

TDIU – PRESENTATION

Introduction

Personal Background and history as an orphaned child and school dependent:

I am Fr Denis Kaggwa Ssenyonjo from Uganda in the Diocese of Kiyinda – Mityana. I was born in 1974 to my parents who already had 10 children. I never had a chance to live with my siblings for most of the time they were in school. I never had chance to grow with my parents either, for my dad died when I was 6. There are those who have heard of Idi Amini Dada, the ruthless and brutal president of Uganda (1970's) who used to call himself Field marshal, (watched that movie – **The last king of Scotland?**). During his time and since, Uganda has been suffering internal civil wars and military conflicts. It is even getting worse today with increased abuse of Human rights and massive corrupt government.

After my dad (Francis) died in 1980, we fled our home, we lost everything and hiding in jungle and forests for several months for fear, until we were able to escape. I and mom fled to my grandparents in another far distant district. There we stayed under the care of my grand-parents (in their late 70's). Two years later my mom had to leave me there and return to take care of her parents who were sick, after they died she never returned. I was able to join school after pleading at school that I was orphaned without help.

I was always a school dependent, studying at the mercy of the school principle and teachers not to drop out. Like many poor kids I lacked what I needed at school. I used one blue uniform shirt and kachi shorts for all week. I walked bare footed to school (You cannot find nails on my feet they were all torn by hitting them on rocks), I walked 4-5 miles distance almost 9 miles a day and arriving at school tired - and back home tired, school bus is something of the developed countries and today some urban schools have one or two.

Often I had to run in dark morning sometimes in a group, not to be late for class, lest be punished with 5-10 lashes. The same way going back home after 5 or 6 pm, not to be late for the home chores like fetching water from the nearby flowing stream or swamp or feed animals or bring them home. We had **no breakfast, no lunch** but carried a cold potato or a mango in the bag. When at home usually we worked in gardens but were happy to eat fruits for lunch and dinner and wait for another day. Here children are very lucky. They need to appreciate all the opportunities available. They have literally everything, and they can't imagine this kind of life the poor children go through.

After my elementary school, I knew my education was no more for I had now come to the end of the school support, and I knew that there is no one in my family who would help me to go to high school. I had to stay with my grandparents and dig. Here is where I my life struggle started. Even if I admired to become a priest since I was 11, for I used to serve Mass with many of my peer age-mates, and sometimes fighting for it, right from my third grade, at this point, I was skeptical of my dream. When they invited all those who wanted to enroll in the seminary, I went with the mob, for I knew it was impossible to get there.

I am grateful to many people who came up to my support right from this point throughout my seminary training, who in a common effort helped me for those 14 years (high school to Ordination) to achieve my dream. Right from the struggles of family. My brother came on bicycle to take me, my aunt and grand-parents gave a small wooden case, packed it with mangoes, my brother in law's gave me his only pair of shoe, the village community, the parishioners who in Church made second collections to raise \$3 or \$4 to take to school, the priests who called out friends' donations (benefactors) and formators who were kind and patient when I couldn't pay fees in time. Very often I depended on the generosity of dormitory mates or classmates for a soap, sugar or stationery, a pair of shoe when my only pair was torn and needed repairing.

At last I was ordained a priest, I said my first mass at the community forest yard for we did not have a home yet. At my first place of appointment, an area ravaged by wars and many people had died, the notion of education was a myth and most parents either were extremely poor and unable to afford or did not see education as priority for their children especially girls. The school (St. Joseph) lacked structures, teachers, parents did not attend meetings, children lacked needs and many children dropped out every term for failure to pay or for lack of necessities. I labored to educate parents the importance of children's education for the development of the community. Many kids came asking for bursaries or financial support. Parents came to plead with what they could afford, many had nothing but wanted free education.

It is very difficult to be kind and merciful when resources are needed to exert the needed mercies. I took in kids to class, and asked them to pray, study and work hard in the gardens for their food. I worked hard with them even when there was no moonlight, some hated it but they are so happy I did. Thanks be to my Bishop for giving me a chance to come to United States. I now have TDIU for the needed support for the poor children. We have successful stories of those children, we have produced helpful men and women from our program and thanks to all of you who are supporting us in varied ways for the school and clinic projects we are managing.

