



Josephine Abalo presents John Osidi with a cheque covering two years of his university course in July 2019 (see p.3)

## Guardian Christmas appeal: Escape route from Uganda's rural poverty cycle

Jessica had to drop out of school but sees education as the path to better future



▲ Jessica in the nursery school where she works. Photograph: Martin Godwin

How we were in 2009 - the Xmas appeal.



One of the thriving Mvule supported schools in NE Uganda 2019.

## Dear Mvule supporters,

At the end of 2019, we are delighted to wish you Happy New Year! We also pause to reflect, however, because it is exactly ten years since we were with Guardian journalists Amelia Gentleman, Afua Hirsch and Anne Perkins in Eastern Uganda seeking students to benefit from the paper's 2009 Christmas appeal.

It's a happy reflection. We funded over 325, including six young women to train as nursery schoolteachers. We are immensely proud to report that five now have schools of their own. See p.4. We can also report that many ex-Mvule students are in salaried jobs, a huge achievement in an economy that is growing but creating very few formal jobs.

Ten years ago was when you came on board. We are hugely indebted to you. Ten years of steady giving! Today we run entirely on funding from supporters who came via The Guardian, and direct

debts bring in about \$15,000 a year. This sound smalls but it makes a big difference.

We've also reduced our overheads. A social enterprise called ACCLAIM Uganda manages our admin. Our driver of 15 years retired but we call him back as necessary to benefit from his prodigious recall of which roads to take to our former students. Josephine Abalo now runs a scholarship scheme funded by Irish Aid but together she and I decide who to give your funding to.

In 2018, Mvule interventions were largely with youth in a refugee settlement in NW Uganda. In 2019 we re-started giving out scholarships, two to four-year commitments that we plan carefully as we want never to have to drop a student halfway through due to lack of funds.

We have more scholarships planned for 2020 and therefore thank you again from the bottom of our hearts for your steadfast generosity that allows us to create opportunities for youth in East Africa.

**Cathy Watson**



## Mvule Trust Objectives

- Fund bursaries for young adults, primarily girls, who are not able to pursue a post-primary education.
- Fund bursaries for young adults not able to pursue a postprimary education.
- Where possible, provide Mvule Trust beneficiaries with personal materials crucial for academic progress, such as uniforms, trade tools and transport allowances.
- Finance the development of school facilities such as science labs.
- Develop a support network for beneficiaries that will encourage them.
- Help graduates to secure employment once they have completed their education.
- Support efforts by other organisations or programmes aimed at increasing quality and accessibility of education in Uganda.



### MISSION

The Trust's main organisational goal is to improve the lives of underprivileged rural Ugandan families by providing young people - primarily girls with scholarships.

### VISION

Mvule Trust envisions a cadre of young people who are educated, self-confident, self-sufficient and able to engage in sustainable livelihoods in their home areas.





*Lawrence appears for the interview with all his certificates, astounded to have been phoned out of the blue.*

## 2018

**Our last newsletter** reported on the influx in 2016-17 of one million South Sudanese into Uganda, which made it the top refugee-hosting country in Africa and the third in the world. Of great relevance to Mvule, most settled in West Nile where we had been particularly active, funding at least 330 young people since inception in 2006.

A pressing issue was deforestation as refugees cleared trees to build shelters, cook and grow food, so Mvule made grants to two organizations, World Agroforestry and Tree Talk, under a project which had a fancy name – “*Empowering the youth through agroforestry training to improve natural capital*” – but which consisted of Mvule’s standard and highly impactful fare.



*Some of the many youth working in the nursery.*



*Training at a school in natural regeneration of trees*



*Baiting a bee hive*

We employed Lawrence Aziruku, a former beneficiary who we had funded in forestry college to raise and deliver seedlings to refugee and host households and make sure they grew. Under his watch, the nursery often had up to 30 other youth working, of whom we chose one who was particularly keen, Dan Ojobile, to attend forestry college. A total of 562 youth and adults were trained in bee keeping, tree growing and farmer-managed natural regeneration of trees. A total of 97,500 seedlings of 20 species were produced. Bee keeping groups were gifted 100 beehives.

## 2019

**2019 found** us calculating how many students we could take

on. We knew we wanted to invest in highly strategic upgrading courses for former students rather than to take on entirely new ones. But the decisions were hard. We put out a call on our Facebook site, and from there, but also by purposefully looking for certain former beneficiaries, finally chose five to start this year and at least two for 2020.

