

FOCUS MULAGO CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER PROJECT

BI-MONTHLY REPORT-SEPTEMBER - OCTOBER 2009

Learning opportunities; A large component of our sponsorship program is about providing education opportunities to under privileged children. Education is commonly referred to as the process of learning and obtaining knowledge at school, in a form of formal education. However, the process of education does not only start when a child first attends school but begins at home. In almost all societies, including ours, attending school and receiving an education is extremely vital and necessary if one wants to achieve success. In our context, not everyone has an opportunity to receive this formal type of education. The opportunities that are offered are greatly limited. Many times there are not enough resources to provide schooling. Since it is not a given that everyone will receive a formal education, the one who receives it is usually envied, praised and even admired by members of the community.

Learning subjects in school is not enough. We can study a lot in school, and be "book-smart". In addition, one can learn how to live life by knowing what to say when, acting a certain way in certain situations and be "street-smart". These two types of knowledge are extremely essential to be successful in life. For example, you can have all the "book" knowledge in the world about a certain profession, but if you don't know how to behave with your co-workers and or your superiors, having "book" knowledge won't get you too far. This is why in addition to providing formal education opportunities to our children; we have supplementary learning programs at the project. But no matter what, education is the key that allows people to move up in the world, seek better jobs, and ultimately succeed fully in life. Education is very important, and no one should be deprived of it.

NEWS BRIEFS

- ✓ We held the annual parents day on September 5th where we graduated 7 students from the program
- ✓ Term 3 resumed on September 8th and will end on 27th November
- ✓ One 8 year old boy was hit by a car and is recovering
- ✓ One 13 year old girl run away from home and is still missing
- ✓ 48 children reported sick during this period mostly to respiratory tract and skin infections
- ✓ 4 families faced eviction for failure to pay rent. 2 other families paired up into one room to save on rent
- ✓ 70% of families at the project now strictly have one meal a day
- ✓ Reported cases of domestic violence and alcoholism are on the rise in supported families



School drop outs in slum areas; It takes many years to complete formal school. Children and youth who drop out of school early are more likely to have a child, be married or head a household than their counterparts. In Uganda, 34 per cent of young men living in slum areas head a household compared with 5 per cent of young men living in non-slum areas. Family responsibilities at a young age often compel young men to seek and obtain jobs. On the other hand, young women living in slums are less likely to seek paid employment, as early marriage and childbearing, forces them to stay at home. Six out of 10 young women living in Uganda's slum communities have a child or are married – double the number in non-slum communities. The majority of young women in slums tend to have children at an earlier age than their non-slum counterparts. In the absence of an extended family to help with taking care of children, the sick and the

elderly, young women living in slums are more likely to stay at home to look after children and do household chores. This limits their opportunity to look for jobs away from home, particularly in the formal sector.

When youth seeking work fail to find productive, decent livelihoods, they can become socially excluded and enter a cycle of poverty, experiencing high rates of unemployment across their life spans. The importance of helping children and youth obtain an education and find productive and decent employment has therefore become a primary motivation for all stakeholders.

Over 50% of Ugandans are aged below 18. There has been increasing concern among policymakers that the frustrations accompanying long-term unemployment among large populations of young men in urban areas may feed political and ideological unrest and provoke violence. As demonstrated by the riots in Kampala and the surrounding towns in September 2009, high youth unemployment, particularly among slums, can create urban unrest, which can challenge government authority and endanger national stability. More importantly, high levels of unemployment among youth, particularly in urban areas, indicate that cities are unable to absorb labor, which in the long term has a direct impact on economic growth and poverty reduction.

Slums and the rest of the world; A research by UN-HABITAT gave a measure of the urban crisis we face: Asia accounts for nearly 60 percent of the world's slum population with a total of 581 million slum dwellers in 2005. Sub-Saharan Africa had 199 million slum dwellers constituting some 20 percent of the world's total. Latin America had 134 million making up 14 percent of the total. At the global level, 30 per cent of all urban dwellers lived in slums in 2005, a proportion that has not changed significantly since 1990. However, in the last 15 years, the magnitude of the problem has increased substantially: 283 million more slum dwellers have joined the global urban population.

These facts and figures explain in part why young people are so vulnerable to unwanted pregnancies, early marriages, prostitution, drug abuse, crime, and AIDS. Slums are a hub of rising crime and violence. We must remember that in this global village, someone else's poverty and deprivation very soon becomes one's own problem: be it poor job prospects, rural-urban and illegal immigration, pollution, AIDS, other diseases, insecurity, and crime. Eventually, it leads to fanaticism and terrorism. The exclusion of so many young people around the world from decision-making, education, health, and from basic services is both a violation of their human and civil rights, and a failure of sound economic policy. This is why we are working to keep the candle of hope burning for young people by investing in them.