What is TDIU - Non-profit 501c3 charity? TDIU is a short form for TRANSFORMING DESTINIES IN UGANDA. TDIU was started in New Mexico over ten years ago at San Juan Pueblo, when I (Fr Denis) described the plight of poverty and suffering of children and orphans in my home village and parish community in Uganda. Mobilized by the pastor Fr.Terry Brennan, at San Juan Bautista Catholic Church at Ohkay Owingeh, with permission of the Archbishop of Santa Fe, volunteers came up and started a charity as a mobilized way to support in mobilizing resources for orphans and poverty stricken children through TDIU charity missions back in his poor home country Uganda –Africa.

The volunteering group set out to legally formalize the charity by registering with and obtaining both **state and federal** recognition and identification as a **Non-profit with a 501c3**. Thus, TDIU charity can receive any kind of donation and with a **tax deductible value**.

As the name sounds, **it was created and meant to change or transform the lives** of children and young people who otherwise are hopeless and suffer the devastating, humiliating and unsignifying effects of poverty. Many families have lost one or both parents to Aids. For instance, in my family,

2 of my siblings, many cousins and nephews have left us small children as orphans. Many children of this kind go through my similar childhood experiences. They suffer and lack basic needs, go hungry, cannot afford school fees, and many lives are hopeless and helpless lives.

You can't imagine a mother who forces her 12-year-old child into prostitution so as to get food or medical help. You can't imagine a parent who sends his 8-year-old boy to vend fruits on roadsides because he needs his HIV/Aids medicines or even food. You can't think of those 10 year olds who have to take care of their siblings because the parents have died or are incapacitated due to sickness. But there are also children who run away from home because their families suffer domestic violence and abuse on top of alcohol and drug abuse.

This worsens the condition of a home and adds to failure to support their children to school. **TDIU's major aim, therefore is to save those lives which if not supported, will likely become prey to several abuses, exploitations, oppressions as well as killer diseases that cause further misery and suffering.** Hampering community development and enhancing economic burdens on society.

I am talking about girls who against their will are turned into sex slaves or prostitutes. There is an increased number of young women falling prey to human trafficking and work slavery from Africa to United Arab Emirates due to unemployment or lack of education. I am talking of many young people who are enslaved and lured into addictions, alcohol and drug abuse. Young men who fall prey to crime, used and damped by politicians and usually will die of mob justice or be sent to jail (the largest jail population in Uganda is youths below 40 years).

The Absurd SITUATION OF UGANDA

The Geography: Where is Uganda? When you look at the globe, Uganda is at the equator in the Eastern part of African continent to the Indian Ocean. Uganda's neighbors are Kenya in the East, Somalia, Ethiopia and Eritrea, in the North East, South Sudan in the North, Congo in the West, and Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania in the South. Lake Victoria is shared by neighbors, and River Nile runs from the Victoria to Egypt through Sudan.

Map of Uganda



GEOGRAPHY: Uganda has a very beautiful geography but a poor political history. Everyone who visited Uganda loves it, beautiful climate and weather. Equal days equal nights, no clock change, no time saving. No winter no summer, always 80 degrees plus, with rain and no tornadoes. No floods apart from poor city drainage which may cause over flows while it rains. Ever green vegetation, huge trees in some places, deep forests, huge rivers with plentiful water all year. There are wild animals that may never be found in many parts of the world. Uganda has a rich cultural heritage which runs far back thousands of years. One can find lots of tourist attractions all over the country.

Religion/Faith: Uganda is 40 % Catholic and 60% Christian, who with Muslims and other religions coexist peacefully. We were colonized by the British as a protectorate in 1894 but regained our independence in 1962.

The **total area coverage** is 241550 square km, with the population of 47.8 million (Dec. 2021 United Nations and World Barometer) 23 million are women. 77% of the population are youths below 30 years of age. The fertility rate is 4.8 children per woman but unfortunately more than 16 women die giving birth every day. Of the 4,597 children born each day, 79 die, every 19 seconds a child is born, but every 2 seconds a child dies. The death child rate per 1000 living birth is 39.2. For every 1000 live born, 39.2 will die. Children who die before the age of 5 are 53.3 for every 1000 children under 5 years of age. Children under 15 years of age make up 46.2% of the total population and these are in supposed to be in school.

