Natalya's Fund
News
July 2025

Supporting underprivileged young people overseas since 1993

Tailoring & Design in Malawi

For positive youth employment and skills

Background

Most youth in Ntcheu District of Malawi try to earn a living in the charcoal business, which entails indiscriminately felling trees and is contributing to deforestation. They are hard-working but not financially independent because of illiteracy and insufficient capital to start a small business.

The Project

A first cohort of young people is being trained in tailoring and design over a period of 12 months. They are being taught to make all types of clothes — e.g. dresses, trousers, uniforms and men's jackets. At the same time the students are being trained in business management. Currently there are 23 students, comprising 14 girls and 9 boys.

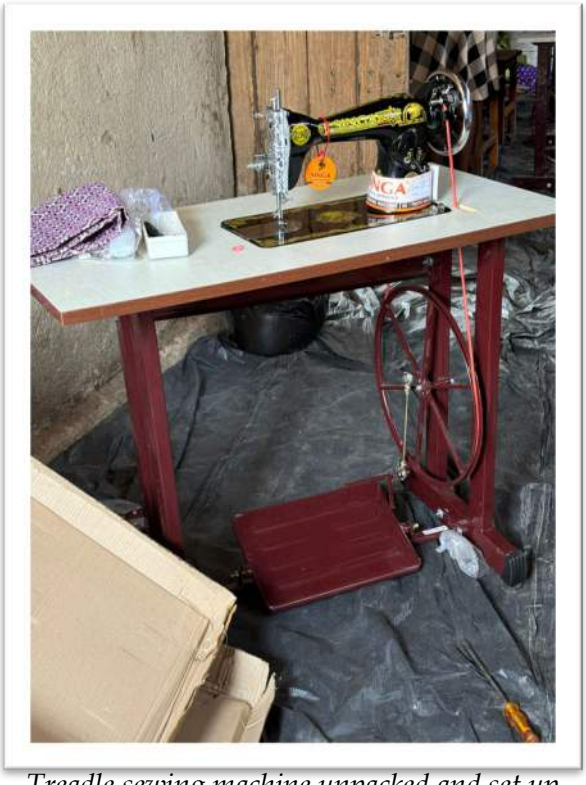
Management

The project is being run by SAPOF (Save the Poor Foundation), a Malawian NGO which started in 2014. It is managed by their Director, Alice Chiwaya.

Our provision so far

We have so far provided:

- ten treadle sewing machines
- a quantity of African print materials
- some plain material for practice
- flip charts both for teaching and for use in making patterns
- many small, tailoring items
- two expert tailoring & design trainers
- a one-week course in business management with two expert trainers



Treadle sewing machine unpacked and set up

The next steps

A Graduation Ceremony will be held in September, when the graduates will be given nationally-recognised certificates.

The trainees are already selling their products, and are learning the practicalities of running a tailoring business. From their trading they will endeavour to buy enough

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machines to have one each, to enable them to set up in business, either on their own or in groups. (Start-up packs containing additional essential equipment may be provided.) However, any who want to seek employment as tailors in Malawian firms would have their certificates as evidence of their qualification.

Some intend to live with relatives in other areas, until such time as they can afford a place of their own. The idea is for them to spread out to avoid saturating the market in any one area.

Business management training

Outcomes

The project has the capacity to start a process of:

- increasing positive youth employment
- growing and exhibiting youth skills
- reducing environmental damage
- supporting Malawi through the above and through the selling of local products

More 'Room to Learn'

Three new classrooms at Bughungu Primary School

The aim and outcome

The aim of the 'Room to Learn' project was to build three new classrooms and an office at Bughungu Primary School in western Uganda, thereby reducing average class sizes from 130 to 87. The four rooms have been built, bringing the total to nine classrooms.

Monitoring visit

Teddy and her deputy head, some teachers, the sub-county official responsible for primary education, and Maurice, in front of 'our block'. Note the older block on the left. Photo courtesy of Maurice Barnes.

Our contact Maurice Barnes, a development expert, kindly agreed to visit Bughungu on our behalf while on a trip to Uganda. He brought back a very favourable report. Maurice wrote, "I was pleasantly surprised by the high quality of the building of the three classrooms your trust has provided funds for. The floors, windows, walls, doors and roof were of higher quality than the rest of the school." Maurice has a masters in Development Studies, lived in Uganda for over 20 years, and has advised numerous NGOs.

