



## Uganda Humanist Schools Trust

### Visit to Mustard Seed School, Busota

### September, 2011

#### Getting the show on the road again

The Mustard Seed School experienced an unexpected hiatus in external funding during 2009-2010. It has been our mission since then to restore the confidence of staff and students by creating a sense of progress. In the past year, UHST has made a determined effort, together with the Rationalist Association/readers of *New Humanist* and the British Humanist Association, to restore the flow of funds and put the school onto a sustainable development path. We mounted two successful appeals which have enabled us to allocate over £44,000 to improving facilities and resources at the Mustard Seed School in the period November 2010 to September 2011.

I was accompanied on my latest visit to the school by Bob Churchill, former BHA Head of Marketing and Promotion. Bob is in Uganda, with support from IHEU, to volunteer his skills to assist the organisational development of the [Uganda Humanist Association](#) (UHASSO). It was immediately evident to us both that the injection of new funds has brought about a dramatic improvement in conditions at the school.

#### Land acquisition and building refurbishment

Dormitory for 4 Boys	Senior 1 Classroom	Senior 5 Classroom	Storeroom
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Teachers' prep room
Deputy Head & Director of Studies
Director & Headteacher

Working with IHEU we purchased the portion of rented school land and buildings that had been threatened with repossession by the landlord. This gave the school 7 additional rooms in two buildings and relieved it of future rental payments. Following refurbishment, the two blocks have given the school a substantial increase in useable space.

The block above contains two classrooms, a small dormitory for 4 boys and a storeroom. The one to the left contains offices: a teachers' prep room, a room shared by the Deputy Head (Annet

Kasuubo) and the Director of Studies (Awali Muledhu),

and a room divided into two for the School Director (Moses Kamywa) and the new Headteacher (Daniel Sabirye).

Director's office



Deputy Head and Director of Studies



Staff prep room with TV



Boys' dormitory with mosquito nets



As well as purchasing the rest of the main school site for the charity that runs the Mustard Seed School, we were also able to raise money to purchase a substantial stretch of farmland near the school that is being used to grow food. This gives students an opportunity to do practical work to support their agriculture classes. It will reduce school running costs by providing food (maize) for school dinners.



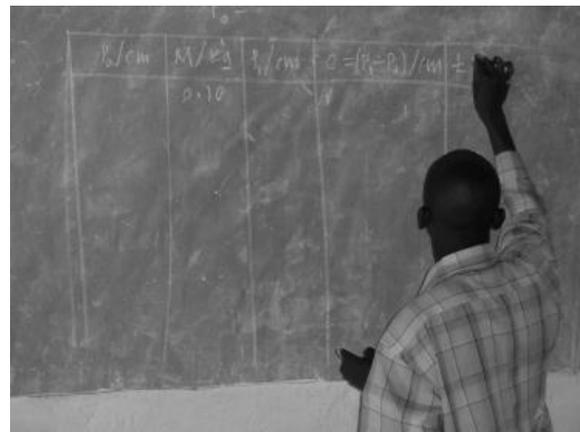
Once we have the funds to do so, part of the land will be levelled, using a digger, to give the school its own playing field. Hitherto the school teams have had to use the sports field of a nearby primary school, though often it is in use and not available when Mustard Seed students want to use it.

It is now a Ministry of Education expectation in Uganda that all secondary schools have their

own playing field – part of a new national school sports policy. Recently the school football team won a local knockout competition and provided the Mustard Seed School with its first trophy cup. Turning out in Stoke City strip is the team’s secret weapon, which covers the opposition before they start.



After buying the land and buildings described above, we have been able to fund work to improve the buildings. The science lab has been completed by plastering and painting the walls, concreting the floor, installing windows, doors and benches. We put £1000 into the schools account at a science materials supplier in Kampala to enable it to increase its stock of equipment and chemicals so that students can now have science practical classes. The pictures show an O-level class in operation, with students using apparatus to make accurate measurements which they record in a table to show the relationships between two key variables.



Building work at the school has also involved plastering, concreting, painting, fitting windows and doors to create the new administration block – illustrated above.

