

Annual Report

January – December
2020



Every moment is a fresh beginning.
T.S. Eliot

2020 January was a fresh beginning on a high note with DLU receiving three visitors (our partners) from Sweden (¹KFUM – Heby) and Estonia (YMCA - Tallinn) who arrived in Uganda on 02nd January for a two weeks’ visit to learn about the organisation they’ve supported since 2010. They spent the time in Eastern Uganda, learning about our intervention programmes for the Deaf in Ngora, Kumi and



Bukedea districts. DLU-Eastern staff organised an insightful programme that was both interactive and informative. Staff, beneficiaries and their families as well as community members welcomed the visitors with jubilation and warmth synonymous with traditions of the Ateso people! ²Activities included home visits to beneficiaries undertaking various economic activities under the Livelihoods Programme.

The visit was in recognition of a committed partnership shared and strengthened over the years, which has enormously benefited DLU through continued financial and technical support. It was a great opportunity to learn about initiatives that promote human dignity and respect, creating possibilities for Deaf people by enabling them develop and utilize their potentials to the fullest: transforming their lives and enabling them participate as equal members of society.

Meeting held with DLU beneficiaries revealed personal experiences and expressions of gratitude for the invaluable services rendered to the Deaf, their families and communities in the region. Working at the grassroots has improved livelihoods and made a positive impact on many lives, in addition to change of attitudes towards deafness and Deaf people. *“I appreciate DLU’s periodic reports; a seal of quality and transparent work that provides in-depth information.”* **Mats Olsén** (KFUM-Heby)



DLU-E: Interactive meetings with DLU staff, beneficiaries and communities in Eastern Uganda.

¹ KFUM is Swedish for YMCA – their triangle logo symbolizes: Body, Mind & Spirit

² Documentary: “DLU hosts YMCA – Heby & YMCA Tallinn” at www.deaflinkuganda.org

The visit culminated in a grand farewell complete with traditional dances for a wonderful time shared. It was a great honour hosting our visitors and spending this time together, before resume our activities.

February is the re-opening of schools. We began with an increase in the number of sponsored students in the Education Programme: two new beneficiaries at Wakiso Secondary and Ngora Schools for the Deaf. The programme had its first student enrolled for Higher Education at Michelangelo College of Creative Arts for a two years Diploma in *Communication & Graphic Design*. Another student set off for internship at Sikri Technical Institute for the Blind & Deaf in Kenya. As students settled into their respective schools for Term 1.

March began smoothly with school visits to follow-up on beneficiaries' education progress. However, mid-March ushered in turbulence with news of the deadly Corona virus spreading fast - soon a health crisis gripped the entire world as panic, fear and uncertainty ensued. A pandemic was upon us, wreaking havoc across the globe with daily news of surging infections, claiming millions of lives with unprecedented suffering! The World Health Organisation began vigorous efforts urging governments to curb the spread of the virus. On 18th March 2020 Uganda's president ordered a national lockdown halting social, economic, educational, religious and cultural activities. Public gatherings, movement of persons and vehicles (except those delivering essential services) were restricted and a night curfew imposed. With the populace confined at home, this turned into a bizarre period never experienced before. Our lives were altered as socio-economic upheavals and abnormalities affected our livelihoods. It was like a war without weapons. Each one of us has a unique story and lingering memory of this time!

June came as we gradually emerged from lockdown into a “*new normal*” experience that called for serious reflection and adjustments in our existence. For the Deaf and other marginalised disabled individuals, C-19 restrictions had a devastating impact with far reaching consequences on their lives. Experiencing discrimination, many struggled to survive during lockdown and were faced with additional hardships, unprepared and nowhere to turn. The pandemic increased their vulnerability by exposing them to exploitation, abuse and various forms of injustices ([Appendix A](#)). Government's failure to pay attention to marginalised minorities, laid bare glaring inequalities in our societies. Persons with disabilities were particularly victimized and neglected during this emergency.

