

In Kijjude, Luweero District, Braze Mark Iraguha's commitment to relationships and skills training is equipping the community with vocational skills and formal education.

BY OWEN WAGABAZA

**H**ope rarely arrives with fanfare. In Kijjude, it came quietly, carried by one man with no possessions, no guarantees, and an unshakable belief that people thrive when someone truly believes in them.

Seven years ago, Braze Mark Iraguha stepped into this remote village with little more than a vision rooted in love and service.

Today, that vision lives and breathes in classrooms filled with laughter, in women stitching new futures at sewing machines, and in families earning an honest living for the first time. This is proof that when skills are nurtured with compassion, an entire community can rise.

Seven years ago, Braze Mark Iraguha arrived in Kijjude, Luweero District with nothing but that vision and commitment to serve. Today, his quiet determination has grown into a thriving educational and economic hub serving more than 500 community members through a school, vocational training programs, and social enterprises that are steadily rewriting the future of the village.

#### Vision to reality

When Iraguha first began working with Kijjude residents in 2018, the challenges were stark. Children walked nearly four kilometres to the nearest school. Women had no access to vocational training. Economic opportunities were virtually non-existent.

Through childcare programs and connections with church sponsors, Iraguha began listening closely to the community. Patterns of need emerge, needs that would soon define his work.

"I came up with a way of getting good donors and building relationships between the community and donors so that we can bring support to this community," he explains.

What followed were five years of intensive work delivering quality education and essential services, efforts that would fundamentally transform Kijjude.

#### Skills that build dignity

The transformation began with a sewing project. Iraguha bought more than 20 sewing machines and offered free training to anyone willing to learn. The response was overwhelming as 67 women enrolled.

"That was so interesting," he recalls. "It was a free service so that we can get to know more about them, build a genuine relationship and share with them."

The initiative was never just about sewing. It was about restoring dignity, helping people believe in themselves through love, trust, and hope.

Ms. Rose, one of the beneficiaries, remembers how the project came at a critical moment in her life. Having dropped out of school early, she faced the hardships of single motherhood, ongoing health challenges, and mounting financial pressure.

"I am grateful for the opportunity

# From one vision to a village transformed



The transformation of Kijjude Village in Luweero District started with a tailoring project. PHOTOS/ OWEN WAGABAZA.



Some of the beneficiaries of the tailoring project at Kijjude in Luweero District. PHOTO/ OWEN WAGABAZA.

and employment Sunbeams has provided for me. I can now look after myself and my son," she says.

#### School changes everything

Education soon became the next urgent priority. Working with partners, Iraguha established Sunbeams Christian School right in the heart of the village, ending the exhausting daily walks children once endured.

Today, the school serves approximately 450 children from Baby Class (now expanded into Streams A and B) to Primary Four.

Beyond education, Iraguha focused on creating sustainable livelihoods. A community bakery now employs around 25 people, producing bread and cupcakes sold within the school and across the village. Meanwhile, a hairdressing salon employs five women

and two men, offering essential services while generating steady income. These enterprises offer purpose, dignity, and the confidence that new skills can unlock lasting opportunity.

#### Power of partnership

Behind this transformation is a powerful relationship. A family of six from Chicago, Illinois who initially sponsored Iraguha's education, expanded their support to include the Kijjude project.

"The donation they bring impact on this community and it is really amazing," Iraguha says. "We focus on building relationships with the community. We want to bring love, hope, and genuine care, that people feel in their hearts."

Kelly Vance, a donor and co-founder of Sunbeams Uganda, echoes this belief

"We want to see people truly trans-



#### FOUNDER SAYS...

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formed by believing in them and giving them hope and opportunity."

Over time, additional partners and donors have joined, forming a growing network of support that sustains and strengthens the programmes.

#### Challenges remain

Despite the progress, challenges persist. Some parents remain hesitant to fully engage in their children's education or acquire skill development themselves. Others feel left behind.

"They [parents] want to get something so fast," Iraguha notes, referring to expectations of immediate income rather than long-term growth.

Language barrier further compli-

cates communication, and some community members remain reluctant to openly share their struggles.

Yet these challenges have only reinforced the project's core philosophy: transformation begins with patience, trust, and relationship.

#### The future

Iraguha's vision reaches far beyond current achievements. Plans include a medical clinic, expanded education for out-of-school children, and technology training programs.

"I am looking at teaching people computer skills such as web design, digital literacy so the youth can see that they too, can make it," he explains.

These programmes aim to connect Kijjude's youth to opportunities in an increasingly digital world.

What makes the Kijjude story extraordinary is its foundation in genuine relationship and long-term commitment. By offering free training, listening deeply, and remaining present for seven years, Iraguha has built a model that puts people before programmes.

The numbers tell part of the story. 67 women trained, 450 children educated, more than 30 people employed. But beneath the statistics is something far more powerful: a community rediscovering hope, one skill and one relationship at a time.

As Sunbeams Christian School continues to grow and new opportunities take shape, Kijjude stands as living proof of what's possible when vision meets unwavering commitment and when one person refuses to give up on a community.