The old administration room has been re-plastered and made secure to house a new computer network and laser printer. The network was installed by U-Connect, an NGO providing refurbished computers at a low cost. The server comes with standard word processing and other general purpose software, plus a wealth of materials selected for their educational use. Teachers and students have access to the Rachel Repository (a huge off-line encyclopaedia of material selected for school use), 800 classic e-books from the Gutenberg collection, tens of video films (including Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet), a typing tutor and a huge collection of support material for teachers from the ELATE



Project (which contains lesson plans, schemes of work, student activities and guidance – all written by educational professionals in Uganda to help young teachers in challenging circumstances). The laser printer gives the school on site printing and greatly reduces the school's expenditure, in comparison with using outside printing services.

During our visit the school experienced one of its regular power cuts, so the computers could not be used. As such sudden cuts in power can damage the computer system we have arranged for the school's electricity supply to be protected with an inverter and batteries to provide power backup for up to 11 hours. This will enable the computers to be used throughout the week and guarantee lighting in the evenings for the small numbers of boarding students (4 boys and 8 girls).

To the right is a picture of the water pump that was installed last year in the school compound with money raised, through a New Humanist appeal, by the Chiltern Humanist group. Having water on site has made a huge difference. Previously the school could only draw water at night from the compound of the Catholic Church. This meant that they often ran out of water during the day, which caused problems for the cook preparing food and affected general sanitation and cleanliness. With the water on site, school dinners now arrive on time and students and staff have safe water to drink and can wash their hands after visiting the latrines.



## Learning resources

There is a mention above of the importance the school has placed on getting science equipment, so that students can do science as well as hear about it.

Another important change in learning provision in the school has been brought about by a sustained and sizeable increase in the number of textbooks. Last year textbooks were purchased for Senior 1 and Senior 4. This year Senior 2 and Senior 3 classes have been supplied with a substantial number of textbooks. In two years we have put £4,800 in the school's account at Aristoc bookshop in Kampala, which allowed them to buy full-colour, well edited, locally



authored books from Uganda publishers. These books are much cheaper than those bought on the international market and they are tailored to the needs of the local curriculum and use Ugandan examples. This is far better than shipping second hand books from the UK.

The books have effectively doubled students' study time. They can now both hear a topic

presented in class and then read about it in their own time by borrowing textbooks from the library. This has the further benefit that students can see how words are spelled and develop their overall reading skills, which is a crucial capability for adult life.

As a regular visitor to the school it is easy to see a marked improvement in both written and spoken English over the past two years, since we started the Foundation Literacy Programme which encourages teachers to integrate the use of books into their teaching and learning strategies. It is also no coincidence that there has been a substantial improvement in examination results. While there is still a tail end of quite low grades, two students gained a Division 1 aggregate across their O-level papers, which puts them in the top 8% of students in Uganda. While the books have helped, the dedication of the teachers in the school is always the key element determining overall student performance.

The school district has been on the edge of the East African drought zone over the past year. Crop yields have been down. This caused a food crisis and left no surplus food to sell to raise income for families. Consequently only half of the students returned to school at the start of the year, as they had no means to pay even the very low school fees of 50,000 Uganda shillings (£11) per term. As the new season's crop was harvested students have gradually returned to school but O-level classes were unable to pay their examination fees. In the circumstance our trustees agreed to help out by paying all exam entry fees for 2011 at a cost of £540.

## Teachers

As Director of the Mustard Seed School, Moses Kamywa has made a determined effort to improve the quality of teachers in the school. As the number of students in the school has grown, now approaching 200, the teaching staff has expanded to 22. All teachers are now fully qualified with BAs in Education or Diplomas in Education. An exception is Computing Studies, which is currently taught by the school secretary who has a University Diploma in Secretarial Studies and is the most qualified person in the school to teach this subject. Moses has chosen to employ newly qualified teachers who he finds to be enthusiastic, flexible and also cheaper to employ.

Pay remains an important issue. All part-time teachers are paid by the 1 hour lesson (1,500 Uganda shillings = 40p), though most teach 2 to 3 days in the school and give over 20 lessons a week. All teachers receive an allowance to cover their travel to school using *boda-boda* (motorbike taxi). The 10 full-time teachers are paid a salary based on the same per lesson rate. In addition they receive a monthly housing allowance of 15,000 Ug sh (£4).