As the Ministry of Health began disseminating information about the pandemic and related services, Deaf people were evidently excluded. Their communication needs were not at all considered. To date, information via television, radio, internet, social and print media remains inaccessible to the majority due to language barriers, reinforcing their invisibility in the planning and execution of government's C-19 Responses. These concerns (which I shared with the Ministry's National Scientific Advisory Committee on C-19) required urgent action to adapt C-19 information in formats accessible to the deaf. Despite being in agreement with this proposal, it's regrettable that they were powerless to implement adjustments in response to Deaf people's needs. Although, the proposal was forwarded to the Minister of Health, no action was taken and hence the continued exclusion of the Deaf and many Disabled persons who continue to face risks of C-19 infection. These predicaments galvanized DLU's to set up C-19 interventions to specifically reach out to the Deaf during this time. Focusing on their needs and struggles we began an initiative: **"Covid-19 Response: Deaf People at the Forefront."**

"When we least expect it, life sets us a challenge to test our courage and willingness to change." Paulo Coelho

In adversity we discover opportunities that sharpen our resolve to survive: Although ironic, C-19 offered us possibilities to overcome difficult situations by adapting new way to exist, recognizing our resilience in the midst of the pandemic and its effects. In bracing ourselves to take on challenges and continue with our work, DLU emerged as an essential participant in Uganda's battle with C-19. Working at the grassroots with deaf people, their families and communities, we endeavoured to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic.

During lockdown months, April and May, most DLU's activities (except those that are home-based) were put on hold. With ease of restrictions, we began with assessment of the impact of lockdown restrictions on Deaf people's lives at all levels of society. In June when restrictions were lifted, our services resumed; the Logistics Officer (himself deaf) was assigned the task of documenting his peers' experiences, compiling information that guided the C-19 implementation plans with the aim of reaching a wider Deaf Community in urban and rural areas. C-19 Responses became an integral part of each programme with meaningful outcomes that restored hope, transformed the lives of many Deaf people, giving confidence and impetus to our work.

C-19 Responses were included in each programme below:

- I. **Livelihoods**
 - II. **Education**
 - III. ³**Business Enterprise**
 - IV. **Deaf Rights & Advocacy:**
Ensuring the rights and inclusion of deaf people at all levels of society.
-

I. Livelihoods

Cultural stigma and negative beliefs about deafness cause discrimination against deaf people, majority of whom are excluded from life opportunities. Many are unskilled and occupy a low economic status, undertaking ⁴Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) with meagre wages, insufficient for one to survive. Struggling to cope with C-19 restrictions presented risks of sliding further into poverty, exposing many to exploitation, violence and dependency. Deaf people's livelihoods were threatened by food insecurity, especially for those living in urban areas. It was critical to respond in an effective and timely manner for those experiencing hunger and starvation (as many were excluded from government food ratios). Through Humanitarian Support, food supplies were distributed to those in need.



DLU staff hand over food supplies to family.

67 Deaf individuals were primary beneficiaries, in addition to their family members. For example, Bwanika, a Deaf street vendor in Kamwokya is a self-employed single father of three children (two of whom are deaf). He owns a food stall along a dusty street in Kamwokya (a Kampala suburb) frying and selling cassava, his only source of income on which he and his children survive.

In an interview with him, Bwanika shared experiences of lockdown: *I lost many customers which was a huge blow to my business! Among my customers were school children, when schools were closed, I lost! It was so difficult to sustain my family, until DLU came on board to provided us with much needed food supplies.*

³ **Business Enterprise**, formerly known as “Micro-finance”; name change reflects various economic activities undertaken by the Deaf.

⁴ Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs)

Many families in similar situations, received food relief. During interviews, beneficiaries shared harrowing story of survival, loss of income, exploitation, violence, emotional and mental distress suffered during lockdown. DLU office became a magnet, meeting point and place of respite that uplifted the lives many in need who came to meet peers (after months of suffering confinement and isolation within their homes); to communicate and share information about the pandemic. The venue provided a sense of hope and comfort to released pent up frustrations. Interviews provided invaluable insight into how individuals' coping mechanisms. Their willingness to support one another (despite hardships), is a unique show of Deaf people's cohesive nature as members of a Deaf Community with shared identity and experiences. It was a reminder for compassion during uncertain and stressful times. Deaf peoples' strengths continue to enriched our work with inspiring experiences that are encouraging as well as admirable. Spearheading an independent C-19 Response enabled us to reach a wider Deaf Community, offering meaningful intervention with positive impact on livelihoods.



Deaf Community members (Rubaga & Makindye Division): Interaction & C-19 Food distribution

Discussion forums with beneficiaries and their families were highly interactive and informative, with follow up activities that gave us opportunities to assess our intervention (a crucial part of the Response) and maintain good contact with beneficiaries. With the rise of infections in Uganda, we remained vigilant to ensure the health and safety of staff and beneficiaries through distribution of personal protective equipment (PPE): soap, sanitizers and masks. As we continue our work in earnest, we share feelings of relief and joy palpable among beneficiaries of our Humanitarian support. DLU's efforts have made a difference to the lives of many; our work is significant to the continuity of the Deaf Community: enabling the Deaf



recognize and harness (Appendix B) their potentials, maintain their spirit of goodwill, solidarity and mutual respect for one another.



