



Issue 53

Newsletter

Winter 2021

Help us build a brighter future in rural Uganda

Forty years ago, a small group of Worcestershire farmers gathered around a kitchen table and talked about how they could help poor rural communities in Uganda. The Farmers Overseas Action Group (FOAG) was born. Fast forward to today and we are still going strong!

Over the past 40 years, with your incredible help, we have:

- Improved livelihoods for thousands of small-scale farmers
- Enabled life-changing operations for hundreds of children
- Sponsored children and young adults through school and university
- Supported a group of fantastic rehabilitation centres to give disabled children a better chance in life
- And much, much, much more!

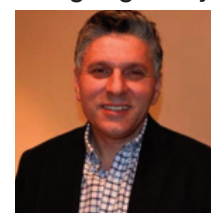


Yet the challenges for Uganda's rural communities are still huge. According to UNICEF, 55% of rural households still live in poverty. The climate emergency is bringing devastating droughts and floods with increasing regularity, and Covid-19 continues to impact all walks of life. In short, the fight continues.

That's why your support counts more than ever, and your donations help us to give a chance to people that need it most.

Perhaps you want to get more involved? We're looking for new trustees and would love to talk to you about building success for another 40 years!

On behalf of the people whose lives you help turn around – thank you.



Nabil Jamous
FOAG Chairman

Nabil Jamous, FOAG Chairman

If you want to become more involved in our work, we are always on the lookout for volunteers and fundraisers, and you can write to us at info@foag.org

To donate, please visit www.foag.org and hit the 'donate' button. You can find other ways to give on the last page of this newsletter.

PROJECT UPDATES

At FOAG we are committed to improving the lives of some of the most vulnerable families in rural Uganda. We help farmers to grow more and waste less food, we invest in children's education, and we support healthcare for youngsters with physical and mental disabilities. All of our projects are implemented on the ground by our superb Ugandan partners. Here are some highlights from the last year.

75 new silos to help farmers in need

Farmers in Namalu, in the northeast of Uganda, grow crops in the most extreme conditions. They are blighted by long droughts that are often followed by flash floods that can sweep away their efforts.

This year drought has reduced their maize harvest by 60-90%.

In addition, due to poor storage at least one third of the food they do manage to harvest is likely to rot or be eaten by pests before it gets to the people that need it.

Such a loss can be the difference between a family having enough to eat or going hungry.

But it is a very solvable problem.

That's why we have expanded our Waste Less Food project this year to help farmers buy on-farm, air-tight metal silos that can reduce food losses to zero.

With your support we have purchased 75 metal silos for 45 small-scale farmers with a total storage capacity of 70 tons of grain.

The demand from farmers is now even greater and your continued support is welcome. £133 will buy a 1,250-litre silo, but any contribution would be gratefully received.



A FOAG silo gets collected by a Namalu farmer



Silos being loaded by the manufacturer before the long journey to Namalu

To donate to this project or learn more about it please contact Will Surman at info@foag.org

Farming for food and the environment

Last year FOAG teamed up with a local Ugandan NGO called EADEN in Eastern Uganda to commence a four-year project to promote the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices, sometimes called regenerative or conservation agriculture (CA).

The project includes three demonstration plots where farmers are trialling and demonstrating CA techniques. As the demonstration farms become established, we hope to expand CA onto neighbouring holdings.

But what is conservation agriculture and why do we think it is important?

In Uganda the rising rural population has increased pressure on land availability. The traditional crop rotation under which land could be rested between crops is no longer possible.

With a reduced acreage farmers must now cultivate the same ground year after year. In addition, climate change has caused more extreme weather, such as crippling droughts and torrential rains.

Subsistence farmers struggle to grow enough food for the family, let alone a surplus.

Conservation agriculture is part of the solution, as it allows farmers to manage their land sustainably.

Key CA practices are:

- Continuous minimum or no tillage to increase organic matter in the soil
- Permanent maintenance of soil cover, be it mulch, cover crop or stubble to limit drying and erosion
- Diversification of cropping systems including legumes to enhance nutrient availability
- Planting of leguminous shrub trees that offer more resilience, especially in the face of extreme drought.

To donate to this project or learn more about it please contact Michael Bentley at info@foag.org



A farmer receives instruction on the conservation agriculture demo plot



Leguminous trees have been planted to improve soil nutrients and structure, as well as shade for crops

In the spotlight: FOAG's man on the ground

FOAG's success in Uganda is entirely dependent on a network of remarkable local Ugandans that deliver our projects on the ground. It is our 40 years of experience, and the deep and trusted relationships we have developed over that period, that set us apart from most other NGOs.

We feel very lucky to count Patrick Walusansa as one of our team. Patrick is our trouble-shooter in Uganda, assisting on all projects, and managing the roll-out of conservation agriculture in the rehabilitation centres.