Unfortunately, numbers show that a high percentage of children did not have access to education. The Macro trends report 2020) shows that illiteracy level in Uganda is very high. 20% of children under 15 years did not go to school, and the school dropout rate was higher among girls. Out of 10 only 4 finished 7 years of Primary. Many children especially in rural areas cannot complete even Primary education and the total number of children going to school is very low. Of the 72 illiterate million children, Sub Sahara Africa, takes 32 m children who have no access to education, due to extreme poverty. 18% of children live under extreme poverty living only 3% living in better income families. Uganda has the youngest populations globally (46% of total population World Bank -Nov. 17, 2021) Even when Universal Primary Education was one of the 8 millennium development goals, for Uganda it is still a dream, has solved no problem since the quality of learning is worse than before. Very few can qualify for secondary education.

In Mityana District alone, whose total population is about 400,000 people (2014 survey), there were 63,550 children age 6-12 yrs primary level. Of these, 6,351 (almost 10%) did not go to school. Again, of the 18,408 teenagers (aged 13-18) who were attending secondary school, there was a huge number (12,583) of youths 15 years and above who did not go to secondary school. They either dropped out or never had the opportunity. Unfortunately, 6,261 were girls.

FACTORS AFFECTING CHILDREN EDUCATION

Extreme poverty is number one factor. 80% of our population live in rural areas and live on subsistence farming affected by unpredictable rains, poor farming methods like hand hoe, lack of irrigation and expensive new methods of agriculture. Rural populations often lack access to even the basic needs and services. This jeopardizes the hopes and opportunities for education of children for a better future and overcome the inevitable challenges of poverty in their lives. Parents cannot afford school fees or requirements for learners and the children are force into child labor not only for their own school needs but to contribute to the financial survival of their families. Parents on this end, would prefer to marry off their girl children into early: child marriages” for bride wealth. Many children are also subjected to extreme violence and harmful traditional practices like human sacrifice and child slavery – human trafficking just for money.

Many young girls (and sometimes boys) are forced into child prostitution by pimps or individually just to get money for survival or to obtain an education. Young kids work in extreme conditions, in restaurants, night clubs, bars, and on streets and in quarries, gardens, in lumber and on lakes.

Many children are exported out of the Uganda into work slaves. Over 500 girls especially leave the country every day by (100 plus organized legal companies) to go in Arab countries for house work.

Many Children are enslaved and oppressed by poverty. Over 15000 children are orphaned at an early age and they take responsibility of their siblings. 46% of children below 15 die of hunger and disease.

EDUCATION SYSTEM: Kids will start to go to school from Day care, Kindergarten (3 years), Primary level 7 years and Secondary school 4 + 2 years and then University. After 4 years

of secondary school, one can take a certificate course and can upgrade to diploma later, and after 6 years of secondary school one, can take a diploma course and can upgrade with a degree later. Often many stop at secondary school level due to financial hardships or related causes.

POOR INFRASTRUCTURE: The condition of schools in terms of infrastructure development, building capacity and maintenance (training and enumeration and motivation) is lacking. The largest part of education is provided by private founders often religious, NGOs or just community based organizations, and private individuals. Often private schools perform much better than public schools, but they struggle in terms of staffing and financing apart from lack of support from government. Often in rural schools, children lack good classrooms, clean water for drinking and sanitation, desks at which to sit, books or stationery to use, text books, library and science laboratory. The situation leads to poor performance and deliverance on sides of the teacher and learner. This explains the high rates of school dropouts especially of girls.

SUFFERING CHILDREN: Many children have to work hard to find school fees. Children have to travel miles and miles to find a school, sometimes 4 to 6 miles and back home same distance. Very often children walk bare footed apart from a few parents who can afford to buy children shoes. They cannot last long of course due to the distance and roughness of roads, but also kids play all the time and the tear and wear is fast. As in my times, most kids don't get breakfast at home. Some schools may request parents to arrange porridge for lunch, but often it doesn't work out.

CHOSING A SCHOOL: Most parents prefer a school that provides faith and moral values. Others want a good upbringing. This we call holistic or integrated education, but others only care for academic grades. Some parents can sacrifice to send their children to boarding schools which usually have a better learning environment and facilities and good use of time without distractions, but often it is costly and a pain and sacrifice.