Beneficiaries receive DLU T-shirts; Logistics Officer receives C-19 Response bike

BEYOND URBAN BOUNDARIES: Gradual ease on travel restrictions opened up public transport, but with strict measures for passengers to adhere to C-19 regulations. In June, outreach activities in Eastern and Western Uganda resumed. Being an agrarian country, rural areas in Uganda are the nation's backbone that drives an economy which thrives on farming and agriculture. During lockdown, communities in rural areas were not adversely affected by food shortages as in urban areas. However, some of the challenges faced in these regions included isolation and being cut off from one another. Deaf peoples' social cohesion disintegrated during and after lockdown (as gatherings were prohibited), thus exposing many to abuse and violence, in addition to lack of information on C-19.



DLU-WESTERN:

Kyegegwa Deaf Community (KDC)

in Kyegegwa Town is home to a thriving and close-knit Deaf Community, a source of strength for the deaf, especially during this crisis. They supported one another: finding solutions and mobilizing themselves to overcome the impact of post lockdown experiences by reaching out to their peers in remote villages. Florence, a

successful deaf business woman owns a retail shop along the Kyegegwa highway. She opened up her premises as a meeting point for peers to converge, share information and updates on C-19. Her well stocked shop was among the few that remained opened during lockdown, providing much needed supplies to the

⁵ Read "Experiences Shared in Appendix B"

community. Her hard work and determination enabled her to take bold steps and apply for a DLU-SACCO loan which increased her stock and income. Florence's leadership qualities and tenacity inspires, deaf and hearing alike. She endeavoured to maintain solidarity among her Deaf peers, encouraging them to continue working and remain vigilant. She provided counselling to deaf women in distress, especially those experiencing violence within their families. As most KDC members are subsistence farmers with home-based agricultural activities, Florence bought their produce, enabling them earn a living. During our July visit, we learnt about the impact of C-19 restrictions on livelihoods of deaf people in rural areas. On assessing their needs, DLU's intervention focused on humanitarian assistance and economic support to revive SMEs for those in self-employment as well as provision of Startup support tools.



(a) Members receive supplies, (b) visit carpenters' workshop and (c) Meeting with KDC

II. Education Response

2020 will be remembered as the most disruptive year in the history of education as governments all over the world were forced to close learning institutions to contain the spread of C-19. Uganda's Ministry of Education shifted to multi-media (radio, television, print materials, smartphones, computers and internet) as an alternative to continuous education, for school-going learners during lockdown. With the country's poor and underdeveloped infrastructure, this alternative was premature and ineffective. Majority of institutions are ill-equipped to meet the digital needs of their learners. Powered by electricity, technology remains the preserve of a minority (middle and high-income earners). Electricity is unevenly distributed and unaffordable for the majority, it's hardly available for those in remote rural areas, many of whom live in poverty and struggle to meet basic needs. Although it was established to reach all children, especially the most vulnerable, digital technology (though highly commendable) as a learning tool for disabled child is an inconceivable luxury. With only 10% of Uganda's deaf learners accessing mainstream education, the use of multi-media as an alternative mode of education reveals a digital divide between the rich and the poor, exposing enduring inequalities, especially for deaf learners who thrive on physical interaction with skilled teachers and peers due to their unique language and communication.

Lockdown of schools has increased the marginalization of deaf learners, impaired their intellectual development and exposed them to exploitation and abuse.

During home-visits students shared concerns about being out of school and lack of access to multimedia technologies. Most parents couldn't afford cost of daily newspapers containing study materials and had no access to internet. Students complained that materials in newspapers were inappropriate despite parents' efforts to provide the necessary dailies: *My parents bought newspapers for me to study at home but the content is for primary, unsuitable for me. It's impossible to study alone as my parents can't sign to provide necessary support (as in school). I've given up on studies and instead turned to farming.* Her parents bought her a piglet and DLU donated a goat, increasing her livestock. Rearing animals is keeping her actively engaged.

Majority of deaf learners are from families ill-equipped to provide educational support at home as many parents do not know sign language. Deaf learners' unique learning needs require the physical presence of specialised teachers equipped with appropriate language skills, a factor that wasn't addressed by the Ministry of Education in planning for learners with special needs. Therefore, digital technology as a tool for learning remains inaccessible and meaningless for the majority. Lack of mental stimulation and interaction with teachers and peers puts learners at risks of intense isolation with far reaching consequences to their mental, physical and emotional development. An extensive lockdown will result in many dropping out when schools re-open.