FOAG Trustee Chrissy Bentley caught up with Patrick to find out more.

Chrissy: Before we talk about conservation agriculture can you tell us a little about yourself?

Patrick: I am a university graduate and an agriculturalist by profession. I am also finalising a postgraduate in Project Planning and Management. I have worked with public, private and NGO sectors in Uganda and across Africa for over 17 years.

Chrissy: What motivates you?

Patrick: My goal is to uplift rural livelihoods through better farming. Over the years my passion has been to work with small scale farmers in Uganda who survive on agriculture and contribute to improving their livelihoods through sustainable farming.

Chrissy: Why is conservation agriculture important?

Patrick: Years of effort are likely to go to waste because of climate change, and thus there is urgent need to support farmers to learn and adopt more resilient ways such as conservation agriculture, as FOAG is doing. It is the main reason I joined FOAG, to keep my dream alive and work together to create more resilient, food secure and self-sustaining rural farming communities in Uganda.

Chrissy: Increasing investment in human capital, the young people of the Centres, the farming families and the field supervisors gives hope in these very challenging times. What else have you learned on the project?

Patrick: That supporting farming households to work together creates a platform for communities to address other social factors that would hinder attaining agriculture success. Discussing gender matters – access to land, equal participation in farming activities – and understanding its impact on sustainable and successful farming is now common practice in these communities.



Patrick Walusansa, FOAG's in-country manager



Patrick (left) addresses farmers as part of the conservation agriculture project

Supporting rehabilitation centres to grow their own

At FOAG we support a number of children's rehabilitation centres. Given we work in some of the poorest parts of the country, we are often asked to provide donations to help meet food bills. This never-ending, hand-to-mouth cycle got us thinking – what if the centres could grow their own nutritious food and be self-sufficient? And with that, a project was born.

We are working with four of our rehabilitation centres (Budaka, Butiru, Pamba and YOUFRA) to train staff to grow their own food sustainably, through conservation agriculture.

The project is working well. Sister Catherine at Butiru Cheshire Home says: "Farmers are very impressed with conservation agriculture. We started with eight people and now we have added twelve more! Many more people have seen what we are doing in the community and are willing to join us next season."

Sister Margaret Itadal at Budaka adds: "We are learning how to become self-reliant in the long run. If we were to buy food every month as usual it would be very expensive. Now we have our own maize!"

Nevertheless, the two growing seasons in 2021 have been tough as drought has decimated many crops. As part of the project FOAG pays for crop insurance which has been invaluable for the centres to keep going.

The Covid pandemic limited visits from project manager Patrick Walusansa (see interview above) but the field supervisors have quickly learned to take more responsibility.

Paulino Ojok, aged 20, has been helping at YOUFRA.

"This is not only a job for me, but it has given me an opportunity to pick lots of skills in conservation farming. Thanks to Patrick for his leadership and mentorship roles. My confidence is growing every day. The project is not only changing my life but has the potential to turn around the lives of the many farmers in my community."

The project continues to evolve as the centres look for more income generation to help meet food bills. They are growing chillies for export, have set up a poultry unit and a scheme to grow soya for a local mill.

To donate to this project or learn more about it please contact Chrissy Bentley at info@foag.org

Chrissy will be happy to give a live or Zoom presentation on all aspects of FOAG's work to groups of all kinds.

Distance learning and food parcels amid Covid turmoil

We continue to support the Pearls of Africa Special Needs Centres (PASNEC) Foundation which has two sites – Kanyana and Seguku – near the capital city Kampala.

The centres help children, from age two upwards and with a mental or physical disability, to develop skills for a fulfilled life.

Due to Covid-19 the centres have not been operational for most of the last eighteen months. In 2020 all children were sent home in March and did not return to classes until November. In 2021 they completed the first term but two weeks into the second term they were again sent home. It is unlikely that they will return this year.

Given the instability, the income from school fees has been greatly reduced. This is where Patti Squire comes in.

Patti has managed to keep most of her staff, although with a 25% salary reduction.

Learning has continued too. At both centres teachers telephoned parents to give activities for their children to do at home and prepared work for parents to collect from the centres. Food parcels have also been distributed to the parents and children most in need.

Staff have also taken the opportunity to work on building projects. For example, at Seguku a second underground water tank has been built with a chicken house on top.

Patti says: "Over the past 18 months we would certainly have not survived without FOAG and their supporters. With the continued help of kind and generous people like you at FOAG, we trust we can continue as we are until we get the children back into the centres."



