



CASE STUDY EDUCATION

MOTHER MARY SCHOOL COMPLEX





MOTHER MARY SCHOOL COMPLEX

A COMPANY SUPPORTED BY THE BUSINESS PARTNERS
INTERNATIONAL EAST AFRICA INVESTMENT VEHICLE

Location: Rwanda

Sector: Education

Intermediary: Business Partners International East Africa (BPI EA)

Administrator: Business Partners International

SIFEM investment into BPI EA: USD 4 million (2015)

Mother Mary School Complex is an affordable non-denominational private school offering a high-quality education to more than 350 kindergarten, primary and secondary students in Kigali, Rwanda. Teaching from the national curriculum, the school started in 2005 with 23 students. After the government-imposed, nation-wide change to English as the official language of instruction in schools in 2008, Mother Mary implemented the Cambridge International curriculum. The Cambridge curriculum supports Mother Mary in its provision of a high quality and unique educational opportunity for local Rwandan students, and is the tool Mother Mary uses to contribute to the rebuilding of local skills destroyed as a result of the 1994 genocide.

SIFEM invested in Business Partners International East Africa (BPI EA), an investment vehicle providing risk finance to small companies in Kenya, Rwanda, and Uganda. BPI EA provided finance to Mother Mary in 2017, supporting Mother Mary in the improvement of its facilities.

2017

Investment Year



346

Students



42

Employees





TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Mother Mary School Complex</u>	2
<u>Country Focus - Rwanda</u>	4
<u>The Situation in Rwanda</u>	6
<u>Development Effects in a Nutshell</u>	7
<u>The Education Sector in Rwanda</u>	8
<u>The Founding of Mother Mary</u>	9
<u>Mother Mary</u>	10
<u>Business Partners International East Africa</u>	15



COUNTRY FOCUS - RWANDA

Rwanda is a small country in Eastern Africa, with a young and mostly rural population of over 12 million people, of which approximately 1 million are living in the capital city, Kigali. Rwanda's economy suffered heavily as a result of the 1994 genocide, with its widespread loss of life, massive refugee movements and emigration, and loss of stability, causing a large drop in GDP and destroying the country's ability to attract private and international investment. The economy has since strengthened, growing from a GDP of USD 125 per capita in 1994, to USD 748 in 2017. However, the majority of the population still largely lives from subsistence farming, growing some coffee on the side as a means of earning additional income. Almost half of the population lives below the national poverty line, one in four households lives in extreme poverty, and up to 40% of children are chronically malnourished.





« THE CONSEQUENCES OF RWANDA'S HISTORY CONTINUE EVEN UNTIL TODAY. SINCE THE SCHOOL STARTED WE HAVE SUPPORTED ORPHAN CHILDREN AS WELL AS STUDENTS FROM VERY POOR FAMILIES WITH SCHOLARSHIPS. »

- RWABIGWI CYPRIAN, MOTHER MARY FOUNDER AND OWNER



THE SITUATION IN RWANDA

- **Rwanda's economy remains fragile even today, a quarter of a century after the 1994 genocide, although it has come a long way in terms of progress.** Its small size and landlocked position allow little room for economic growth and this is amplified by challenges such as population pressure, lack of public and private capacity, and poor access to product and financial markets.
- **Rwanda faces a critical skills gap: 20% of the population were killed during the genocide, including most of the educated elite.** One of Rwanda's main development goals is to move from a low-income agriculture-based economy to a knowledge-based, service-oriented economy. This requires heavy investment not only into its formal education sector, but also into vocational and practical training.
- **The genocide tore apart Rwanda's educational infrastructure.** 65% of the primary and secondary schools were damaged or destroyed, leaving only 640 schools operational throughout the whole country. 75% of the teachers either were killed, fled the country or were imprisoned on genocide charges, making the task of rebuilding and educating the next generation extremely difficult.
- **Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) struggle to gain access to the limited financing available in Rwanda,** as many entrepreneurs do not meet the requirements set by the financial institutions. For example, they may lack sufficient securities or not have the required formal processes in place to establish audited accounts.