In response to these challenges, DLU's devised innovative strategies to engage students in stimulating and meaningful home-based activities, such as, farming & agriculture, sign language and ICT training. These resulted in positive experiences, boosting self-confidence and enabling youth to learn about DLU's work. Interactions with families and peers increased, giving youth opportunities to utilize their potentials as resourceful members within families and communities.



DLU-E: Ismail at planning meeting

Ismail Mutumba: Having reached a milestone in his education, Ismail was enthusiastic to begin his two-years diploma in *Graphic Communication & Design* at Michelangelo College of Creative Arts. Two days after admission in March, schools were ordered to close, leaving him disenchanted. He was assigned the role of Sign Language Trainer to utilize his signing skills.

a) Sign Language Training

More than 90% of deaf children are born of hearing parents without any knowledge of sign language, which presents major communication and language barriers for these children. Without language, deaf children's mental, psychological and social development is severely hampered, making them vulnerable to abuse and intense isolation. Without language, many parents fail to bond with their child. Therefore, meaningful interaction, acquisition of knowledge and information is curtailed, subjecting the child to neglect. During lockdown deaf children in such families gravely suffered from mental distress. It's for this reason that DLU embarked on a community-based Sign Language



project to support the Deaf and their families. Ismail (sponsored student) was selected to lead this project, assisted by his elder Deaf sister. The duo worked together to train beneficiaries in rural Gomba district, bridging communication gaps and increasing appreciation of USL.

Photo: Ismail receives laptop from staff

As Ismail continued his education through *self-study* at home, he committed time to training. The siblings offered their home in Kanoni village as the project venue, imparting skills to deaf youth without language. The activity's impact was evident in increased interaction, reduced isolation and social cohesion among the deaf; they had opportunities to share information and experiences. To ease movement between villages, bicycles were procured for trainers to reach trainees in remote villages and incorporated information on the pandemic.



Sign language training – Kanoni village, Gomba

“Our trainees are Deaf adults and students from neighbouring villages. They're impressed by our signing skills and are enthusiastic to learn. They have a deep yearning and thirst to learn ⁶USL!” **Halimah Nabanoba** - Instructor

⁶ Uganda Sign Language (USL)

In August the project was initiated in Eastern Uganda to provide the same opportunities to deaf youth in Ngora and Kumi districts. Ismail, assigned as *Trainer of Trainers* (ToT) traveled to the region to train the youth:

“It was the first time to travel East: over 400km from my home – it was a new refreshing experience that enabled me interact with DLU staff and the Ateso people. Learning about their culture widened my horizons! I travelled to various villages to meet and interact with beneficiaries and their families, which gave me insight into DLU’s work in rural areas.” **Ismail Mutumba** – Instructor

Madoch village (Kumi district): Two Deaf peer trainers obtained training in USL by their peer (Ismail - in photo below). A student’s lockdown experience below:



Since March, I’ve been confined at home unable to learn. I live in a remote village, no electricity, no learning materials. Being out of school has brought many challenges for us deaf students – it’s a hopeless situation. I’d lost interest in education until DLU selected me as a USL trainer for the Deaf. The experience has been uplifting and enabled me earn an income.

Okurut James.

The two student trainers began by identifying deaf children in their villages, particularly those without sign language skills. Seven deaf children in villages (Mukura subcounty) benefited in the training, as did their parents and family members. The project has increased awareness about deafness and USL.



USL trainers receive bicycles and training materials for Eastern & Central regions.

Kibingo Cell (Hoima district): Extending USL training to home-based settings was a positive endeavour that was gladly received who recognized the great need of improving communication with their deaf children. Families made concerted efforts to learn USL from their own deaf child (USL trainer). The project is helping reduce tensions as a result of communication barriers, restoring hope and creating deaf-friendly family environments that value their child as a Deaf person.

Photo: Ronnet teaching her parents USL
USL trainers are provided resources as staff follow up to ensure progress. In Hoima, 16year old Ronnet enjoys teaching her family. Her father shares his sentiments: *Ronnet was born Deaf. We've never made efforts to learn sign language, thinking it was difficult, we always used gestures, which make it difficult to communicate effectively with our daughter. Relying on her younger sister to "interpret" creates tensions as she frequently distorts messages. Learning sign language is a great opportunity – having Ronnet teach us is a joy! Since lockdown of schools, she's been actively engaged in farming. DLU donated a goat, we'd previously bought her a piglet. She loves the animals and tenderly cares for them, keeping herself busy at home.*



Home-based sign language training is boosting self-confidence among deaf youth and improving communication in families. The activity has exposed students to DLU's work, laying a foundation for its future leaders: equipped with potential skills and tackling social prejudices and stigma towards deafness.

