

Mifumi Primary School

December 2016-February 2017

Only when school education translates to learning can pupils excel both in and out of school- Meet Margaret Apio a very practical teacher

53 year old Margaret Apio's love for education radiates in the passion and confidence with which she speaks about the subject. Margaret points out that for learning to actually happen in Ugandan public schools, the current education/teaching approach right from elementary school needed to be challenged.



Margaret, a trained and certified teacher noticed that the majority of children

in several schools where she had taught in Uganda struggled with 2 subjects; Mathematics and Science. Whereas she could almost zero down to the actual reasons behind the disinterest by the majority of the children for the two subjects, she could not substantively state her opinion. She needed to confirm if this was happening in other schools and regions around Uganda and Africa.

Margaret opted to put a halt to her teaching and embark on research. Her research efforts saw her traverse many schools around Uganda and some across the Ugandan border to the neighboring countries of Rwanda and Malawi. Through her research, Margaret came to learn that the education/ instruction system in Uganda did not measure up to the learning outcomes. She started compiling her recommendations and learning on best practice and improvisation for Mathematics and Science subjects.

Margaret started applying her learning strategy in one school in Rwanda, she proved her hypothesis and saw gradual improvement in pupils' grades and emerging curiosity by pupils in the two subjects of her specialty. After four years of instructing pupils in Rwanda, Margaret came to the realization that she needed to bring back this learning to the local schools in Uganda, a place that motivated her to conduct the research in the first place.

Coincidentally Margaret Met Atuki Turner, the Executive Director of MIFUMI and an Old Girl from her secondary school. They spoke about her work and Atuki immediately knew one place where Margaret's education-learning approach would have significant impact; Mifumi Primary School.

Margaret was introduced to MIFUMI Primary School and contracted for one year. She was tasked with using her strategy to improve learning so pupils in this village school can compete and excel favorably with other well-placed schools both locally and nationally.

What changes has Margaret brought about since joining MIFUMI Primary School in March 2015?



(L) Margaret explains one of her new teaching aids to MIFUMI Programme Manager Beatrice Atyang. (R) Margaret in her office

After observing the teachers in class for a couple of weeks, Margaret felt she was ready to have a conversation with the school teachers and pupils aimed at influencing them to consider a new approach of instructing pupils that encourages the pupil to research, think and engage in communicative activities in addition to their passive (teacher-centred) method.

Margaret started by demonstrating to the teachers how the two approaches of instructing pupils work; one based on content and the other based on life-skills by sampling pupils who performed best and poorly in a science test. She instructed and retested them using the two approaches, the school management was impressed with the outcomes.

Margaret has since developed and shared a number teaching aids/tools with the teachers to slowly enable them to introduce and adapt to the skill-based education system to their pupils. Margaret is confident that this approach will enable pupils learn and use knowledge and skills they have acquired during the learning process in and outside school.

Margaret also introduced tests to measure learning outcomes at each stage of instruction. One of her key recommendations to help pupils compete favorably was to introduce external tests and group marking. External tests meant the pupils were sitting standard national tests set outside the school; and the group marking ensured that teachers were not assigning empathetic or biased grades to pupils.

On the subjects on Mathematics and Science, Margaret believes practical learning (often introduced in secondary school) provides a good foundation for pupils to familiarise, internalise and appreciate the two subjects. Margaret with support from MIFUMI and the School Management Committee has opened up a new Resource Centre on the School premises where pupils can walk-in and try, test, practice and even research what they have learned.

Effective March 2017, Margaret is introducing Science and Mathematics days where pupils will show case their projects to their Teachers, Parents and School Management Committee.

Considering all national examinations are set in English, and question interpretation and articulation of the response depended on the pupils ability to understand the language of instruction, Margaret emphasised routine debates to enable pupils express themselves in the English Language, the pupils will then be supported to perfect.

The school library has since been revamped and Margaret is supporting both teachers and pupils to use all the learning resources available in the library.

Margaret who is also a trained teacher trainer conducts teacher capacity building sessions with the Teachers of Mifumi Primary school every School holiday.

As the conversation draws to an end Margaret states that Nutrition and Education go hand in hand and for almost half of the children at Mifumi Primary School, this is a concern. Considering that the School provided the only meal in a day for many of the pupils, the School needed to quickly consider establishing a functional school farm that can provide for every child's nutritional needs every day.

MPS welcomes new teaching staff



The New teaching staff of Mifumi Primary School

A team of 6 new teaching staff including a head teacher have recently joined MIFUMI Primary School. On Friday 10th February 2017, the staff and School Management Committee welcomed Mr. Olwenyi - Head Teacher, Obbo Clement - Deputy Head Teacher, Oboth John Paul - Mathematics and Science, Teacher, Adikin F.O Mary- All subjects Teacher, Alupo Dorothy Primary- English Teacher and Okoth Stephen- Mathematics and Science Teacher. The teachers were introduced to their pupils at an assembly and have since commenced work.

The board meeting- 2017 plan

In December 2016, the School Management Committee of Mifumi Primary School held an end of year meeting to evaluate school performance. The Board made a few recommendations to the School. The Board recommended that the school management and staff become more accountable to the school stakeholders for all the resources invested in the school. As a way forward, the School Board was going to make suggestions for a fundraising plan for the school.

