

THANK YOU FOR CONTINUING TO SUPPORT ONE OR MORE OF OUR VILLAGE SCHOOL PROJECTS

This year we focused on supporting two primary schools: Nyakeina and Rushaga. Both schools are extremely important to those local communities but they struggle to raise sufficient income to cover essential expenditure and are therefore at risk of closure.



Omushana has been involved in these schools for over 10 years. We had originally hoped that after some help to improve the infrastructure such as latrines, classrooms and water provision, both schools would be thriving by now. However, there are many significant, and unfortunately increasing, challenges which are out of the control of the schools and which mean they cannot currently run sustainably. These challenges include:

- Parents have always struggled to pay fees but this has become even more difficult in recent years due to the pandemic affecting tourism (a major source of income), a collapse of tea prices, failure of tea factories to pay salaries on time, climate change impacting crop harvests and the cost of living rise which has hit Uganda hard. Families currently have even less chance of completing school fee payments.
- Food prices have gone up massively – when you are feeding over 200 children this makes a real difference in balancing the budgets. Parents can't afford to increase lunch payments but the price of food has gone up by at least 20%. The food budget before 2020 was £750 per term; it is now over £900 per term.
- Salaries are increasing due to the cost of living crisis. These remote village schools are competing with government schools and schools in tourism hotspots which can afford to pay their teachers much higher salaries. To recruit and retain quality staff these schools need to keep salaries competitive and also provide accommodation or pay rent. The staff salary and housing budget prior to 2020 was around £2000 per term but is expected to rise to over £3500 per term by the end of 2024.
- Children are being taken from these schools and sent to schools far from their homes as a result of the sponsorship culture. Children picked for sponsorship get taken to schools chosen by the sponsors or the sponsorship organisations. Also, parents often choose to send their children away to schools in tourism hot spots in the hope of attracting a sponsor. But whenever a child leaves their village, not only does their welfare suffer, it also results in a loss of fees for the village school - the more children that are taken away, the less sustainable the school.
- At Rushaga there is an additional challenge that in the past all the Batwa children were supported through the profits of their local Community Walk. However, there are now many competing tourism projects that do not support local projects like the school. Only two of the Batwa children currently attend the school due to the lack of funds.

In the face of all these challenges, Omushana continued to support both Nyakeina and Rushaga Schools during 2023, ensuring over 300 children still have access to a good local education.

Nyakeina School received a fee top up of approximately £4 per child each term to allow the school to balance its books. Omushana also subsidised school meals by £2 per child each term to encourage parents to let their children eat at school – this means they don't go hungry or need to walk home at lunchtime. Over 220 children are now eating at school. We upkeep the water filters so the children still have access to safe drinking water from the piped gravity fed system funded by Omushana some years ago.



At Rushaga, Omushana tops up school fees for day pupils provided the parents complete their share of the contributions. Parents pay the first £16 then Omushana pays the final £4. We also work closely with an independent donor who generously funds improved nutrition at the school, advising on the best ways to use the donations to benefit the children's diets.

Both schools benefit from Omushana Community Libraries and are part of our Reading for Fun project. Our librarians visit them regularly: Caroline and Moses from Buhoma Library reach Nyakeina for story reading and IT lessons; Patience from Rubuguri Library makes the long motorbike journey to Rushaga at least once a month for story reading. We have also provided laptops to both schools.



During March & April our Librarian team was taking part in a fortnight's training exercise and visited these schools to encourage teachers to read to the children. These schools are particularly keen to take advantage of these opportunities and the children thoroughly enjoy the stories and books.

We also ran another Nutrition Community Day at Nyakeina – over 200 parents and community members attended as well as local leaders and the Local Authority Nutrition and Health Officers. These Community Nutrition events have a big impact on improving nutrition for children both at home and school. Nyakeina School currently adds milk, fish, vegetables and fruits to the children's weekly diet as well as using wholegrain maize instead of refined cornflour for the breakfast porridge.



Omushana wants to continue supporting these two schools to ensure they survive but it was never the intention for any project to become dependent on Omushana funding. Having kept these schools open over the past 5 years we now need to reduce our support but we are working with both schools to develop other ways they can survive.

One way of achieving this will be to encourage donors to directly support the schools and we are also looking to set up “Friends of Nyakeina School” and “Friends of Rushaga School” groups. We hope very much that you will continue to support the schools through Omushana in 2024 but when these new groups are established you can continue to support the schools through them – we will send details of how to transfer your support in due course.

We are also discussing the issues faced by these schools with local authorities who we hope can do more to encourage parents to send their children to their local schools and for tourists to support village schools rather than only concentrating on the town centre schools.



***Thank you so much for your continued support
for these schools***

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