USL Home-based training: Madoch village, Kumi

b) Farming & Agriculture

In 2019, 12-year-old Asio was among the selected deaf children to benefit from the Parents Business Group (PBG) under the Livelihoods Programme. She received two sheep donated towards an income generating activity (IGA) to improve her family's economic welfare. This year she was enrolled in the Education Programme for sponsorship, and began primary education at Ngora School for the Deaf. Asio had just started school when government ordered closure of all schools. She returned to Kadesok, her home village, saddened by the abrupt end of her education. Since then, she's been actively involved in rearing of her sheep, which have increased to four! Her farming skills have been greatly enhanced and kept her engaged. **Photo:** Asio holding her lamb



Farming and agricultural activities aimed at increasing economic empowerment among deaf youth and their families were disrupted by Covid-19 restrictions; selling and buying of farm animals and produce in markets was banned, resulting in huge loss of income for many families in rural areas.

c) Skills Training

Students enrolled in technical (skills-based) courses at respective schools had opportunities to continue training (during lockdown) in DLU's home-based activities, which kept them interactive and actively engaged at home and in their communities. Each was supported with donations in kind (such as, sewing machines, fabrics and carpentry tools) while those in farming and agricultural activities received seeds, pesticides, poultry and farm animals); special arrangements were made for some to undertake apprenticeship training in carpentry to broaden their skills. Deaf youth had access to practices ICT skills as a form of continuous education.



i) student receives sewing machine; (ii) ICT session at DLU Office; (iii) student receives goat

7Business Enterprise

C-19 resulted in major economic setbacks for deaf people in small & medium enterprises (SME), majority of whom are in the non-formal sector characterized by meagre income. Restrictions on travel and ban on gathering affected their livelihoods, forcing many out of employment and seriously reducing their income. Inadvertently, majority of self-employed deaf people have been pushed further into poverty and dependency, factors that fuel exploitation and abuse. DLU's Economic Response targeted those affected by the impact of C-19 through provision of economic support. The intervention brought hope to many in need of financial assistance to restore their businesses; for others, donations in kind provided opportunities for startup capital, securing employment and restoring confidence to re-build lives.

⁷ Formerly known as Microfinance Programme was re-named Business Enterprise

Recipients selected according to their needs received donations-in-kind related to their enterprise. Our endeavour during this time was to revive and strengthen economic capacities of self-employed deaf individuals; with additional humanitarian assistance (food supplies, consumables and C-19 protective items) provided. The

Response had a remarkable impact on livelihoods saving many from the brink of unemployment and starvation. *Below are some examples:*



- a) **Bwanika** (*photo above*), Deaf single father of three children (two of whom are deaf) is a street food vendor with a catering business along a dusty road in Kamwokya (a Kampala suburb). During lockdown months, his business came to a standstill and nearly collapsed. He experienced a substantial loss of income and struggled to feed his children. Despite being among the very few vendors permitted to work, he lost a large clientele, mostly school-going children. DLU's economic response enabled him restore his business post-lockdown, steadily picking up to make up for lost time and lost income!

- b) **Ntongo** is a Deaf teacher of deafblind children at Ntinda School for the Deaf and single mother of two. When schools closed, her contract was temporarily terminated, leaving her without a salary. Fortunately, besides teaching, Ntongo had concurrently been running her own businesses (soap-making and poultry) since 2017 to supplement her meagre salary.



C-19 restrictions seriously affected her businesses: *I lost customers and couldn't travel to buy feeds or drugs for my poultry. The vet who treats my birds couldn't travel due to the ban on public transport. Many*

chickens died from disease and lack of feeds. When the travel ban was lifted, I was deeply relieved and approached DLU for support. They quickly came to my rescue by providing the much-needed support. I received chicken feeds and drugs, which resulted in significant improvements through sales to commercial and domestic clients.