DEVELOPMENT EFFECTS IN A NUTSHELL

- **Mother Mary provides a high quality and affordable education to Rwandan families.** By serving children in parallel to the public system, Mother Mary lightens the burden on Rwanda's overstretched public educational infrastructure.
- **As part of its curriculum, Mother Mary provides both guidance to students for their further education and career choices and training in vocational and practical skills.** Mother Mary's development of the students' skills, knowledge and attitudes invites them to take part in the innovation and entrepreneurship needed to bring Rwanda towards a global knowledge economy. This meaningful guidance at an early age supports the students to understand how their skills can fill their nation's critical skills gap.
- **Using the Cambridge International curriculum, Mother Mary offers English as its language of instruction,** competently supporting the official nation-wide change from French to English in schools. Giving this language skill to its students supports them to confidently interact with the wider economy – both at a regional and global level – and be part of an educated and skilled generation which fosters the growth of Rwanda's economy.
- **Mother Mary serves its local community in many different ways, including providing scholarships to those who could not otherwise afford to attend.** 14% of students currently receive a full scholarship and 9% receive a partial scholarship. In addition, together with its students, the school also regularly organizes donations for those in need in their local area.
- **The financing from BPI EA allowed Mother Mary to build new classrooms and extend the facilities of the Kindergarten, as well as upgrade the bathroom and kitchen facilities.** In addition, BPI EA's team supports Mother Mary in the implementation of improved business practices which will allow further growth and set the company on track for a sustainable future.

THE EDUCATION SECTOR IN RWANDA

RECOVERY AFTER THE GENOCIDE

As a result of the genocide in 1994, Rwanda's educational infrastructure was torn apart, both in terms of the physical structure and human capacity. 800,000 people were killed, and an additional three million people fled the country or were internally displaced. An estimated 95,000 children were orphaned. The majority of teachers were lost, and all schools were ransacked, with most being damaged or destroyed, leaving the sector in chaos, and a shortage of financial resources to rebuild the infrastructure.

In the years following the genocide, there were intense efforts from both the government and non-government organizations to encourage the return for all to school and to update a previously discriminatory curriculum which had contributed to the divisive spirit leading up to the genocide. There were also extensive efforts undertaken to find and train people who could perform the role of teachers. These reconstruction efforts were amidst additional challenges including the need for specialized education for the overwhelming number of children suffering from physical and psychological disabilities, and the overall distrust amongst the population. The fragile environment was under intense pressure and moving forward required the resources of both the public and private sectors.

ACCESS AND QUALITY – A COMBINED EFFORT FROM THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS

Rwanda eliminated fees for primary education in 2003, and primary student enrolment rates subsequently increased to 96% (2016). However, resources for the public education system have been limited and the sector has struggled to keep up with the provision of adequate learning spaces and sufficient quality of education for the increased enrolments. There are on average more than 57 students per qualified teacher (2017). Furthermore, although primary school is free, secondary school carries high fees and the national enrolment rates are still lagging (28% in 2016). The combined contribution of the public and private sector providers can strengthen the system, and support flexibility to meet the growing demand across the sector.

FROM FRENCH TO ENGLISH

French was adopted as an official language in Rwanda during its years as a Belgian colony, with Rwanda gaining its independence in 1962. In 2008, Rwanda changed its language of education from French to English, in part due to a desire to align with the anglophone East African community including Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania, with which it does much of its trade. Kinyarwanda, the national language, has remained the language of instruction for the first three years of primary school, and is the most widely spoken language in Rwanda (93% of the population). French and English remain mainly the language of the educated, exacerbating the skills gap. It is due to the lack of English spoken by Rwandan locals that the skills gap is largely filled by foreigners from the surrounding East African countries.

The rapid implementation period for English to be used in schools was a challenge for students and teachers alike. Although English had been an optional language previously, few were familiar with the language. In many cases, teachers were required to teach in a language they were still learning themselves. Finding English-speaking teachers was and continues to be a major challenge. Ultimately, this has impacted the level of education obtained by graduation, leaving graduates less prepared for the job market, a considerable issue across the country.



THE FOUNDING OF MOTHER MARY

A SCHOOL BUILT ON PASSION

Mother Mary School Complex was founded in 2006 by a husband and wife team – Rwabigwi Cyprian and Masozera Claire. They wanted to offer a high-quality education to families similar to their own – those without large salaries – at a time when Rwanda was still extremely fragile and largely without an educated population. Cyprian himself was an orphan and he wanted to contribute to the improvement of the education standards in Rwanda, including for orphans and lower-income families. There have been challenges for Cyprian and Claire to realize their vision, including finding sufficiently trained teachers, supporting families in need, implementing the Cambridge curriculum, and sourcing capital for their growth. Their work over the years has resulted in a school which fosters an excellent environment for learning, including outdoor green spaces, safe buildings and bright classrooms. Their passion has meant Mother Mary continues to grow and is a well-known pillar in its local community.