New underground water tank with a chicken house on top



Tomatoes are being grown in sacks on the other water tank



While FOAG Trustees are unable to visit our projects in Uganda due to Covid, Patti Squire did come to see us! Patti (centre), Jan McConville, FOAG trustee (right), Val Clark, former FOAG Trustee (left)

To donate to this project or learn more about it please contact Jan McConville at info@foag.org.

Photo stories: Children's rehabilitation centres

Thanks to your continued generous support we have been able to complete several building projects at Budaka and Butiru children's rehabilitation centres. See here for yourself, along with some beneficiaries of your support!



A new fence was constructed at Budaka with concrete posts and metal fencing to stop theft, protect children and to keep out wandering animals like cows.



A new water tank with pump was needed at Budaka to supply water to the kitchen, the loos and showers.



Here are new toilets and showers at Butiru constructed with suitable facilities for children in wheelchairs. Parents of children have helped towards the cost of the roof.



Sr. Catherine Nabutyeka, Head of Butiru Rehabilitation Centre with Bakhita in the wheelchair and Sarah who both live at the centre.



Robert Makuto the Butiru Physiotherapist with Sister Proscovia helping to realign a two-month-old baby with a club foot. If this is done gently several times the foot can be straightened without surgery. FOAG pays Robert's salary annually.



Evaline (left) is being sponsored by a FOAG donor to be a nurse.

To donate to these projects or learn more about them please contact Jane Sturdy at info@foag.org

IT initiative brings light during tough times at school

It has been a difficult time for schoolchildren in Uganda.

The lockdown meant most schoolchildren had to return to their homes, although some of the FOAG-sponsored students whose parents live a long way away were able to remain at the rehabilitation centres. During these tough times FOAG has helped to fund food supplies and medical requirements.

O and A level students did continue their learning and we're happy to report that one of the O level students sponsored by FOAG got very good results and will start his A level studies in January 2022 when schools will be allowed to reopen.

We're also happy to note another good initiative during lockdown. FOAG supported Sister Margaret Itadal, Head of Budaka Rehabilitation Centre, to buy two computers and give four FOAG-sponsored students lessons in computer skills.

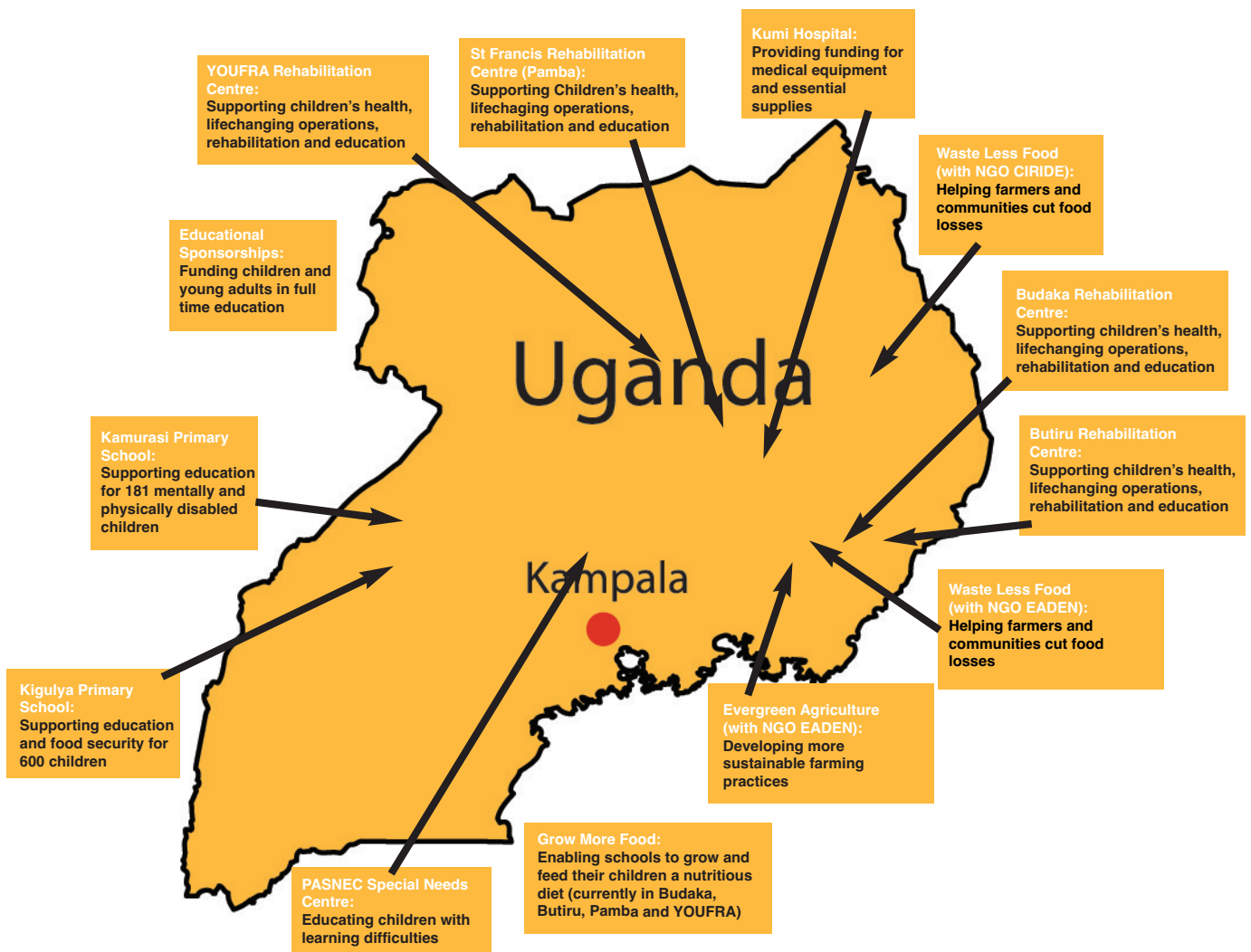
To learn more about sponsoring children please contact Jane Sturdy at info@foag.org