A DLU friend donates camera to Eric; Ssebatta receives a hand-drill

- c) Born deaf, 24-year-old **Eric Harerimana** is a refugee from Burundi where he fled in 2015 due to political instability. He previously worked as a photographer and graphic designer in Bujumbura and when he lost everything, he started life in Uganda from scratch. Strong support networks within the Deaf Community won him friends who helped him settle down. A friend offered to train him in carpentry and employed him as an apprentice in a team of 5 Deaf carpenters. C-19 restrictions forced the carpentry workshop to close: Eric and his team lost their income. As Ssebatta the workshop owner explains during an assessment interview, C-19 impaired their livelihoods: *Customers with prior orders of furniture failed to collect it. After lockdown they complained about loss of jobs. It was difficult for everyone – the worst experience was hunger!*

Deaf people in SMEs are in trades such as, retail shops, carpentry, poultry, farming, printing, photography, etc. Assessment of C-19 restrictions revealed challenges encountered and their ability to endure these difficult times. Despite intense isolation, the deaf maintained strong networks and continued to support one another. Their stories of survival were inspiring. One Deaf carpenter and father of four owns explained how he provided shelter to deaf refugees, risking his life by walking for miles during curfew in search of food supplies for his deaf friend, with a 7months pregnant wife. Their contributions during C-19 lockdown is testament to their resilience and willingness to reach out to one another.

DLU-Eastern (established in 2008) spreads out in Ngora, Kumi and Bukedea districts in Teso region, serving beneficiaries in remote rural villages. With activities resuming in July 2020, DLU interventions resulted in improved livelihoods among deaf people, their families and communities. To adhere to C-19 regulations, all activities were home-based, well suited to this region that thrives on farming and agriculture. Closure of local markets – characterized by vibrance of selling and buying of goods gravely affected economic transactions. However,

close networks among our beneficiaries enabled transactions (of animal and food products) to take place within their localities.



Akello Ketty, a DLU beneficiary since 2015 was enrolled and sponsored by the organisation for a two years' course in Tailoring & Fashion Design at Apoolo Na Angor vocational institute (Bukedea). On completing her training, DLU set up a small tailoring business for Akello in Kachinga village, Ngora district where she's worked since, making clothes, mending and selling second-hand wear, in addition to

subsistence farming to ensure food security. As 2020 was her final year to transition to independent living, the organisation set up a three weeks' internship programme for her in Kampala (01 – 23 March, 2020) to increase her skills and expose her to the tailoring industry. Her trainer, Ms. Namusisi, an accomplished tailor and mother of a deaf son, hosted Akello during the in-house training, providing her new skills and expanding her productivity. She made a variety of products such as, handbags, fashion dresses, school uniforms, aprons and Vaseline. Interactions with the host family, local community and exposure to Kampala's tailoring business hub boosted her self-esteem.

Akello has evolved into an economically empowered woman and a key resource person (peer trainer) for DLU. Over the years she's continued with her business gaining steady momentum in the trade with increased confidence. She was a recipient of DLU's Economic Response due to loss of income and received fabrics and accessories to help revive her business.



⁸**Internship:** Akello at work & Kampala's downtown business district

⁸ A DLU Documentary: *Economic Empowerment of the Deaf* at www.deaflinkuganda.org

Art Entrepreneurs

One of the major highlights in 2020 was DLU's encounter with Deaf artists Mandela Alex (24) and Barugahare Deus (23) students at Michelangelo College of Creative Art. These exceptionally gifted youth are a beckon of hope for Uganda.

The sudden closure of learning institutions brought blessings to our doorsteps, with unfolding opportunities that paved way to the discovery of talent. During my meeting with Mandela, he expressed grave concerns about the impact of closure on his future and art work: *"What shall I do with my large collection of art work tacked away and gathering dust at home in Adjumani?"* he asked. He was frustrated and uncertain about the Covid situation. At DLU, we embarked on a plan and found a solution that transformed our office into a gallery, exhibiting the artists' work and opening up our office to the public to showcase the extraordinary potentials of these young men. Mandela shares his experiences:

We'd barely returned for the 1st semester when the principal announced that our college, like all others, was closing with immediate effect due to Covid-19! I was



shocked as to what I'd do with my art collection; I was forced to pack my Art in boxes and sent home to Adjumani. A turning point came in July when I received a message from Ms. Kiyaga requesting me to visit DLU with my Artwork. I contacted Deus and asked him to get on board. Our work has since been displayed at DLU, giving us prominence and uplifting our spirits! We've had great opportunities to sell our

paintings, meeting famous Ugandan artists, visiting Art exhibitions and going on an educational tour sponsored by the organisation! We're grateful to DLU for promoting our work and creating avenues for us to earn a living during this difficult time!

"The power of an idea is not in its complexity or in its genius but in its ability to resonate with the people that need to get it."

