

Newsletter No. 15 – January 2021

Coping with COVID

Eswatini responded quickly to the threat of the COVID-19 pandemic with a firm lockdown in March. It resulted in the closure of the tourist industry, severe disruption of the economy and the destruction of many informal businesses so vital for poorer families. Restrictions have eased but high unemployment and the hardships remain.



The SCT is mitigating lockdown hardships with the distribution of food to desperate families.

Food distribution

To help alleviate the hardships caused, the SCT has bought food and, with the help of partners, distributed it. Assistance has been concentrated on community centres and charities like Hope House, a hospice in Manzini.



Delivery to Hope House



Lavundlamanti Neighbourhood Care Point

Food distribution

Much of the food was distributed in the heavily-populated Manzini/Mbabane corridor where the loss of income from informal businesses and tourism has severely affected families. Urban bread-winners commonly also support family in the rural areas and food was also provided to the community in Lavundlamanti, one of the hardest-hit areas in the low veldt. The area is also affected by drought. Ten bales of 40 x 500g e-pap were distributed to 100 families in September and again in December.



The impact of COVID on education



The Eswatini chair Charles Gilbert donated a sanitizer.

Schools closed on the 17th March when the state of emergency was announced. Students who were due to sit external examinations in 2020 gradually went back to school: for High School finals in Form 5, for Form 3 exams and the Primary School finals in Grade 7. For others, lessons were conducted via social media, radio programmes and newspapers. Assignments were sent electronically but pupils without access to the internet had to rely on text books with little support.

It was hoped that all classes would resume in January but, as of early January, it was still uncertain when schools would reopen and whether classes would automatically move up to the next year's curriculum.

Keeping safe at work and school



Supporter Mrs Lee Howe with donated face masks.

Regulations to mitigate the spread of COVID include the wearing of facemasks, frequent washing or sanitizing of hands and maintaining a minimum distance of 1.5 meters. Schools have mounted wash basins by main gates and classroom entrances. Visitors entering the school have their temperature checked and their contact details recorded. Pupils returning to school mid-year were supplied face masks by the Ministry of Education. The SCT sponsored students were also provided with additional masks.

Student support scheme

The student support scheme has now been running since 2005 and over 20 students have proceeded to further education after high school. They have qualified to be nurses, teachers, chefs, engineers and a beautician.

Competition for further education is fierce and high grades are required for both course admission and government scholarships. Those who do not get the necessary grades commonly retake their poorest subjects in the hope that improved results will secure them places, some even re-sit the final two-year IGCSE and GCSE courses.

Four of the 11 students who finished Form 5 at the end of 2019 qualified for further study. Mzamo Magagula, Zilindile Kunene, Vuyo Magongo and Noxolo Mkhonta have all secured places and Eswatini scholarship grants for further education. Mzamo is studying for a BSc at the University of Eswatini (UNESWA); Zilindile for a Diploma in Pharmacy student at the Southern Africa Nazarene University (SANU) and Vuyo for a BA in Humanities at UNESWA.

Student profile: Noxolo Mkhonta



Noxolo is in Year 1 of a 3-year diploma course in Emergency Medical Care and Rescue. The course is offered by the Emergency Medical Rescue College in partnership with UNESWA (The University of Eswatini).

Born in August 2001, she was a 9-year-old, single orphan studying Grade 4 at Manzana Primary School when she joined the scheme. Manzana is a poor rural community in a low rainfall area in central Eswatini. After completing her primary education, she studied 10km away at Dvokolwako High School for 3 years before moving to Mater Dolorosa High School in Mbabane for the two-year GCSE course. She graduated in 2018.

Student profile: Khanyiselwe Dlamini



Khanyiselwe is a determined, versatile and enterprising young man. He studied at Lwandle Primary School then Salesian High School in Manzini, finishing Form 5 in 2019.

At Salesian High School, he was a prefect and came 3rd in the elections for head boy. While at school he started selling home-baked muffins to boost the family income. His first outlet was the school tuck shop. He then secured outlets at the local market and Manzini's shopping mall. Impressed by his diligence, his sponsor sent an extra donation with which he opened a bank account and started saving for his future.

His Form 5 results were disappointing and he used his savings to upgrade physical science and mathematics. While studying to upgrade, he took a part-time construction job to gain experience with a view to starting a construction business in future. Keen to learn about the world around him, he also visits the magistrate's court to listen to court cases. Sure that his abilities, charm and determination will take him far, we wish him well.

Help us support students in tertiary education, visit our website at www.swazilandcharitabletrust.org/how-to-help/ to make a donation.

Evusweni Water Project, Dennis Gilbert Trust



At the site of the solar borehole pump

In 2017, the trust provided fencing material for a plot of land granted by the chief to a group of young people starting an agricultural income-generating project. The project is in Vusweni, in the north-western high veldt. Although a high rainfall area, irrigation is still required for horticultural production and in 2018 the installation of a water system was supported with a special grant to the trust in memory of Dennis Gilbert, the late father of the trust's current chair of the Eswatini board. A borehole was drilled, a solar pump installed, storage tanks erected and pipes laid. The system now serves the

young people's gardens and provides a reliable supply of cheap, fresh, clean water to the local community of 84 homesteads with a total of 513 residents.