For many parents, the boarding section provides safety for their children from road accidents, abductions and child sacrifice which was on the increase lately. There has also been an increase in human organ sale, and the issue of human trafficking. For girls, it is worse, due to a high population of youths abusing drugs and alcohol. Rape (sometimes by relatives), violence and murders against young girls also created a fear.

Many children suffer the fate of their parents. For the most part, most people live in abject poverty and only live on less than 2 dollars a day. With Covid, 30% of the students are expected to lose the opportunity of going back to school. There is an extremely biting poverty, and parents cannot afford to take the kids back to school or provide them with the required scholastic materials.



HYGIENE/GENERAL HEALTH CARE: Uganda does not have safe, affordable health care. There is no health coverage or insurance for the average person or rural people. Most of the healthcare services are in the urban areas with the good quality being provided by the private physicians. Government healthcare centers, even at district levels, do not have the equipment, professional capacity or medications to meet the needs of the patients. You can imagine pregnant women are asked to buy gloves, bags and soap for the midwife at labor ward. Very often those in government have to fly out abroad for better medical care.

EMERGENCY and Ambulance services are very unusual and are only obtained at a very high cost. Patients are carried on bicycles and motorbikes, and often some die on the way. Those who cannot afford city clinics will die in their villages. Many people resort to self-medication or go to traditional healers and herbalists. Sometimes they never get better. And this is dangerous because there is no diagnosis but a trial and error system. Many women die in the hands of village traditional birth attendants due to complications.

Generally, most common diseases include malaria, pneumonia and other respiratory diseases, water borne diseases like diarrhea and cholera, cancer, accidents and many more. Death rates are high especially for children born per day and of infants. Mothers die in labor daily. It is estimated that 16 women die in labor every day and 39.2 of 1000 children born die. The life expectancy of the average Ugandan is 64.

The availability of services is a pain in the butt. There are long queues at the hospital or clinic. Competition to see the doctor or nurse is high. Sometimes one has to return again and again. Other times, the patient has to bribe someone to see the doctor or get proper care. The rate of patients for one doctor is said to be 8000 people and for patients to one nurse is said to be 2000.

There is poor access to healthcare services both in terms of personnel and in terms of distances. Referral regional centers are over 50 miles, 2 hours depending on road situations. Roads are often impassible from rural areas, but even in the urban areas they are as poor, since they have not been worked on for several years. This alone can kill patients before they can arrive at the hospital.

At Santa Rosa de Lima, they bring us critically ill patients, and they have to be referred for better procedural handling and care. Women in labor come in the wee hours of the night and due to complications, have to go to referral hospital to see a doctor or to save her life and her baby. But usually it is a difficult situation. That is why we need an ambulance for these emergency cases to save lives in such situations.

What TDIU does and where: TDIU has as its major mission to offer support to orphaned and vulnerable children whose families live in extreme poverty and cannot survive, go to school or obtain a decent life and cannot find any support elsewhere in community. We educate and provide healthcare to our community.

We started by supporting individual children to get access to school. We provided financial handouts in form of scholarships, and we have seen many go through successfully to graduate in various areas or professions and at different levels. We have over 100 beneficiaries with at least about 60 graduating and going back to their communities. We also supported the construction of school structures at St. Henry's Senior Secondary School in Misigi parish (Mityana).



ST JOHN PAUL II SCHOOLS: We are now building a primary and vocational secondary School at Mityana named after St. John Paul II. St. John Paul II nursery and Primary school located at Kagavu –Mityana is already running, with two classroom blocks. This summer, we are starting a dormitory for girls and also boys. We started St. John Paul II Vocational Secondary School this year, and the classroom block will be ready by the end of summer of 2022



One of the school in Uganda



Infants with their teachers at the school block.



Our Students at St. John Paul II nursery and primary school after church



Current structure under construction at St. John Paul II vocational secondary school at Mityana

WHY St. John Paul II, because of the backgrounds in which our charity started. Pope John Paul II was the last of 3 siblings. He was born in 1920 to a poor family. He lost his mother at 9, and his brother at 12. His father died 10 years later. By 20 he had lost everybody. As a child, he suffered the effects of war and had to suffer child labor while working in quarries and mines. He also worked in restaurants and as a salesman.