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The arithmetic

The school is somewhat overwhelmed by its success, and they try not to turn pupils away. As well as our new classrooms, various other factors have contributed to the popularity of the school, including a toilet block built by the parents, and good exam results. Retention rates are higher, and also the birth rate in this part of Uganda is still quite high. All these factors have meant that the school roll has increased from 780 when we started the project to 914 as of this month. That means that we have only managed to reduce the average class size to 101. Nevertheless, the teachers and parents show real confidence that they are coping with the huge number of pupils.

On the other side of the equation, the whole project was managed by headteacher Teddy Ithungu within budget. We are very grateful to her for her meticulous record-keeping and reporting of all expenses. Taking two-and-a-half years from initial fundraising to completion, and costing £18,642, this is by far the largest project we have undertaken.

Bughungu School from the nearby river. Photo courtesy of Maurice Barnes.

Potential future development

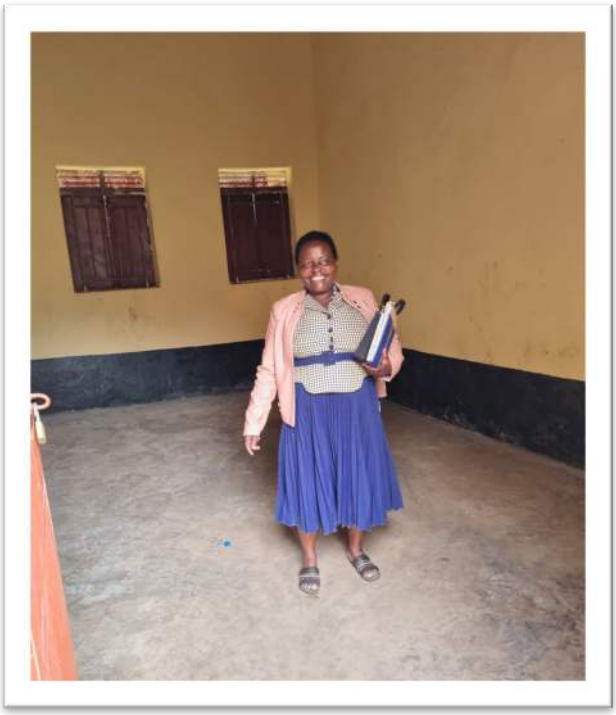
The school is in a rural area. To quote from Maurice, "When you consider the school cannot be reached by road and has no running water or electricity, it is quite amazing how good it looked - clean and tidy with adequate play space and the ability to grow some crops around.

"While visiting, the rural electrification team was putting poles for electric cabling fairly close to the school. It is expected that sometime next year, if money is available, to connect the school to the line being put up now. The school could get electricity but funds would be required to wire the school and of course to utilize it."

The pressing needs are:

- More classroom furniture, for which Teddy has prepared a budget amounting to £2,600.
- Maurice recommends they install a water purifier, as typhoid has led to the death of quite a number of children in Uganda.
- Maurice also suggests that a school hall could be useful for the school's own fundraising events.

In summarizing, Maurice said, "I have visited many schools in Uganda and overall I have to say I was impressed with Bughungu. I am not sure how your organisation is able to give further support but I came away feeling very sure whatever you could raise would be well spent."



Teddy in one of the three classrooms built; note lack of furniture. Photo courtesy of Maurice Barnes.

Another 60 girls free to attend school

Gateway – Girls' Access To Education – an effective, sustainable and affordable solution to monthly periods for Malawian schoolgirls

The need is ongoing as girls grow up, and every year a new cohort needs the freer access to education enabled by these re-usable sanitary kits. So last December we sent a further £300 to Starfish Malawi, earmarked for this programme. The money was used to provide kits for girls at Kaputu Primary School.

Unfortunately costs have risen, and now the kits cost about £5 each. We are hoping to send £500 this autumn for the new cohort.

Above: sanitary kits being made

Left: some girls at Kaputu School

To Donate

Please send a cheque payable to 'Natalya's Fund' to our address below, specifying which project you wish to support – Tailoring & Design, Bughungu, or Gateway – or Where Needed Most. Let us know if you would like a Gift Aid Declaration.

Or visit our website, where you can pay by card, PayPal or Direct Debit.

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