

The contribution of Discover to work in schools

Keith Lindsey, December 2018



Kirimya



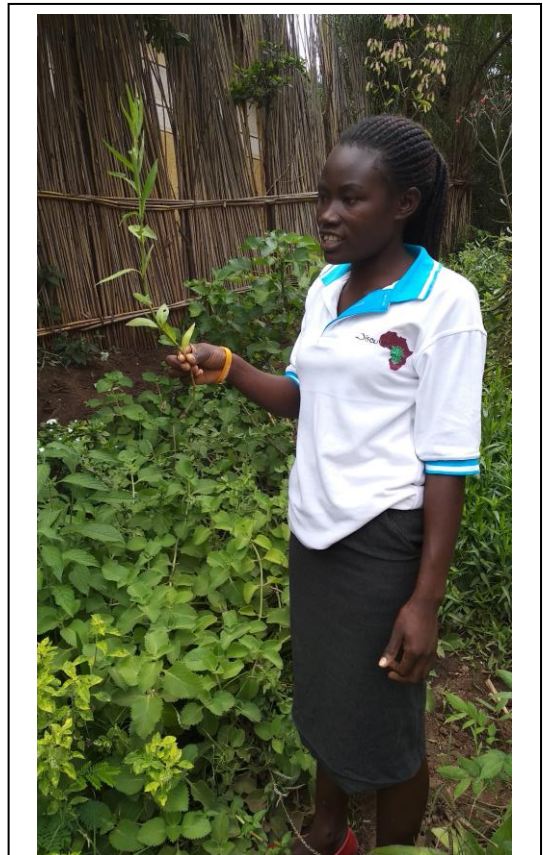
Judith Namba in her grain amaranth garden

Judith Namba is the headteacher of a private primary school. She said, *“We grow grain amaranth and give the children grain amaranth porridge for lunch. They like it and it is very nutritious. The children also make skin ointment. Before, the parents gave their children Vaseline which costs 10,000 shillings. But the herbal ointment costs only 3500 to make. In this way the children learn a lot and the parents learn a lot as well, because the children teach their parents. The skin of the children has improved. We made ointment with the parents at the annual Speech Day as well”*.

Kasese

Six primary schools in Kasese District have Discover clubs. From each school, 5 teachers and 10 pupils were trained by Discover partners in the “Kasese Network” for 4 days in the following topics:

- Identification of medicinal and nutritional plants
- How to treat malaria with *Artemisia annua*
- Nutrition and healthy cooking
- Soil and water conservation around the home and school



A teacher at Standard Primary School, Kasese, presents one of the many medicinal plants in the school garden



A boy at the Kinyaminagha Primary School demonstrates what he learnt about managing banana plants

- How to assist people living with HIV with artemisia and *Moringa oleifera*
 - The important uses of *Carica papaya* (the pawpaw plant)
 - Establishing herbal and vegetable gardens
- Now each school has a garden of vegetables and medicinal plants. The children are becoming enthusiastic gardeners!

Kaliro District

Discover partner Eric Kihuluka and his colleagues have visited 50 schools. They distributed vegetable seeds and taught the basics of good nutrition. Now many schools have gardens of



Teachers at the Kaliro Church of Uganda Primary School were very enthusiastic about their garden of egg plants. “We are now healthy” they exclaimed “because we have a balanced diet!”

egg plants, kale, sweet potatoes and maize. Some have also planted trees or have gardens of medicinal plants. The older pupils conduct debates on the topics of nutrition or hygiene.

Eric also has attended parents’ meetings. Here they discuss the importance of providing school lunches and of stopping animals roaming into the school gardens. In many schools they have won the parents’ support for providing school lunches. The parents contribute 5000 Shillings per term with which maize is bought and milled. The children then get maize porridge for lunch,

supplemented with vegetables from the school gardens.

Parents do not readily contribute money. But when they are told that, each term, that means the children have lunch for just 50 Ugandan shillings, they see that it is a bargain. 50 Uganda shillings corresponds to one and a quarter (Euro) cents.

School lunches are very important, because classes continue until five o’clock in the afternoon. Without lunches, children fall asleep, especially those that are not even given breakfast.

Challenges faced in the Ugandan school system

1. There is a massive dropout rate in almost all schools between the first and last classes. The reasons are numerous. Here are some of them:
 - a) The problems of finding school fees for private schools, and in state schools finding money for books and uniforms.
 - b) Many schools give lessons until 5pm. If children have had no, or very little, lunch, and perhaps even no breakfast, then school must be a terrible ordeal.
 - c) Teenage pregnancies. The average age at which girls in Uganda have their first child is 14 years and 3 months.
 - d) Boys and girls are needed at home for child care or to work in the garden.
 - e) Girls have no sanitary pads during menstruation.



Children and teachers at Izinga Primary School, Kaliro District, stand proudly in their garden of egg plants

2. The motto of one school we visited was “obey and learn”! That is nothing about asking questions or developing an enquiring mind.
3. The school system as it stands is very academic and pays no attention to practical skills. The emphasis is on formal education, not on developing practical skills which enable children to be more self-reliant or to earn a living.
4. Many teachers, including headteachers, have little English, even though they should teach the upper classes in English.
5. The population increase is so rapid, that the number of children entering school is constantly growing, and therefore also the demand for qualified teachers. Thus class sizes are very large and not all teachers are qualified.

Discover is convinced that its work in schools is very valuable:

1. We teach a few teachers and pupils, and the knowledge is shared with the entire school.
2. Teachers feel supported and become more motivated because they benefit themselves from the training and knowledge, and they see how the children enjoy the practical work.
3. From work in the school garden children learn how to be more self-reliant with regard to producing their own food and even medicines.
4. Children and teachers become healthier because they learn what it is to have a balanced diet with organically home-grown fruit and vegetables.
5. Children talk with their parents, who also develop interest. At one school we visited the parents had even established a parent’s garden!



Watched by the whole school, children of the Standard Primary School in Kasese performed a short drama which illustrated the benefit of medicinal plants to treat diarrhoea

Major challenges for primary school education in Uganda

1. Preparation for family planning and family life

Morality in Uganda appears to be at an all-time low. This is not only a comment about corruption. Even more seriously it is a comment about the very predominant behaviour of many men to neglect their duties as husband and father. They seek casual work, spend time drinking and taking drugs, sometimes take several wives, expect sex on demand and sometimes do not even know how many children they have.

At the same time, there appears to be little solidarity amongst the women. They complain, but in the Ugandan tradition women are seen as failing if they have only 3 children or less.

Could primary school education help all their pupils to grow into adults:

- a) who know their own needs and how to meet them?
- b) who can make informed decisions about family planning?

c) who are ready to be good mothers and fathers?

2. Preparation for conflict resolution and participation in a democratic society

The rapid increase in population has led to an increase in the number of conflicts over land. Inter-clan conflicts and inter-tribal conflicts have always been a part of life in Uganda, but today they are more frequent.

Violent conflicts are also, tragically, feature regularly in Uganda's political life.

The challenge for schools in Uganda, therefore, is to enable children to

- a) develop skills of language, listening and argument, so that when conflicts arise, they can express their concerns verbally without immediately resorting to violence.
- b) understand and critically assess the policies of the political parties, so that they can take part in debating important issues and vote responsibly in elections.



Pupils of classes 6 und 7 in the Church of Uganda Primary School in Kaliro took part in a formal debate in English. The resolution was, "Vegetables are better than meat". A girl in class 6 chaired the debate superbly! Such activities are a super preparation for participation in democratic society.