The community live on a plateau and water for homes and livestock had long been a problem for the area. Before the borehole, drinking water was carried from springs deep in the valleys below.



Future Shabangu, Charles Gilbert, Sue & Phoebe Unwin inspect the Vusweni water system.

In September 2019, the Vusweni Community had a special thanksgiving ceremony for the SCT and other friends and supporters. Mrs Sue Unwin of the Dennis Gilbert Memorial Trust visited the project when she was in the Kingdom of Eswatini before the lockdown began in February 2020. She visited with her daughter Phoebe and was shown around by the project's dynamic coordinator, Future Shabangu.

Nsingizini High School



Classrooms for Forms 4 and 5 under construction at Nsingizini.

Nsingizini High School is in the deep south of Eswatini, near Hluti in the Shiselweni Region. Following approval by the Ministry of Education, the community started building the school. In 2015 two classrooms were completed and the head-teacher and the first six teachers arrived. Classroom construction continued and classes for Forms 1 to 3 were completed.

The school serves a remote and poor rural community and conditions were very basic. Until the SCT bought tables and chairs for the teachers, they were sharing desks with the students. In 2016, the SCT then bought a photocopier to save the teachers from having to make a 112km round trip to Nhlanguano to copy test papers and supplementary course work. The SCT has since helped build a two-bedroom teachers house and three classrooms for Forms 4 and 5. When these are complete in 2021, students will no longer have to change schools and travel long distances to complete their schooling.

Typical of community schools, the locals provide labour for construction and locally-available materials like sand as well as raising some of the necessary finance. The government helped secure assistance for the first Form 1 to 3 classrooms but the community were left to build the remaining classrooms and teacher housing on their own. Without housing on site, teachers commonly have to travel long distances using unreliable public transport.



Nsingizini High School Head Teacher, Constance with the UK chair Vicky McDonough & Eswatini chair Charles Gilbert.

Braille machines for schools

St Joseph's Primary School

Reading about St Joseph's Primary School's teaching of visually impaired children in the last newsletter prompted generous donors to pay for two new braille machines to support their work. The school now has 12 braille machines. A further 8 machines are still needed to cater for the high school students.

St Joseph's is an inclusive school in the centre of Eswatini. With a mix of day scholars and boarders, it serves the surrounding rural community and also accepts students with a wide range of disabilities.



The SCT's Eswatini chair Charles Gilbert with head teacher Winford Cindzi at St Joseph's Primary School.



Primary school children using the braille machines at St Joseph's.

Mbasheni Primary School



Mbasheni Primary School: Teacher Ms. Nondumiso Shongwe, Deputy-head teacher Mr. Charles Phiri, Teacher Mrs. C.K. Ngatha and Head teacher Mrs. N.F. Ndlangamandla.

Ms. Nondumiso Shongwe is a former visually-impaired student from St Joseph's. She is now a teacher at Mbasheni Primary School in north-west Eswatini's Hhohho Region. Her school is also inclusive and she has two visually impaired students. Two further braille machines were donated for her students by SCT supporters.

The braille machines are specially imported from South Africa at a cost of £900 each.

Yebo Art Reach

Robert Loder Memorial Project

Yebo Art Reach have taken over an old derelict plot in Mahlanya, in the centre of Eswatini, and transformed it into a community centre. Two main artist-caretakers work closely with 3 young apprentices. There are now art classes and workshops, a children's play area and a garden. The artists are now developing creative products and artworks for retail. They want to create a small, sustainable and thriving art studio where apprentices from the area will learn how to fix, make and design both functional (i.e. furniture) and creative (artwork etc) items and objects.

The project is in memory of SCT Chairman Robert Loder and celebrates his lifelong interest in African art. Yebo is passionate about promoting the fine arts and enabling the growth of Eswatini's creative economy, whether through the medium of sculpture, painting, printing or mosaic making.



Message from the chair



“The 2020 visit to Eswatini was cancelled because of COVID-19 travel restrictions. I hope to go next September and will be able to update all you generous sponsors of orphans after my visit, meanwhile please accept my heartfelt thanks for your continuing support of these children.”

The SCT chair Mrs V McDonough with Temacwasho at Holy Ghost Primary School.

Partnerships

Swaziland Schools Projects (SSP)

The SSP and SCT bond has been strengthened following SSP's proposal to fund ten more vulnerable school children. SSP supports the education of children and adults in Eswatini. For further information, visit www.swazilandschoolsprojects.org. Their support for school children includes uniforms, bus fares and fees. The SCT continues to assess the students' progress at school and their situation at home.

Enterprise Development Trust (EDT)

The SCT has forged a new relationship with the Enterprise Development Trust. The EDT helps schools and school children both directly by supporting them at school and indirectly, by supporting women to start companies and generate income. The SCT helps maintain contact with their partners in Sweden, the Swazi Children Foundation.

How to donate

Help us develop a healthy and well-educated community in Eswatini by making a donation. All donations go towards supporting children in schools, improved school buildings and community support and projects. Please send a cheque or pay online by visiting the SCT website: <http://www.swazilandcharitabletrust.org/how-to-help/>

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