Photos of the students having their first lesson in September

WHERE WE WORK

Here is an overview of our current projects.



HOW TO DONATE

Since 1981, when FOAG began its work in Uganda, your continued generosity has helped us to keep supporting those most in need in Uganda. On behalf of our Ugandan partners – thank you. There are many ways you can donate – all of which are listed below!

Buy a concert ticket!

We are once again partnering with the Cheltenham Symphony Orchestra to put on a concert in June where you can listen to fabulous music while also supporting a great cause!

- **What:** Programme to be confirmed. Please see <https://cheltenhamsymphonyorchestra.info>
- **When:** Saturday June 25 2022 at 7.30pm
- **Where:** Pershore Abbey
- **How:** Tickets are £16, including a free drink, and can be bought from the FOAG Office on 01886 853295 or at info@foag.org

An effective way to leave a legacy

Over the years we have been very grateful to supporters who have left FOAG a legacy in their Will, and honoured to set up or support projects in their name.

If you are considering leaving FOAG a legacy, we have some information to consider.

As property values continue to increase, many more people will need to pay more Inheritance Tax on their estate. In the simplest case, HMRC take 40% of any excess over various allowances. Any legacy to a charity will reduce your tax liability.

Or you might want to find a way to donate now. A little while ago, we received a substantial sum from a supporter with a message that he was not going to include us in his Will but preferred to make a donation while he was alive – we were also able to claim 25% Gift Aid on his donation!

As my mum used to say: “You can’t take it with you!”

We cannot give you advice about setting up a legacy – an accountant or solicitor will be able to advise you – but if you would like to talk, please contact me by email (robin.dean@foag.org) or by phone (01886 853295).

Robin Dean, FOAG Administrator

5 more easy ways to donate

1- Buy from Amazon and improve lives!

We are a recognised charity with Smile Amazon – this has exactly the same prices as Amazon, except that 0.5% of any purchase can be donated to FOAG at no extra cost to you!

Just go to smile.amazon.co.uk, click on the Get Started button and type in Farmers Overseas Action Group when asked which charity you wish to support.

2- Donate online

It couldn't be easier to give a one-off, or regular payment direct to FOAG with Give.Net.

You can find FOAG's donation page at www.give.net/20023984. Then simply choose the amount you would like to donate.

Please tick the box to share your contact details so we can acknowledge your support personally.

3- Become a member

For just £20 per year, you can subscribe. If possible, please pay by Online Bank Transfer to FOAG at CAF or NatWest Bank or by cheque. Details below.

NatWest Bank

Name: Farmers Overseas Action Group

Sort Code: 53-81-33

Account Number: 08376158

CAF Bank

Name: Farmers Overseas Action Group

Sort Code: 40-52-40

Account Number: 00015662

Please note that some donors have had difficulty making payments to CAF Bank as it is a non-clearing bank.

4- Donate by Cheque

Please send your cheques, made payable to FOAG, to Robin Dean, FOAG Administrator, Rectory Cottage, Stanford Bridge, Worcester, WR6 6ST.

5- Use the PayPal Giving Fund

FOAG has a page on the PayPal Giving Fund – just visit the site and search Farmers Overseas Action Group. They do not take any money from your donation for their costs. FOAG will receive 100%!

The importance of Gift Aid

Whichever way you choose to donate, recovering Gift Aid on all eligible donations is particularly important as it increases their value by 25%. We hold completed declarations from many of our members. However, when a donation is received where we do not hold one, our Administrator Robin Dean will forward you the necessary form and ask you if you are able to complete and return it, when he thanks you for your donation.

THANK YOU