MPS excels in PLE



The 2016 Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE) results of Mifumi Primary School have noted as a historical milestone for the school that started as a mud and wattle facility over 15 years ago. The year's results indicated that all except 2 pupils passed their primary leaving examinations and were eligible to join secondary school. This was a 70% increase compared to last year.

These impressive results are attributed to a number of factors such as MIFUMI's contribution in contracting Margaret Apio, an education specialist. The teachers and pupils also mentioned that the dormitory facility currently accommodating candidate classes provided a conducive environment for the pupils to focus by separating them from unwelcome pressures at home that often deviate them from studying after school.

Two Pupils who emerged as the best have been enrolled to benefit from the MIFUMI Merit Scholarship Scheme that supports best performing pupils with School fees in Secondary schools.

60 pupils sat for their PLE at Mifumi primary School in 2016. Overall Mifumi Primary School took the 22nd position in the District PLE results scoreboard and 2nd position as the best performing Universal Primary School in the District. Tororo District has a total of 173 Primary Schools.

Beating all odds to stay in school- the story of a boy who is determined to become the first doctor in his village



Gerald Owino (L) with a teacher of one of his favourite subjects- Mathematics.

On the day of our planned interview, Gerald Owino, now 16 was on time. Whereas his voice was gentle and almost timid, his handshake was firm. He tried to hide his calloused hands but anyone could have noticed that he had very recently been engaged in heavy and very physical work.

Gerald was one of 5 pupils at Mifumi Primary School who excelled with a first grade in the 2016 National Primary Leaving Examinations. At the mention of this achievement, Gerald's face lights up and he flashes a huge involuntary smile.

As Gerald discloses a bit of his education background, he reveals his fascination for books and education; his favourite subjects being Mathematics and Science.

Gerald notes that he is the only surviving child of his mother. Five of his siblings mysteriously died before the age of 5. When Gerald was almost 10, his father died leaving him and his ailing mother. From the age of nine, Gerald quickly learned to help his mother on the days she was unwell.

But with the death of his father and now ailing mother, all the odds seemed to be against Gerald. His mother was not in position to provide for his education needs, this left Gerald with the probable option of dropping out of School; an option even at his tender age he refused to consider. He was determined to stay in school.

Less than a mile from his house is a rocky hill from which builders quarry rocks to make gravel and foundation material. 2 days a week Gerald worked at this quarry breaking large rocks into gravel. He saved sufficient money to return to school.

In 2014, Gerald sought admission at Mifumi Primary School for Primary 5. With his promising grades, he was admitted at the School.

When he joined Primary Seven, Gerald worked twice as hard to raise extra money to keep him in the boarding section of the School. Each term Gerald managed to raise 140,000/= (£31) to pay for the boarding facility by cracking up to 3 full Lorries of gravel. It took Gerald a week to fill a lorry and an entire terms' holiday work to raise his tuition.

Gerald is driven by one goal to become a doctor. He says he is occasionally haunted by the circumstances under which his siblings and father died. The village always associates all ailments to witchcraft. He believes that had his father or siblings been examined by a medical doctor, they could probably be alive. This is a mindset he wants to change.



(L) Gerald with his mother Loyce Nambafu, (R) Gerald points to the hill from which he quarried stone to pay his fees

Our conversation with Nambafu Loyce- Gerald's Mother

Loyce says her son is a kind and caring boy. He is also a curious boy; right from a young age, Gerald wanted answers for why things are the way they are. He has always wanted to become a doctor. He loves to study Mathematics and Science and his choice of Mifumi primary school was very good. Loyce says she can offer very little practical support to her son but knows he is a focused and determined boy who will pursue his dreams to the very end. She says she is so proud of him because even with all the suffering that surround him, he excelled in the Primary Leaving Exam, coming third in the whole school.

Loyce says she cannot afford a good secondary school for Gerald but believe his hard work will certainly open opportunities for him. At the moment all she can do is pray for him. Loyce hopes someday someone will see her boy for his good heart and hard work and support him to achieve his dreams.

Loyce lost 5 of my children under mysterious circumstances. The entire village said it was witchcraft. They (her and her husband) did not take them to see a medical practitioner because they were told if a person who was bewitched was taken to receive modern medical help, they would die immediately modern medicine was administered.

In 2005 when her husband died, it was said he was also bewitched, and her extended family started to throw suspicions at her. Loyce and her son were sent away from the family land. When she started to get sick, a friend discretely advised her to visit a hospital. The medical test at the hospital confirmed Loyce was HIV Positive, an ailment she believes killed her husband.

MPS receives funding to improve School

Mifumi Primary School received a financial donation of £18,000 from Standard Bank towards improving on the School.

Part of the donation will be used to solar electrify the School including teachers accommodation and class rooms. The rest of the resources will be used to purchase 8 bunk-beds for the School dormitory, 10 storage cabinets, 6 bookshelves, Science equipment, teaching aids, School farm tools, carpets and mats for the Resource Centre and Library for the nursery pupils.

Thank you

We truly appreciate every individual and institutions' support that have been extended in form donations of funds, in-kind and direct personal voluntary service at the school in Uganda. We are grateful to; John Carnegie, Anne Carnegie, Janet Marshall, Mifumi Primary School Jersey Committee, MIFUMI Uganda, MIFUMI UK, John Roberts, Winnie Binns Trust, One Foundation, Jersey Overseas Aid Commission and last but not least, Standard Bank - South Africa, Jersey, Isle of Mann and London.