



February 2021

Dear Friends,

In the UK, the first tentative signs of spring are with us and hope for an end to the pandemic is increasing. It is a very different story in Africa and in this Newsletter you will read the contributions of our two partner schools in Rwanda, Umutara and Nyabihu, on the subject of the virus and COVID. But first a huge thank you to everyone who responded to our Christmas Appeal so generously. We received just over £2,100 which we made up to £2,400. We were able to send substantial donations for food to all of the four countries in which we work: Burundi, Congo, Rwanda and Uganda.

Here is a picture of Rev. Kamonyo Botanyi delivering food parcels to the families of his pupils. Kamonyo, together with his late wife, Beatrice, both deaf, founded three schools for deaf children in the Goma region of Congo and, with our help in the planning and design stages, is hoping to build a new school for deafblind children.



Almost There

As readers will know, we decided some four years ago that our first major project would be the development of a Vocational Training Centre (TVET in Rwandan terminology) with Friends of Handicap in Rwanda (FHR) at its deaf school, Umutara. Our policy for any major project is that there should be a viable Business Plan in place for the partner organisation beforehand. Howard, our International Director, worked with FHR on plans for both the charity and the school, and, following the successful completion of these, on a plan for TVET. This estimated that the total capital and revenue costs over five years would be approximately £190,000. For a charity of our size, this could not be achieved in one fell swoop and so we planned the development over three to four years.

Thanks to your generosity and the UK Government's Gift Aid programme, the end of the project is now in sight. Accompanying this Newsletter is a report "[The Story So Far](#)" which describes our relationship with FHR and TVET over the years 2017 to 2021. As you will read, our total support to FHR has been just over £150,000 of which just under £64,000 has been for TVET. We now need to raise approximately £40,000 to complete the capital needs of the project i.e. Hairdressing and Masonry Equipment and one Water Tank.

The final buildings in the project are for Masonry. While much of the training is inevitably outdoors, there is a need for a Practical Room and Stores. Here is a picture of the Masonry Stores, and the Practical Room is now under construction.



Last year, with our support, FHR produced an awareness and fundraising video which gives a comprehensive look into the educational and training work at Umutara over the past few years. This video is available on YouTube. Click to follow the link.

<https://youtu.be/R3-bH5svVqk>

What has also been very gratifying is our ability to respond to unforeseen crises that have affected our partners. During the pandemic we were able to make payments to cover loss of regular income, food shortages, the construction of handwashing stations, and outreach education during school closures. Another example is that, without warning, the Rwandan Government issued ultimatums requiring every church to have certain amenities including toilets, fencing, car parking etc which resulted in the immediate closure of literally thousands of establishments. Our donors twice sent donations to enable Umutara's Baptist Church, of which Dominique, Chairman of FHR, is Pastor, to stay open.

Association for the Self-Development of Deaf Women in Burundi

Last year we reported on a project with this association which was to spread awareness of coronavirus and Covid 19 amongst the deaf community across the country. We have been delighted to continue to work with this very active group who are sponsored for the management of their activities by the Burundi National Association of the Deaf. The current project is about training and is in three parts: 1) Tailoring and Managing a Business, 2) Sexual and Reproductive Health, and 3) The Rights of Persons with Disabilities under the UN Convention. The group are planning to make an active contribution to International Women's Day.

The tailoring element is for a series of workshops with a group of five women at a time, and this is the first activity to have started.



The first group from the Deaf Women's Association receiving their tailoring training

Coronavirus and Covid 19 in Rwanda

Both of our Rwandan partners have reported in detail on the effects of the pandemic on the country, both in relation to the general public and as it has affected their own institutions. The lockdown had profound effects on Special Needs Schools. The first lockdown resulted in all pupils being sent home from mid-March 2020 for 8 to 10 months, depending on age. Outcomes were financial hardship, domestic abuse and no education. The situation improved to a degree when from mid-summer 2020 teachers began to make home visits both for education and delivering food parcels. During the second lockdown, schools were required to keep children at the school during the Christmas holidays, to extend classrooms and dining rooms for social distancing, and to double the number of handwashing stations. In addition, the Government greatly increased the

number of state schools across the country as they needed to reduce the pupil population in the existing schools where class sizes could number three figures. Many more teachers were required for these schools, and the Special Needs Schools lost many specially trained staff as the salaries are higher in the state schools. Rwanda is now in another lockdown, less severe for the districts, but not for Kigali, the capital. District schools are open, but there are still no holidays for residential pupils who have to stay on site. Travel between districts is forbidden.

Right across Africa there were shortages of PPE, oxygen and medications. Our colleagues at Medic Malawi (a UK charity in Shropshire) reported that at the time of increased hospitalisations there was only one oxygen cylinder in their hospital. This is a situation that is likely to exist right across sub-Saharan Africa.

One positive development has been that Rwanda is in the forefront of countries in Africa in respect of vaccinations. In January the Government purchased five new ultra-cold freezers in anticipation of the arrival of vaccines. The Rwandan National Deployment and Vaccination Plan is targeting the following priority groups: 1) Health frontline workers, social workers and security agencies, 2) Elderly people over 65 years of age, 3) Persons with underlying chronic health conditions 35-64 years old, and 4) People with disabilities aged 15-64 and those with HIV. How gratifying it is to read of this final group, since here in the UK they have only just been prioritized on the very day of writing (24th February).

And finally, some grand news



**Our friend, Omar Kayigi, Head Teacher of Umutara, and his wife, Aline,
at their wedding in December**