Wale Akinyemi – PowerTalks

Journalists from Uganda Broadcasting Cooperation (UBC) visited DLU to document this unique Art Exhibition with interviews from staff and the artists that was televised nationwide on 10 September 2020. This publicity resulted in greater awareness about Deaf people's talents and potential contribution to our nation. The artists work was posted on DLU's social media platforms – including the WhatsApp Group forum, avenues that opened



up a market for the artists to sell their works, boosting their income with increased sales. As a result, self-confidence and hope replaced earlier feelings of disillusionment as the artists' networks widened to include Uganda's internationally renowned Artists, Taga Nuwagaba and Kibuuka David. The *Covid Experience* emboldened our resolve to promote entrepreneurship among talented deaf youth, a key aspect of overcoming economic deprivation, cultural and socio stigma towards the deaf that increased during 2020. DLU's economic intervention enabled the artists to evolve as ambassadors of socio-economic change, armed with



determination to utilize their talents to create opportunities for better future amidst the long-term impact of C-19. As the *Covid Experience* unfolded to become a reality of our lives, it became an outstanding feature in their artistic creation.

2020 ended on a high note for the artists for whom DLU organised and sponsored a week's retreat to boost their creativity through exploration of Mabamba Wetlands, Lake Victoria's conservation area covering 2,242 hectares of pristine environment. The region is home to hundreds of bird species and the famous Shoebill stork. Mabamba's uniqueness increased the artists' understanding of Art as a valuable tool for preserving nature. Boat tours of the Channels brought in flight the elusive Shoebill stork in full view for the artists to internalize and re-create on canvas! Frequent visits to the Fisherman's village on Lake's shores and Nansubuga Hill (populated with numerous vervet and red-tailed monkeys) offered a memorable experience!



Photos: The Shoebill stork; Boat tour in Mabamba channels & Deus at work

And Finally:

Deaf People at the FOREFRONT!

Emerging from a year of unprecedented challenges tested our resilience and endurance to survival against all odds. Restrictions to which we all had to abide



altered our lives in various ways. For Deaf people in particular, the impact on livelihoods was sharply felt with negative outcomes that continue to date. DLU Friends and partners are commended for their exceptional efforts in continuing to support DLU's Covid-19 Response, raising funds to ensure the organisation's continuity - embracing the reality of living with the pandemic. Aligning our services to meet Deaf

people's needs directed intervention programmes in meaningful ways to reach those in great need – a testament in honour of our ⁹Mission and ¹⁰Vision.

2020 despite its absurdities was the most productive year at DLU as the organisation emerged with increased visibility. Highlights worth noting:

- ❖ **Art Exhibition at DLU:** Deaf Artists' work televised on ¹¹UBC
- ❖ **Invitation to** ¹²*Democracy Talks on Human Rights for Vulnerable Groups*. An event organised by the Embassy of Sweden in partnership with the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC). As a key DLU presenter, to share experiences on the impact of COVID-19 restrictions on Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). The live dialogue was broadcasted on National Television Uganda (NTV) was streamed on social media platforms;

⁹ Commitment to inspire change and provide opportunities to promote the welfare of Deaf people.

¹⁰ Societies that enable the Deaf reach their fullest potentials to lead productive and dignified lives.

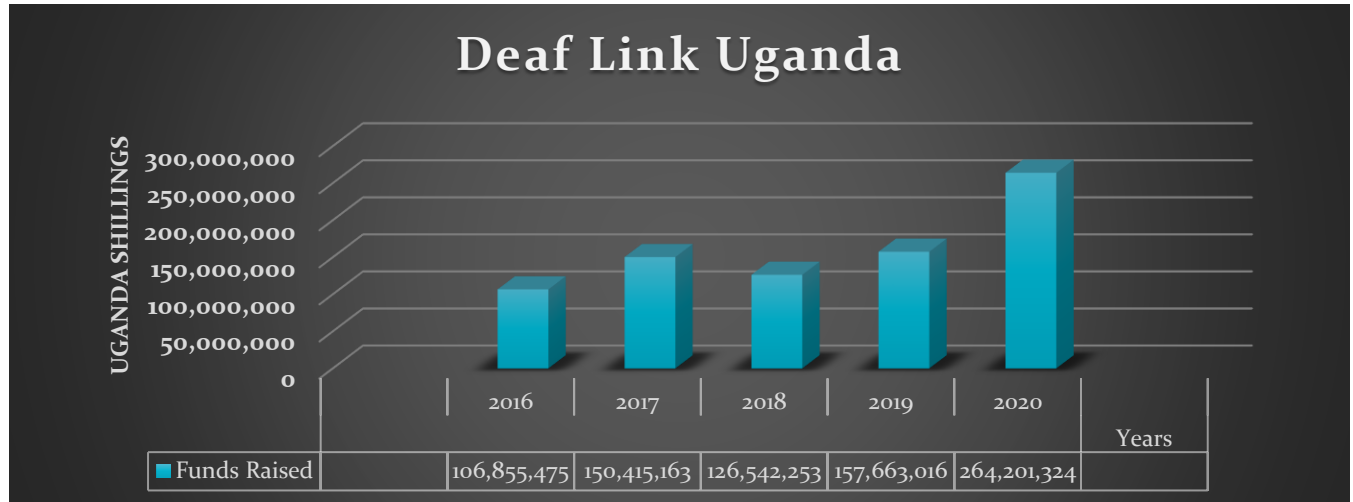
¹¹ Uganda Broadcasting Corporation

¹² Virtual dialogue on 4th December 2020: "Assessing the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups in Uganda".

