

**Osiligi Charity Projects
Newsletter May 2011**

Hello,

Black clouds are gathering over the Ngong hills to the north east of Olepolos, the Maasai Warriors' home community. We are very popular because we have brought blessings of rain from the UK.

Goats are finding lush pasture and milk is plentiful for their kids and for the Maasai tea, a very important part of their diet. Spare milk is used for "mala" to eat in times of hardship when there is no food. To make mala, a gourd is scraped clean, filled with milk and a little sugar and shaken. It is left to ferment for three or four weeks before eating.

The Maasai might be glad of the rain but everyone is shivering. Out come the winter coats and woolly hats. We are sweating in T shirts as usual.



The Ngong hills, viewed from the community

Inflation and shortages

Financial storm clouds are gathering over the whole of Kenya in the shape of rampant inflation. Petrol costs go up daily followed quickly by the cost of food. A few months ago most people barely managed the bare necessities of maize flour, rice, tea and sugar. Now these items are a luxury for many families. A bag of maize flour was 75 shillings (54p) in February. Now it is 110 shillings, about 80p. The Head Teacher tells us that one third of her school had no food other than milk throughout the four week Easter holiday. She herself is relieved to receive this term's fees for our sponsored children - to buy food for school lunches. If a school doesn't provide lunch, many children stay at home. Some children, on the long journey home from school, on finding a cow with calf, will push the calf away and drink direct from the udder. While we are in Kenya there is no petrol in the whole country for three days. Everything stops.

Water

Our completed water projects, Olchorro Moreo, a tapped spring and Kashanga Osiligi, a well, are now on Google maps. Find Kiserian, SW of Nairobi, then zoom in SW of Kiserian.

Each trip we hope to begin another clean water project but this visit is spent repairing previous work - two steps forward, one step back. We had expected destruction from goats but not children. At Olchorro Moreo they pulled out, with great effort, one of our pipes and stole it but were caught red-handed. Maasai parents are kind but very strict so they won't be trying that again. Other children pushed a large rock into the drain pipe on the Kashanga Osiligi well, blocking and breaking it. We have repaired both water sources with belt and braces.

There are two dirty springs at Olchorro Losoit, a major watering hole on community land. We have been trying with much frustration for six months, to get permission to tap the unused one. Even after endless meetings nobody is willing to make a decision. We suspect some elders rather like the meetings. Meanwhile children continue to drink the dirty water here. It is much easier to get permission to do a clean water project on private land. The Maasai will always allow others free access to their well or source - not to do so is against their culture and invites a curse. Nevertheless, we will continue to push to work on this spring because it is such an important watering hole for the entire community.

We begin the visit feeling annoyed and frustrated but this quickly passes. It's hard to feel bad when so many people stop us and say "enkare - si dai!" (lovely sweet water) and when we know that as we enter the dry season 200 families this year will drink clean healthy water.

Sponsored Children

I ask Catherine, the head teacher of Maasai Plains School, if the children can take home a questionnaire about how they spend Saturday to give to their sponsors. She is very reluctant - "the letters will come back covered in goat dung and charcoal. The children share their hut with the goats at night". We now sponsor 13 children at the Maasai Plains School and one, Bernard, at secondary school. He is age 18 and is finding his first time away from home at boarding school difficult. Other children tell us he will soon settle. Our most disadvantaged girl is consistently top of her class with grades above 90%. Seeing someone who otherwise would not attend school do so well makes it all so worthwhile.

We mentioned in February that two of our sponsored orphan children (Dadio and Joshua) were invited into new homes after their grandmother died. It is humbling that Dadio has been welcomed into a family with very little income and he now lives in a hut barely bigger than a garden shed. He shares a small twig bed with his new parents and two siblings.



Dadio at home and with Joshua and friends



The faith healer

Everyone is talking about a faith healer and herbalist in Magadi near the Tanzanian boarder and one of the Maasai is trying to arrange transport to take his father for healing. The healer charges a modest 80p per person. This might not seem very much but he is apparently seeing 1,400 people every day - an impressive £1,120 per day.

The New School Build

Over the last three months we have put the project out to tender and have now chosen Peter, an excellent contractor. He is an engineer with experience of building hospitals and schools. This is evident from the many practical suggestions he makes for the design. Work will start in the next two weeks but not before the essential ground breaking ceremony - it is the Maasai way to invite a pastor to bless the land and no doubt a goat will be slaughtered. The school is being built on 5 acres of land donated by Tajeu (Richard) Ole Minisa, the Warrior Troupe leader.

For phase one we will build six classrooms, a kitchen, a flush toilet block, two sets of pit latrines (to conserve water), water tanks, four staff houses and if money permits, a dining hall. We expect to open the school next January for Reception and Class 1. For class 4 onwards, the school will have boarding facilities so the boarding house will be built in phase two, in a couple of years time when needed. We are building in two phases to allow time for fundraising.

School Management

Building a school, the bricks and mortar, is the easy part. We are now looking carefully at the management to ensure that it not only meets its goal of being a centre of excellence, accessible to the poor but that this is sustainable for many years to come. To this end we are looking for suitable local people to sit on a Board of Governors. The Charity will have a place on this board to ensure our aims are met consistently and long term and our funds are well spent. We have a good shortlist already.

The Church

You may remember from the last news letter that a donor came forward to build a church in partnership with the community. The building is almost complete and the women are busy sweeping it ready for hosting a women's conference this week.

Solar

The Kisamis Women's group sold all 24 solar lamps within days (see November newsletter). They are now trying to re-stock. Only a few rich people can afford these lamps leaving the very poor to continue to use kerosene. With help from a donor, we set up a small business to lend lamps to poorer people. They will rent a lamp for less than the cost of kerosene. Susan, a Maasai woman living in the centre of the community, will run the rental business, giving her a small income. She will start with 12 lamps and if all goes well, will increase her rental stock to 42 lamps. Watch this space.

We are now turning our attention to solar cookers. Traditional cookers use charcoal or fallen wood that takes the women ages to collect. The government has recently made illegal the felling of trees for charcoal and police road blocks are often seen checking trucks for charcoal on its way to market.

Kisamis

Shops in this small village close to Olepolos are diversifying. They all used to sell the same thing - groceries. A tailor's shop (already very busy) and photocopier's have been added to the line-up. The owner of the photocopy shop, Sarge, one of the Maasai Warriors, calls us inside and proudly shows us his instant photo printer. Previously photocopying meant a day's trip on a matatu bus to Kiserian. He has plans. Next time we visit he hopes to have an internet café. Although electricity is available in Kisamis, most shops don't have it. Even when they do it is unreliable and will often be off for a whole day with no warning. Kisamis's small café, sells rice with beans, chapatti and tea. Tea costs 12p and a meal is 40p



Fundraising

We are delighted with our fundraising for the school and through much generosity have now raised or have pledges for three quarters of the total for phase one. If you know of anyone who can help us with the remainder, please let us know.

The Maasai of Olepolos say they are truly grateful for your help and send their greetings to you and your families.

Thank you on behalf of the Charity also, to everyone who has so generously given their time and their support, both financial and moral.

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