Education opportunities in FOCUS; Most of our sponsored children come in the project aged 6 to 9. Ideally they are supported for an average of 12-15 years until they complete school. For quite a number, the period of support is much shorter as they drop out or as we lose support. It is not uncommon for a child to have been sponsored by 3 or even 4 different people by the time they complete school. When a sponsor is not able to continue with support, efforts are made to find an alternative sponsor although sometimes we do not succeed. A major highlight of our calendar year is always in September when we graduate students from the program who have completed school. This report brings you some of their stories.



Left to right; Immaculate, Brenda, Harriet, Ronald, Faridah, Justine and Thaddeus. 2009 program graduates

HARRIET NAKATO



I was registered for sponsorship in FOCUS in 1994 by an Aunt with whom I sometimes lived. My Father was outraged when he heard about it and said it would reflect badly on him if it was heard that a child of his is sponsored by an organization that supports the orphans and the needy. Sadly, he committed suicide 4 months later. He beat my Mother so badly and feared that he killed her so he hanged himself. I was still in Nursery school but my Aunt lied that I was in primary. It was thought it would get me in the program. I had a rough time catching up with the rest of the students as a result of this. A pivotal point in my life was in 1998 when I got saved during a camp arranged for us in Gerenge.

I have always struggled with feelings of inferiority because I was from a very poor home and I was usually called too stupid to know anything because I was too withdrawn and quiet. One time in class I asked for a clarification during a Mathematics lesson and the teacher told me I was too stupid to understand an explanation so I should wait for an easier subject that I might understand. Somehow that stuck with me for too long. All the schools I went to were really low quality education schools I marvel that I excelled at S6 and got into university. By my Advanced level, I was a lot more confident and enjoyed school and was always one of the top 3 students in class. I am the first person in my family, including my relatives, to go to University. I have just completed a degree to teach secondary school students. I have always wanted to teach so I look forward to that.

I have had two big challenges. During my S1-S4, my Mother ran a bar where we all worked till about two in the night. I was already a Christian and I struggled with the bar scenes with men groping you and the language they would use and would feel bad about it. Meanwhile I was leader of the school Christian fellowship!

The second challenge was the extreme poverty at home. We all started working young to supplement the family income. During my vacation, I worked in a hides and skins factory from 8:00 till 6:00 for 2500 shillings per day. I would carry heavy animal skins and pack them on trucks with grown men until I just couldn't manage it. I then taught at a primary school for 3000 shillings per week. We would go for days without food and my Mother would tell us to each find someone to visit so that we would get served something to eat at their homes. Those people to date don't know how much they blessed us. I hated my home life that we had to do without so many things.

Being in the project was my lifeline. I have been able to get an education which there was no way I would have got if I wasn't sponsored. The life skills classes at FOCUS really helped me to overcome the problem of a low self esteem that I have struggled with most. I always thought I was too poor, ugly and stupid to amount to anything, but now I have learnt otherwise. A major lesson that I learnt young was sexual purity. Even in a permissive community, and however tempted I was to behave otherwise I would recall a verse we memorized; 1 Corinthians 6:18 "Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body but he who sins sexually sins against his own body". The biggest achievement for me is the feeling that I have options now. I always felt so helpless, but now I feel so hopeful. THANK YOU so much.

JUSTINE NABATANZI

My Father passed away when I was 3 years old (1986). I was registered in FOCUS in 1992. My Mother worked in Mulago hospital although I do not know what she did. I had an older and a younger step sister. My Mother died when I was 8 to HIV. My two stepsisters were each taken by their Fathers and I was taken to the village. The staff at FOCUS sought for me for months and located me in our village and brought me back to Kampala. Our former landlady, an older woman



who was friends with my Mother accepted to foster me as long as FOCUS was paying my tuition. I was a very difficult child and this lady I call Grandmother sent me away from her home. I lived with a relative of my Mother for a while but she sent me away as well. I lived with some stepsiblings from My Father's side but I was also sent away. I kept moving from home to home but as soon as I messed up, I was sent away. After my P6, I studied a vocational course learning to tailor. After this course, my then foster Mother requested the project to put me back in school which was done and I was able to complete primary school. Again, I moved to a number of homes. For a while I lived with a boyfriend - over a year and struggled with school. I got another foster Mother with whom I lived during my secondary school. I then went back to live with the lady I call my grandmother where I call home.