« THE PROJECT OF MOTHER MARY CAME FROM NOTHING. WE ONLY HAD PASSION. WE WANTED TO OFFER MIDDLE CLASS CHILDREN THE SAME QUALITY EDUCATION STANDARDS WHICH HAD ONLY PREVIOUSLY BEEN OFFERED TO MORE PRIVILEGED FAMILIES. »

- RWABIGWI CYPRIAN, MOTHER MARY FOUNDER AND OWNER



MOTHER MARY

OFFERING AN AFFORDABLE EDUCATION

There are a number of other private schools in Kigali offering an international curriculum such as the Cambridge International curriculum. Generally, the cost for attending a school offering an international curriculum is very high, and as a result, attendance tends to be restricted to wealthier families. In line with the original vision of the founders to make a quality education affordable, the cost for attending Mother Mary is kept to a minimum. The fees are between 15-30% of similar private schools in Rwanda, promoting affordability for the lower-middle and middle class.

« OUR LOW SCHOOL FEES ALLOW US TO SERVE EVEN THE CHILDREN OF PUBLIC SERVANTS OF KIGALI. THEY ARE GIVING THEIR BEST, AND WE WANT TO SUPPORT THEM BY GIVING OUR BEST TO THEIR CHILDREN. »

- RWABIGWI CYPRIAN, MOTHER MARY FOUNDER AND OWNER

BROADENING STUDENTS' FUTURES

The high-quality education received by Mother Mary's students allows for broader options post-graduation, including access to both local and international universities. As the Cambridge curriculum is an internationally recognized program, the certifications acquired by the students are recognized on a more universal level. As part of the curriculum, skills in the areas of communication, critical thinking, problem solving, entrepreneurship and leadership are fostered and help to prepare students for their next steps after secondary school. These skills not only increase their employability but also their contribution to Rwanda becoming a competitive and diversified economy.

FILLING A SKILLS GAP

The current national education system is still not fully adapted to the labor market needs. This, together with a lack of training facilities, leads to a persistent skills gap and contributes to a high youth unemployment rate. Mother Mary is working to meet this challenge by preparing its students for university as well as arming them with both vocational and language skills. Graduates of Mother Mary are proficient in both French and English, which allows them to competently undertake higher education, or enter the local workforce, competing with applicants from surrounding Anglophone nations. By offering innovative vocational training classes, such as international cuisine, specialty baking, Information and Communications Technology (ICT), and music, the school encourages students to learn tangible skills and benefit from practical hands-on training. Complementary to academic skills, this vocational training supports the creation of a skilled workforce which is of great benefit to the future of Rwanda.

« I STUDY HERE AT MOTHER MARY AND I LIKE MY SCHOOL VERY MUCH. I HAVE A LOT OF FRIENDS HERE. I LIKE ALL OF MY CLASSES INCLUDING MATH, SCIENCE, ART, TRADITIONAL AND MODERN DANCE, AND MUSIC »

- IAN (9 YEARS OLD), MOTHER MARY STUDENT



« FOR ME, THE MOST IMPORTANT THING ABOUT MOTHER MARY IS THAT IT ALLOWS MY CHILDREN TO LEARN FROM AN INTERNATIONAL PROGRAM AND TO BECOME BILINGUAL IN FRENCH AND ENGLISH. I DID NOT HAVE THIS OPPORTUNITY WHEN I WAS GROWING UP AND SO I WANT TO GIVE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO MY CHILDREN. »

- IRENE, IAN'S MOTHER



Irene and Alain, Ian's parents

OFFERING QUALITY ENGLISH TUITION SUPPORTING ITS TEACHERS

Ten years after the implementation of English as the official language of education, an immense language barrier remains, with English speakers estimated to comprise only 1-6% of the total population. The Cambridge curriculum allows Mother Mary to not only provide high-quality tuition, but also supports it to be done in English, the combination of which is the main reason many parents seek places at Mother Mary for their children. It could be assumed that after ten years, tuition in English would be provided at a high standard for all Rwandan schools, but in fact the implementation of English has been a slow and difficult process. Mother Mary's teaching staff includes regional Anglophone teachers from Uganda and Kenya alongside its local staff to ensure the curriculum is taught at a high standard of English.

