

# Magalen Community Services

2020 – 2021  
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## A year of change and progress



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**“Helping to increase community participation and involvement.”**

## Collective action makes a real difference

Magalen Community Services (MCS) was established primarily to empower girls and women in rural communities and to change dependency cultures. MCS' first joint venture was a Saving Group Scheme, formed by 120 women in 2013, which is still in operation to this day. This scheme made sense and it was fit for purpose because in rural villages, without bank facilities or money lenders, getting immediate financial support is virtually impossible. The scheme made a difference to the group members by helping to increase community participation and involvement. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many households that had no savings were left destitute and the local health centre was not well suited for dealing with COVID-19. MCS wanted to organise an alternative source of income to support eligible marginalized women i.e., the disabled and elderly unable to bring themselves out of poverty. Therefore, before the second lockdown in Uganda, 40 group members agreed to make weekly contributions of variable amounts to start a crisis fund to be used by the contributors to address the financial burden of those marginalised by the challenges of the pandemic or effects of unforeseen circumstances. MCS contributed to the total sum amount contribution given each month, we talked to local shopkeepers to offer discounts on essential commodities and arranged with the local health clinic to provide some treatment at a low cost during this difficult time. With your support, the group gradually raised money that helped fund two residents, diagnosed late with breast and cervical cancer, to receive some adequate palliative home care to have their needs met and to ensure quality end-of-life care. Sadly, the two residents died. The group continues to self-organise so that it is not only members that are eligible for consideration but also the wider community.

## Promoting menstrual wellbeing

Menstruation is stigmatised globally. Regardless where it happens, poor menstrual hygiene can cause physical health risks. Conversations to tackle the taboo and prejudice surrounding periods is essential. According to a Meniscus report by the BioMedical Centre, when girls in Uganda are on their periods, absenteeism is at 28% compared to 7% during non-period days.

MCS wanted to work with Magola Primary School, a day school located in Gule Parish, Magola subcounty, Tororo district, to help support the management of menstruation in schools. In this region, girls have difficulties accessing affordable and hygienic solutions for managing their monthly cycle. Some girls resort to managing their periods using pieces which can be unhygienic and uncomfortable. Access to adequate materials to make re-usable sanitary pads is a challenge. MCS worked with local volunteers to provide practical training to 285 girls (9-14 years) so that they could make their own washable and reusable sanitary pads, made of cotton. Dialogue is an important step towards addressing knowledge gaps, safeguarding, dignifying and providing advice when needed.



**“Education is critical  
for creating  
sustainable  
solutions.”**

We delivered training within the school compound and classes with support of the head teacher allocating time and space within main lessons. The girls were also trained on how to use and maintain the re-usable pads. The school has difficulties maintaining water facilities and lacks funds to provide adequate hygiene and sanitary products to its students. Conversations revealed that girls had no changing room, there is a lack of adequate water to clean and wash the body during menstruation. Having access to proper toilets prevents the transfer of bacteria, viruses and parasites which can contaminate water resources, soil, and food. There are only four latrines which are shared with boys.

Education is critical for creating sustainable solutions. MCS believe in supporting girls to continue with their learning to improve their lives. We cannot do it without you. You can help us achieve this goal by donating to:

- girls to have access to sanitary protection during their period.
- the renovation of the latrines and creation of segregated toilets.
- the extension of our education services to nearby villages to build community support for school dropouts.





## Sustainable agriculture: combining theory and practice

The agricultural sector continues to be the backbone of the economy. However, rural women rarely complete agricultural training that combines theory and practice with knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to succeed. Quality teaching is a key part to the solution for the challenges faced.

In December 2020, MCS was delighted to support five women to attend one week's intensive training workshop in organic farming at Mukono district. We achieved this through cooperation and joint endeavors.

The women wanted to grow crops for home consumption on a small to medium scale, the training aimed to improve their skills, to increase food production and food security for their families. The training techniques were made simple and unique, so that the participants could acquire new and practical ways of developing their competencies.

The women were inspired to share what they had learned to help other women in their village to also achieve sustainable farming systems.

*"Quality teaching is a key part to the solution for the challenges faced."*

Due to the COVID-19 situation, the women have not had the opportunity to directly share their knowledge, "schools are still closed, we don't have funds to facilitate transport and food to the trainees, and we will need wheelbarrows, garden hoes and gumboots and other materials while we wait for schools to open."

For the women to achieve their potential, they need access to supporting services and physical resources, information, and knowledge to enable them to transform their communities.