As a child, he experienced the suffering of the Jewish people in concentration camps. But filled with faith and special love and zeal for his people, he became a priest and later the first and youngest bishop of Poland (1963) and later a Pope (1978). In his life and ministry, Pope John Paul

He carried the message of love and peace. He called for human freedom and respect for human rights and especially for human dignity. He campaigned for the preferential option for the poor and against political and economic exploitation and oppression. His whole teaching was to see everyone in the image of God and so treat each other with special kindness and love. He said “It is important to teach young people to Love.” He understood that a child’s early years of life are very important and have a great impact. This is what we are doing at TDIU charity so that every child finds love and meaning not only now but in later life. We desire that everyone can live life with dignity and joyfully contribute to a personal and community growth.

SANTA ROSA DE LIMA CLINIC:

As mentioned in the above narration of the poor healthcare system, I saw the big struggle people in my community were facing. There was no clinic to provide first aid to the people, nor access to diagnostic services. Few people were able to see a nurse or even a doctor. My village was like an island cut off from other communities. We have a very poor road where two spots in the valley flood and are impassible for several months especially during the rainy season. One time I went on vacation from New Mexico to visit my family. My car could not pass. I went out to push while the driver maneuvered, and I fell in the muddy ditches. Women on motorbikes fell in several times and children going to school too. I engaged the local leaders but in vain, even today. So, with help of friends and TDIU, I set up this clinic to help the community, the elderly, the women who find it too hard, either to go in labor or rush sick babies for medical help. We have the staff, and we are grateful to all who have supported us to set up and acquire equipment we need for its operation. Its running costs are still high, but with time it will sustain itself.



Teaching mothers how to prevent common illnesses at their homes.

WHY Santa Rosa? My mother was a very prayerful woman and dedicated a lot of her time to prayer. She sacrificed many things as a kind of penance just like Rosa of Lima. But above all, she made so many sacrifices to save my life during war. She sold sweet bananas and sugar canes to save a few coins to give me when I visited her from the seminary. She insisted that I should take it for my pocket money. She died poor but happy. She contracted Aids while taking care of my 2

siblings and their kids who suffered Aids. She never got the medical help. She would have lived longer if she had received diagnosis, but it was too late when the tests came out positive a week before she died.



Where We Work:

Based in New Mexico, we are trying to extend our mission to various states here in America. We are seeking more people to help coordinate our fundraisings as well. Our mission operations are basically in Uganda in the central districts (Mityana, Kiboga, Wakiso, Gomba and Mubende). We also welcome beneficiaries from nearby and upcountry districts in both our school and healthcare projects.

WHAT WE NEED and why we are asking for your help (tax deductible donations)

Currently, we need an ambulance for our clinic Santa Rosa (purchase of a van for 25,000). **We also need \$152,000** for both the girls' dormitory and boys' dormitory.

We are looking for Donors for the full completion of our St. John Paul II school's campus infrastructure, we need at least **\$1.5 million dollars** which will possibly take us several years to achieve. But we understand that Rome was not built in one day. We never know. A generous donor or benefactor might be inspired to bless and support our project.

HOW AND WHERE TO SEND YOUR DONATIONS:

You can support our project by directly by donating online. (see website www.tdiuamericancharity.org). You can also donate directly with your bank using zelle pay (call us). You can send your check to our address in Ohkay Owingeh written in the names of TDIU. Where possible, drop your donation at the Church office in Archdiocese of Santa Fe - mention TDIU charity for Uganda children or Fr. Denis. In Florida, you can send/drop it off at Maria Vision Television or to our coordinators Angela and Roger Bisson in Ave Maria.

Want to help as Mission, Volunteer for Africa? –We welcome volunteers as teachers and social or health workers, doctors, nurses, benefactors, engineers (plumbing, construction, water), religious. We also need experienced fundraisers and coordinators for fundraisers and benefactors or donors. **“Let us serve Jesus in the distressing disguise of the poor, let us make sacrifices, let us allow God to love us through the poor.....we all cannot do great things but we can do small things with great love.”** Mother Theresa! Thank you so much for all your support.

Some of our students who have benefited from TDIU





Helping community members with a machine to help them get income at home.