

Koch Goma Secondary School

Koch Goma Secondary School is a government school which currently has around 800 students studying for 'O' and 'A' levels. Founded in 1984, originally using buildings on the Koch Goma Primary School site, owned by the Church of Uganda, the school has had a difficult past, and still faces a very challenging future.

As a result of the insurgency by rebels from the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA), like many schools in the area, it became unsafe for Koch Goma SS to remain in its home village. The LRA operates largely by abducting children and forcing them to become child soldiers. Many have been forced to kill family members and the girls are often taken as "wives" by the rebels. Attacks on villages have forced over 1.5 million people to be displaced into camps for Internally Displaced People where conditions are very poor. At times over 27,000 children, known as "night commuters" would pour into Gulu town every night, having walked miles from the villages to sleep in the relative safety of shop verandas, the hospital grounds and temporary shelters. There is not a person living in the District who has not been directly affected by the conflict and many people are still very affected by their experiences.

Since 1988 Koch Goma SS been displaced into Gulu town, where it has "camped out" in very temporary accommodation and been forced to move locations four times. Throughout the last 20 years the school has remained hopeful of being able to move back to the village, but has had to spend valuable resources on building permanent and semi-permanent buildings to house its limited resources and cut down on repair costs of the grass shelters they originally built.

However, there has been peace since July 2006 and whilst negotiations are still ongoing for a permanent end to the conflict, many of the displaced people are beginning to think about returning to their homes. The government is encouraging schools, including Koch Goma Secondary, to return to their original sites.

When it was displaced, Koch Goma SS was using buildings loaned to it. Despite the war, the school has not been idle about planning for its future. With some support from the Ministry of Education and help from local people they have obtained a new 200 acre site on the edge of their village. In 1993 parents started to build a new school with bricks they had made themselves - 14 classrooms and 3 store rooms/offices. They have a well-thought out and ambitious development plan for the school - they want it to be a well-resourced and well-run establishment which achieves good results. The foundation stone was laid by the President in 1994, but 14 years later, the buildings remain unfinished due to the ongoing conflict. In 2006 the government paid for and built 3 brand new science labs at the school - as yet unused as the school is not habitable.

Despite its troubled history, there is a huge amount of optimism and commitment from the school governors, PTA and teachers. They are seriously planning how they can move back to their village site and have offers of financial support from a number of foreign aid organisations - albeit not always on realistic "terms". The village site itself is fantastic and has lots of potential. The school has recently been chosen by the Uganda Communications Commission as just one of 80 secondary schools to receive 12 new computers and internet access, although the school will have to be responsible for finding a way to generate power as there is no mains electricity in the village. They also have to face the logistical challenge of relocating to a site 15 miles away, when many of their pupils still live in the town and there are very mixed feelings about whether or not it is yet safe to move back to the village.

2008 will be another challenging year for Koch Goma SS but hopefully the challenges faced will be those of developing and moving the school forward in an environment where peace prevails and people are safe and able to begin rebuilding their lives.

Pictures of Koch Goma Secondary School, Gulu, Uganda



Pictures above and left of the school's current temporary site and below of the new, unused, lab and part-built classrooms at the new site in the village