### ► **Abraham Oluka**

This young man was one we looked for. His story was among the most moving of the candidates we interviewed in 2009-10. Desperate to stay in

school, he had sat through the last year of primary school three times, scoring top in Katine sub-county each time he took the national primary leaving exam. We learned of Abraham when we asked the Katine administration for its list of top performers.

The academic gap between him and the 24 others in the top 25 (all of whom we funded) was vast. Only he achieved a ‘Grade 1’, a rarity in a rural primary school. We put him in Teso College, a good boarding school, and then funded him at Lira Medical Laboratory



*Oluka in the lab.*

and Pharmacy Training School, where we had a history of placing students and which, serendipitously, has a football pitch surrounded by magnificent *Mvule trees*. He obtained a certificate in medical lab tech after which he worked in a private lab. We are now delighted to support him for three years to obtain a diploma in medical laboratory science to be awarded by the Uganda Allied Health Examinations Board under the Ministry of Education. It will ensure him a career that progresses. We also pay expenses since this is a full-time course and he had to give up his job.





*School football team. Note Mvule trees towering behind.*

**The total cost of tuition for three years is UGX 11,269,800 or USD 3,063. Living expenses are additional.**

### ► **Nighty Aneno**

In total from 2006 to 2016, about 340 individuals or 10% of all Mvule beneficiaries, were funded to train as nursery, primary or secondary school teachers. We were looking for a former beneficiary from whom this group to offer a chance to upgrade when Nighty Aneno contacted us out of the blue.

From Kitgum, we had supported her to train to acquire a certificate in primary school teaching at Kitgum Core Primary Teacher's College. She had worked in the north for 5 years as a teacher. When she re-connected with Josephine, she was teaching in Kampala. Josephine was bowled over by her bright demeanor. She is now upgrading to a Diploma in Primary Education on a distance or 'in service' course that enables her to continue teaching. She studies on weekends and holidays at St. John Baptist Primary Teacher's College Ggaba, which is accredited by Uganda Martyrs University Nkozi. It has been a pleasure interacting with her. She earns UGX 250,000 or USD 67.93 a month working in a private primary school nine months a year. Her husband is also a teacher.



**The total cost of tuition and functional fees for two years is UGX 8,022,000 or USD 2181.**

### ► **John Osidi**

Mvule Trust located John in Kabermaido, a remote district in Eastern Uganda, in 2009 when he was out of school after O levels, and helped him to attend Nyabyeya Forestry College. He was one of three students out of the 20 that Mvule was supporting there at that time who achieved a first-class diploma. Technically, this entitled him to government sponsorship to university, but this proved hard. Instead he started his own nursery business, which now employs a Nyabyeya classmate, and he obtained a job working with refugees with the NGO Lutheran World Federation.

On 9 July 2019 Mvule presented him with a cheque to cover the

first two years of a four-year 'in service' course towards a BSc in Ecological Organic Agriculture at Uganda Martyrs University-Nkozi. He has distance learning assignments and attends lectures and exams for one month a year on the campus outside Kampala every. His first Facebook post after his first on campus stay was: "Ethnomedicine, ethnoveterinary medicine and ethnoecological systems - wow so good."

**The total cost of the entire four years is likely to reach about USD 3695. The cost of tuition for the first year of the degree was UGX 3,257,000 or USD 846.**

*In September 2018 John attended a 'youth in landscape restoration' event in Nairobi. His first time to leave Uganda, he traveled by bus. Though lacking a degree, his work distinguished him from others, and he gave a poised and meaningful presentation.*



### ► **Reuben Muhindo**

From 2010 to 2015, Mvule Trust funded Reuben, a young man from Uganda's Rwenzori mountains, which border the Democratic Republic of Congo, for his A levels and then to become a clinical officer, a rank between nurse and doctor, at Kagando Mission Hospital. He worked diligently there for several years. In 2017, he asked Mvule if we could support him to train as a doctor at Kampala International University-Western Campus. On our own this was beyond us, but we were able to organize the munificent amount of GBP1000 a year towards his fees for the duration of the training from a trust set up in the memory of a British medical student who perished in a bus accident in Uganda. His hospital also contributes a yearly sum, and Mvule Trust tops up the balance. The cost of studying medicine is not trivial!