The school recognises that pay rates are low – even by Ugandan standards, but they do not, as yet, have sufficient income to pay more. Finding a way to raise rewards for teachers is important in order to attract good teachers, reduce staff turnover and increase their

commitment to their students when they are in school. I discussed with Moses and his staff in a meeting a number of proposals to improve matters. These included, with our assistance, raising the lesson rate to 2000/=, paying an end of year bonus for teachers who stay in the school for a full year and, more controversially, paying a bonus related to exam results. They intend to let us know before the end of the year which option or options they would prefer. At the moment, the end of year bonus seems to be the favourite as it will serve as a form of forced saving and give staff a large pay packet at the end of the year which they can use to pay for such large items as school fees for their own children.

## **School Registration and Examination Centre**

Just before my last visit, the Local Education Department Inspector had set out the conditions that must be met by the school to be registered by the authority. These included completing the science lab, creating an administration block, a staffroom and upgrading the teaching staff to include a minimum of 8 fully qualified teachers. In the course of the year the school met all these conditions and is now fully registered and has official recognition.

The next challenge is to meet the requirements for becoming a recognised examination centre, so that students no longer need to go away to another school to take their final exams. Following a visit from the Uganda National Examinations Board the following conditions were laid down: creation of a dedicated examinations hall, provision of examination desks and a secure perimeter fence. The school already has the hall, but it has been separated by temporary wooden dividers into individual classrooms. The partitions need to be removed, the walls plastered and painted, the floor concreted, glass windows and solid doors fitted to keep out wind and rain to prevent disturbance during examinations. The school must also have a secure fence to prevent cheating involving third parties outside the school.

## **Purchase of neighbouring school**

The major problem for the school was that freeing up the hall during the examination period would leave no classrooms for the students who were not involved in exams. Moses obtained quotations for a needed 4 classroom block. Unfortunately, at £25,000, the cost was very high. Coincidentally, a nearby Moslem primary school announced that it was closing down through lack of support. The site had two acres of land, 5 classrooms, staff offices, a kitchen and latrines for boys and girls and would more than meet the needs of Mustard Seed. After a period of negotiation, Moses was able to secure the site and buildings for £22,000. We launched our first appeal for a specific targeted sum with the BHA and New Humanist helping us greatly with promotion. The appeal was initially successful but had stalled at about £13,000 before we received a final generous donation of £10,000 to take us to our target. This enabled Moses to exchange contracts for the purchase of the additional school site at the end of August. The local chief and community leaders have asked Moses to allow the primary school to complete the year to December, and to take formal possession of the site in January. Below are some photographs of the site and buildings as they stand at the moment. In front of the school there is a playground and netball court, and behind there is an enclosed courtyard with the kitchen and latrines.



Once Mustard Seed takes full possession of the site there will be some work to do on the buildings including concreting floors, plastering and painting, fitting windows and doors. It will also need attention to the kitchen and latrines, arranging water supply and extending electricity to the new site, which is 80 to 100 metres away from the existing site.

Once this work is finished the hall building can be refurbished and the site fenced to meet examination board requirements. Moses intends to locate sixth form teaching (Seniors 5 and 6) and boys' boarding on the new site and keep O-level teaching and girls' boarding on the original site.

There can be little doubt that this new acquisition has created space and facilities which will allow the future development of the school to proceed unhindered.

One final point of interest is that, like all schools, security is an issue. There is no point buying expensive books and equipment if they are going to get stolen. Fencing is therefore important. As with other schools, Mustard Seed also employs a night guard (an *askari*), who defends the site with a formidable looking bow and arrow. I could not resist showing you all the pictures of these.



## **School requirements for 2012**

1. Refurbishment of school hall.
2. Fencing the site.
3. Improving teachers' pay and conditions.
4. Renovating the newly acquired Moslem school site.
5. Levelling the land for the school playing field.
6. Increasing the stock of books to reach the level of one textbook per student.
7. Purchase of additional learning materials for science, art and music.

If you feel you or your group would like to contribute to meeting any of these needs then please contact us at [uhstinfo@gmail.com](mailto:uhstinfo@gmail.com) or download a supporter form from our website: [www.ugandahumanistschools.org](http://www.ugandahumanistschools.org).

Steve Hurd

8 October 2011