Although teaching is a relatively well-paid profession in Rwanda, the localized challenge for this profession is the need for a sufficient command of English, with teachers often not having received English training. Mother Mary supports its employees to take further English training if needed and hires French and British expats regularly to offer language and curriculum training. In addition, Mother Mary provides a salary above the national teacher average for its employees, along with healthcare coverage, contribution to social benefits, meals during the school day, and scholarships for employees' children.



« THROUGH MOTHER MARY,
WE CAN OFFER SO MANY
POSSIBILITIES TO THE
STUDENTS. EVERY LESSON
INCLUDES LIFE SKILLS WHICH
ARE INSTRUMENTAL FOR THEIR
FUTURE. »

- DIANA NAWATTI, MOTHER MARY HEADMISTRESS



Physical education classes are included as part of Mother Mary's curriculum. The outdoor green areas encourage active and healthy students.



An upgrade of the school's existing kitchen was completed as a result of Mother Mary's loan from BPI EA. This has supported the school to provide lunch for the students. The upgraded facilities also allow use of the kitchen for teaching some of the technical classes such as international cuisine and specialty baking.



« I'M PROUD TO BE A PART OF A SCHOOL WHICH LOWERS THE COST FOR THOSE WHO CANNOT AFFORD IT. THERE WOULD BE SOMETHING MISSING IF MOTHER MARY WAS NOT HERE. I WOULD LIKE TO GO ABROAD TO STUDY AND MOTHER MARY HELPS ME TO PREPARE WITH THIS INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION. I COULD THEN ACQUIRE THE SKILLS I NEED AND COME BACK TO MY OWN COUNTRY, TO RWANDA, AND APPLY THEM HERE TO BRING BETTER DEVELOPMENT. »

- MBAWAZI JOY STELLA (15 YEARS OLD), MOTHER MARY STUDENT

BUSINESS PARTNERS INTERNATIONAL EAST AFRICA



Business Partners International East Africa (BPI EA) is a Permanent Capital Vehicle (PCV) providing risk-finance to small enterprises in Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda. BPI EA's offering is tailored to the needs of small enterprises, accounting for their lack of collateral, and irregular cash-flows. With its nascent SME market, Rwanda has a growing need for the formalization of its businesses and their processes. BPI EA offers financial products which are more flexible and better tailored to the needs of SME clients than those of traditional banks, and is also involved in supporting its clients in implementing good business practice which support their future growth. These include adequate audit standards, clear employee responsibilities, good corporate governance, and best practice HR policies (including rules and regulations on remuneration, leave management, working hours, and holidays). BPI EA complements its finance with technical assistance (TA) in the form of non-interest-bearing loans in order to support the improvement of the business capacities of the enterprises.

Mother Mary's loan from BPI EA has been used to build a new wing of the school that houses new classrooms as well as a computer lab. This will enable Mother Mary to work towards meeting the demand for increased student capacity. The loan has also been used to extend the facilities of the kindergarten, as well as replace and upgrade the school bathroom facilities, including separate facilities for boys and girls. An upgrade of the school's existing kitchen is also in process using part of the loan.

In addition, BPI EA provided an interest-free loan from its Technical Assistance (TA) facility. The TA facility enabled Mother Mary to fund the further training of its staff. For example, Mother Mary regularly brings in French and British expats to support its teachers, both in the areas of language and the implementation of the Cambridge curriculum.



Some of the BPI EA team: (L-R) Jean Claude Mutajogire, Darius Mukunzi, Faith Gasatura

ABOUT SIFEM

The Swiss Investment Fund for Emerging Markets (SIFEM) is the Swiss development finance institution. It is owned by the Swiss Government and is an integral part of the instruments of economic development cooperation. SIFEM is specialized in providing long-term financing through local funds and financial institutions to small and medium-sized enterprises and other fast-growing companies in developing and emerging countries, focusing on the priority countries of Switzerland's development cooperation. This helps to create and secure more and better jobs and reduce poverty while also contributing towards the integration of these countries into the global economic system.

ABOUT OBVIAM

Obviam is an independent investment advisor specialised in long-term investments in emerging and frontier markets. Obviam advises public, institutional, and private clients, including the Swiss Investment Fund for Emerging Markets (SIFEM), the Development Finance Institution (DFI) of the Swiss Confederation. Obviam offers investors an opportunity to capture attractive returns and generate sustainable positive impact in emerging and frontier markets, via a proven and responsible investment approach.

Obviam has made reasonable efforts to ensure the accuracy of the data presented. A case study is made possible both through Obviam's first-hand experience and/or the information provided by Obviam's investment partners. The data in this case study is valid as per 2018.

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