Reuben is now in his second year at medical school and performing well, a requirement of the scholarship. In his holidays, he returns to the hospital where he works from 7 am to 1 pm and studies in the afternoon. He was in close clinical proximity to a child from DR Congo with Ebola, whose family sought treatment for her at



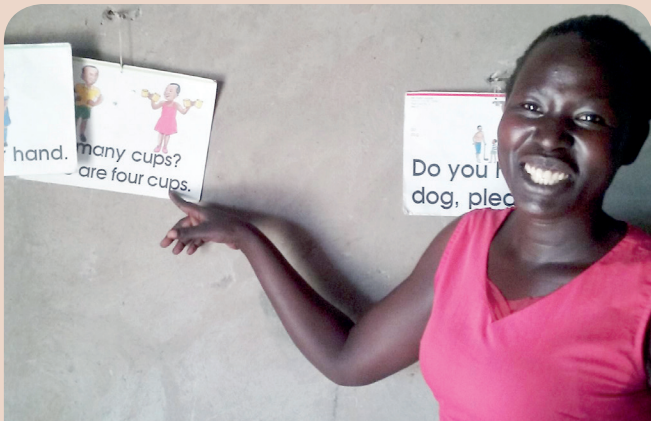
*Muhindo's Christian fellowship. Note the classic medical school prop, a skeleton for learning anatomy, in the background.*



Kagando. She died in the regional Ebola Center in Bwera shortly afterwards. Like many young Ugandans, he is a devout Christian and belongs to a medical fellowship.

**Mvule Trust pays about USD 2700 a year towards Reuben's five-year course, of which the equivalent of GBP 1000 is contributed by the associated trust. The full cost of the course is UGX 25 million or USD 6794 a year.**

## The Early Childhood Development centres/ nursery schools



**This was Mvule's moonshot.** Looking back, it was audacious to give the equivalent of \$2000 to each of six young women who we had funded at nursery teacher training school to set up their own schools. But our thinking was that their training had been very reasonably priced, just a few hundred dollars for two years in the regional town of Soroti. And after all, we had spent up to the equivalent of \$5000 on some beneficiaries who had had six years of secondary school and three of university funded by us. Furthermore, we thought, would it not be awesome if they could start nursery schools in villages that had none, creating a multiplier effect? So why not take the gamble? And, indeed it has been awesome. Only one has had to close her school, largely due to personal health problems.

All the other five have functioning schools, with staff, well over 100 pupils each, and key requirements in place. In the case of two of the schools, two humanitarian NGOs pay for 30-50 pupils. The NGO's endorsement is reassuring to us of quality and it provides some guaranteed income to the school, no matter how small. Fees are just 25,000-30,000 UGX per term (\$6.50 - \$7.75) or about 10 US cents a day. Regrettably, rural families find even these hard to meet.

## Mvule on Facebook



You are welcome to look at the Mvule Trust Facebook page where about 740 of our 3400 or so former beneficiaries stay in touch with us and each other. (Not every young person is on Facebook) The conversation largely consists of beneficiaries congratulating each other and votes of thanks.

**Apidra Santos Original** "I would like to thank you, Mrs. Josephine Abalo, for your tireless efforts towards seeing that we the needy continued with our education in various secondary schools up to various institutions. Through your effort I am an architect self-employed. From Moyo Secondary School 2010 to Kampala Polytechnic Mengo 2011"

**Grace Ainebyoona** Wow thank you, Mvule Trust. You covered my nursing tuition. I am proud to be a Mvule product."

## Other good news

### ► Betty Jolly Acayo

We reported on Betty in the 2017 newsletter. From Kitgum, she had had to leave forestry college where Mvule was supporting her without completing her studies because, it was discovered, she needed hearing aids. Once that was sorted - it took about a year - Mvule paid for her to return and complete her diploma. Her good news is that she obtained a coveted post of assistant district forester in Nabilatuk district. This is in fact glorious news. She will be a respected resource person for a district of deeply traditional pastoralists. We wish her all the very best.



### ► John Bosco Turyatunga

From Western Uganda, this young man recently wrote to say that he was on his way to train to be a national examiner for the Uganda National Examination Board. Mvule supported him for six years in secondary school and then through to reaching the level of a grade 5 teacher which qualifies him to teach in a secondary school, teacher training college or university.

### Two nurses for upgrading in 2020

Health workers need permission to stand down from their government job to pursue further training so in 2019 we were unable to send any from the group of about 150 that we put through training 2006-16. However, we have identified two - Agnes Auma, a nurse, and Alice Oriokot, who was profiled in The Guardian in 2009.

**Mvule Trust 2018-19: Trustees D Lyon (chair), J Kibazo, R Dowden; Directors C Watson, W Pike; Manager J Abalo; Driver Fred Mwesigwa. Like to know more? Please write to cathyhwatson@gmail.com or Mvule Trust, Highfield House, Park Road, Combe, Witney, OX29 8NA, UK, or text +256-752-513113. Please continue to donate.**