- ❖ **WhatsApp Group:** A powerful tool to share information and updates on the organisation's activities. The forum boosted DLU's visibility on social media, widening the scope of its network with increased awareness about deafness and Deaf people's potentials. It became a fundraising platform raising Ugx 1,746,300/- towards the *Covid-19 Response for the Deaf*;
- ❖ **Covid-19 Response:** An initiative to mitigate the negative impact of C-19 restrictions on the Deaf Community. Reaching out to those in need, the *Response* was integrated in all programmes, providing humanitarian assistance and economic support.
 - *Education Response:* an alternative of home/community-based activities for students during the yearlong school lockdown to engage them in meaningful activities.

2020 Income

In comparison to income received since 2016, funds raised last year were significantly higher as shown below:



Income received end of each financial year from 2016 until 2020

Increased fundraising is particularly related to a wider network of support in 2020 and increased visibility, as well as DLU's internal fundraising initiatives.

It's a privilege to have made it to the end; we're grateful to friends and partners for the extraordinary support received and are indebted to each one of you for your commitment in enabling us [Advance the Welfare of Deaf people in Uganda!](#)

APPENDICES

Appendix A: **Police brutality**

During lockdown was shocking and many deaf people were victimised during this time. This violence is reiterated by Oryem Nyeko a researcher at Human Rights Watch who notes that Uganda's security forces used excessive force to enforce the government's COVID-19 measures: *As we face an unprecedented public health challenge, it is all the more important for the government to ensure that it does not become a human rights crisis.*"

- ✚ **Baluku Emmanuel** retells his torment and how he nearly lost his life. A deaf carpenter and expectant father with his 8months pregnant wife (also deaf) had a horrifying experience: *Lockdown caught me unawares on my way home from work. Military police run around in a frenzy arresting people. I was ordered to stop, but didn't understand the commands - only saw aggression. Two of them suddenly pounced on me and beat me up severely - breaking my arm and leaving me bleeding along the street. Painfully I dragged myself and run bereft of energy but with great instinct to escape from this nightmare. On arriving home, I fainted and was rushed to a nearby clinic. I had a broken arm.*
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Appendix B: **Personal Experiences**

- ✚ **Robert Sevume** father of two run a printing business in Kampala producing calendars, flyers, posters, t-shirts, etc. *The lockdown resulted in the closure of my business leaving me indefinitely unemployed. Customers bring me work at home, but in hiding - it's very difficult to survive. I've failed to pay rent for my shop and accommodation, I've lost income and feel deeply distressed.*
- ✚ **Ntongo Eumeri** single mother of two children is a deaf teacher of deafblind children at Uganda School for the Deaf. *Since schools closed in March, I've received no salary and struggle to survive and feed my children. I face huge losses in my poultry business (a source of extra income) as lockdown resulted in closure of restaurants where I sell my chickens. I'm bankrupt.*
- ✚ **Rita Namuddu** single mother of three lives with her mother in Kamwokya. In 2016 she had a fatal accident that left her paralysed on the entire left-hand side, as a result she only signs using one hand: *Covid-19 brought us suffering – we went without food for days and only eat porridge. Due to my health condition, I must take medicines everyday but during lockdown this wasn't possible as we had no money – lack of medicines impacted my health seriously.*

"A nation's strength ultimately consists in what it can do on its own and not in what it can borrow from other." **Indira Gandhi**

Friends of Deaf Link Uganda -

Thank you for making it COUNT!

Thank you for being instrumental in our JOURNEY –

Uplifting and transforming the lives of the Deaf, their families and communities.

Looking forward with hope to a productive 2021!



Embracing a New Beginning to 2021 with Open Arms!

*"When you face difficult times, know that challenges are not sent to destroy you.
They're sent to promote, increase and strengthen you."* **Anonymous**



Report written by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nassozi B. Kiyaga'.

Nassozi B. Kiyaga
Executive Director
Deaf Link Uganda

Date: 11 March 2021