MCS wants to supply the materials required, to encourage peer support so that the five women can teach five women and so on, therefore creating a tree of empowerment, *"teach one to teach one."*

More bicycles are needed to allow the women to travel greater distances in a shorter length of time.

Within Magola, there exists pockets and scattered households experiencing deprivation. Financial poverty in this community is also highly concentrated amongst older people. We know that it is difficult to separate the multiple conditions that older people experience as their health worsens, so they have greater need of health and care services.



*Experiencing agriculture theory in practice*



*Banana (matooke) plantation*



*Fruits of our labour*

## Hail storms in Tororo District

Due to a climate change and global warming, Tororo district in the month of April 2021, experienced an unexpected hailstorm with serious devastation. As reported in the Daily Monitor, 53 people were injured and admitted to different health facilities after sustaining injuries. In Magola and Iyolwa sub-counties, approximately 1,500 families were displaced, left homeless, had to take shelter in neighboring schools and churches. Although no life was claimed, the rough estimate of those who were injured including children were high, the emotional and psychological scars will remain for a long time. It was not just the loss of homes or household effects; dried stored food but also several acres of food and cash crops such as cassava, banana plantation, millet, beans, rice, and maize gardens were destroyed. Over 1,000 families were left stranded with nothing or nowhere to turn. The storms created another challenge for the people in the village, particularly when many are marginalised. The most important support families needed were having a shelter and some helping hands to rebuild their lives back. The cost of building a house is very expensive, but we can start by providing food, a basic meal of warmth to give some comfort and lift some of the burden.



*Homes left in tatters*



*Deprived of shelter and protection*

## Children orphaned due to COVID-19

Magola Health Center II (clinic) provides only ambulatory services. It is supposed to be led by an enrolled nurse, working with a midwife. It runs an out-patient clinic, treating common diseases and offering antenatal care. When a loved one is diagnosed with terminal illness, both family and friends are deeply distressed and may not know how to react. This was the case for two women who had cancer and no access to finance and cancer care/treatment during the pandemic. This had a devastating impact on the families. MCS believe that it is essential to try to continue, as far as possible, to ensure continuity of essential clinical services despite the several challenges. We mobilised a group of volunteers to provide practical and emotional support to the women's families. Three children were orphaned by COVID-19 and their grandmother caregiver, also died. The children's lives were permanently changed by the loss of the caregivers who provided their basic needs and care. The broader impact on the children left behind needed addressing. We wanted to ensure the children rapidly received access to support services they needed during this difficult time. With the help of the local community, your generosity and well-wishes, the children have been receiving support to address their adversity.

By supporting MCS, you can help families stand a good chance of improving their livelihoods and gaining knowledge to address life's challenges.



**“We need to understand the magnitude of the pandemic and mobilise support efforts to help those most effected by COVID-19.”**



## Looking forward

The saving group members need new record keeping materials and finance management upskilling and regular updating so they can better invest in their own income-generation activities, such as tailoring or a hair salon, or eventually qualify for microfinance.

The women's group had to postpone activities such as women's football, singing, and dramatizations due to COVID-19. They relied on performances to generate revenue. It is a struggle right now; we want to support the group to innovate their services and adapt to the changes.

## The impact of borehole wells

Magola Primary School's water supply system became damaged, causing significant water shortages in the school and for the community that is also reliant on the same water system. This meant that the local people had to walk long distances to fetch water and queue for hours.

MCS being a community-based organisation in the heart of the village was approached to lend a hand. With your support we repaired the water system. Two borehole wells were repaired. Thank you for making a difference.

The school now has access to clean water, but 500 liters' supply is not enough for entire community and 1000 school pupils. Because of the COVID-19 situation, the boreholes have been overused which has resulted in damage to the borehole pipes and pumps. It is important to protect the infrastructure used to treat and transport water to ensure the quality and reliability of water services in the area.

We need to raise funds for an additional borehole for the school and nearby community, which is roughly estimated at 25 million Uganda shillings (UGX) or equivalent to £5,000 GBP.

In 2021-22, we will continue to invest in creating and promoting projects that lead to successful sustainable living, significantly growing the number of women benefitting from educational programmes. We will be engaging the ongoing fantastic support we receive to further enhance opportunities for rural women. Working in collaboration, we will help more women benefit from more education and training to achieve the exceptional results they need.

Deep down, everyone wants a better life and helping others helps us too. Help us create the potential for women from all backgrounds to succeed.



**We hope you will be proud of what is being achieved thanks to your commitment, and that anyone reading this will be inspired to join us.**

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