uganda that will bring together teachers and students in the schools and their supporters. Our aim is to use the intervening period to help the schools to achieve self-reliance and sustainability.

Following our recent Uganda tour we have identified with schools a list of essential infrastructure needs that form the basis for this fundraising appeal. During the appeal UHST will continue to prioritise essentials such as books, learning resources (especially for science) and improved pay, conditions and training for teachers.

We believe that the priorities set out on the next page are achievable. Should donations rise ahead of expectations then we will be able to do even more to improve education and welfare in the schools.

We welcome feedback from our supporters on the proposals.

On behalf of teachers and children in the Humanist schools and their communities, we would like to express our immense gratitude for the selfless assistance that UHST supporters have provided over the years. As a result of your support, the lives of many children, their families and communities are being transformed.

Steve Hurd
Chair, Uganda Humanist Schools Trust,
November 2024

Humanist Schools' Sustainability Appeal to 2028

Costs are approximate Uganda shillings/UK pounds

		Uganda Shillings	UK pounds
Kasese Schools	Kahendero refurbishment	25,000,000	£5,435
Kasese Schools	Mains power Muhokya	10,000,000	£2,174
Kasese Schools	Muhokya refurbishment	25,000,000	£5,435
Kasese Schools	PCs & projectors	13,800,000	£3,000
			£16,043
Isaac Newton Primary	School Hall, staffrooms & furniture	70,000,000	£15,000
Kanungu Primary	School Hall	55,000,000	£12,000
			£27,000
Isaac Newton Primary	Water Harvesting at the primary school	12,500,000	£2,717
Isaac Newton Primary	A second Blair toilet at the new school	25,400,000	£5,522
Isaac Newton Primary	Kitchen at the new site with wood burning stoves	25,000,000	£5,435
Isaac Newton High	2 replacement Blair toilets for student & teachers.	50,800,000	£11,043
			£24,717
Katumba Primary	Dormitory & Toilets (or just beds)	152,000,000	£30,000
Isaac Newton Primary	Refurbishment of Kindergarten site and playground		£7,000
			£37,000
Eagle's View Primary	4 classrooms for Primary 4 to 7 children + furniture	124,000,000	£27,000
		TOTAL =	£131,761

We will work systematically down the above list as funds are donated.

As soon as satisfactory management arrangements have been put in place at Mustard Seed School, we will seek additional funds to resume development work at the school.

Should you wish to help a particular school to meet its needs from the above list, then please get in touch with us:

Contact: stevehurd@uhst.org +44 (0) 7773 972601

Full details of how to contribute to UHST can be found on our donation page:

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