The biggest challenge for me has been finding a place to call home. People would offer to help me but if I made any mistake, I was told to leave. My experiences in some of the homes were so difficult I don't want to recall them. One of the hardest things was being told to remain at a boarding school alone when everyone went home for holidays.

FOCUS has a policy that one cannot get pregnant while in school. This is especially so if you are getting tuition at university since they spend more money on education then. I got pregnant early this year and was removed from the program. My sponsor amazingly agreed to help me finish with school. I will be doing my last set of exams this December and will have completed a University degree as a secondary school teacher. I already feel such a sense of accomplishment because growing up I never foresaw a future for me. I always felt like I depended on the mercy of others and couldn't help myself. Every day I get up and feel so thankful that I'm not being asked to leave a home. My boyfriend does not have much, but he accepts and loves me like I am. I have a son now. I don't want him to ever go through what I have gone through in life. FOCUS has played such a key role in my life, I can't explain. Even now when am consulted to find children in need of sponsorship, I feel like I actually have something of value to offer in this world. I thank you for giving me value and dignity. My sponsor, may God bless you more than I can say.

RONALD SEBUUFU

I was originally registered in a project called Faith Mission International in 1992. I was later transferred to FOCUS in 1994. For awhile it was hard to adjust to the new project but we liked it better. There was a lot more supervision at school and at home. Indiscipline was not tolerated so some of the children we came with were removed and the rest quickly shaped up.



I became a Christian at a camp arranged at Gerenge. That was a life transforming experience for me. My Father died when we were still young. For long my Mother was sickly but somehow it never occurred to us that it was a life threatening illness. In my S4, I found out that my Mother was living with HIV and that my two youngest siblings were also infected with the virus. Those were dark days for us. Those are the years I appreciated being in the project so much. We received a lot of emotional support and counseling as a family. My Mother was bed ridden for months, but we were given food items for home. Neighbors and some relatives used to think that FOCUS staffs were also relatives to us because they came round so much. For my Advanced level, I was given

full tuition since my Mother couldn't raise the balance on my fees. I was even taken to a good school because I had excelled in school. Presently I have completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in Development Economics. I'm the first person in my family to go to University! My dream is to support two children in the project.

THADDEUS KUSIIMA

I grew up with a widowed Mother who had to raise 5 children. I am the second eldest of these. I was registered in FOCUS in 1992. My earliest memories of FOCUS were that I was one of the children that were forever on the 'disciplinary cases' list. For some reason I didn't value education. Some man in our neighborhood told me I would never complete school and would never amount to anything. He always said this when he saw me going to school and I believed it was probably true. School ceased to be a priority. I recall a whole year of school I missed because I would never get to school even though I left home to go to school. The project staff was always looking for me in the

community and I would get punished and taken back to school. Between my Mother and the staff, the community was no longer a safe place to be during school time and I finally resumed being regular at school. I can only assume it was the grace of God that I was not removed from the program because I was surely a trial to everyone! I thought at best I would do a vocational course after primary or lower secondary, but by my Advanced level in secondary school, I finally started to study really hard to succeed. I have now completed a Bachelors degree in commerce specializing in accounting. For sure that is a miracle. I had to start working early because we all had to pitch in and help my Mother with expenses. My Mother is a role model to me. She has made tremendous sacrifices to keep us where we are. Without the support and patience at FOCUS, I know my story would have been very different. I appreciate my sponsors' for never giving up on me. I don't know what the future holds but it looks bright where I stand now.



Social investments have a long recovery time, but they have returns none the less. We appreciate all those whose giving over the years has made it possible for the FOCUS program to happen. Help us get the young ones below to the level where they complete school too and can take care of themselves.

Until next time

Audrey Karuhanga

Program Director



The FOCUS Mulago Child Development Project is a department of FOCUS Uganda and is a community-based outreach program to the Mulago-Kalerwe slum community in which the FOCUS center is situated. FOCUS now supports 143 children. These children are supported financially through individual sponsorship so that they have the opportunity to attend school and also be provided with their basic needs. Through various educational programs, FOCUS exposes these children to opportunities that will help them develop spiritually, physically, socially, and economically. The FOCUS: Mulago Child Development Project is committed to making a holistic impact on the Mulago-Kalerwe slum community by using the child as the entry point in the community.

The program also reaches out to parents and caregivers of supported children to promote positive parenting through seminars and counseling sessions, improve the lives of the HIV infected and affected families through sensitization, counseling and family support.