

Osiligi Charity Projects Newsletter August 2011

Enda sopa, (hello to all)

Many of you have asked about the drought in Kenya and how the Maasai of Olepolos are faring. The worst of the drought has been in the North of Kenya - Olepolos is in the south. There has been the odd shower - just enough to keep the goats going with leaves but the men have walked their cows to the hills about 30 miles away. The main effect of the drought is the continuing food inflation. The bag of maize flour mentioned in the previous newsletter is now about £1. It was 54p 6 months ago. For many people, the only way they can pay the higher cost for food is to reduce the amount they eat. So, people are definitely struggling. We hear so much about an international aid culture these days it's heart warming to hear on Kenya Radio about the fund raising campaign taking the country by storm: "Kenyans for Kenya". Kenyans can send a handful of shillings on their mobile phone to the Kenyan Red Cross, to help drought victims. Important for many Kenyans, this money is out of reach of the Government. People are excited and proud of their contributions of a few shillings and together have raised over £4million to date.

Water

We still have no luck persuading the elders to let us tap the two dirty springs at Olchorro Losoit but we will keep chipping away. Who knows - maybe one day?

At the well and pump, we arrange to put a fence with steps around the area to keep the donkeys and goats out as their faeces could find their way into the water source.

On a visit to Olchorro Moreo we are alarmed and, let's admit it, despondent to find the entire pipework missing and no clean drinking water. Surely the pipes have not been stolen again. Eventually we track down Daniel the owner of the spring and find that he himself has removed the pipes! Why? Well, Roger had warned him that, come the dry season Daniel would need to remove a small black cap to increase flow for the animals - a five second job. Seeing the flow dwindle and fearing for the lives of his community's livestock Daniel took radical action and removed everything visible. Roger has re-instated the pipework and re-trained Daniel.

Cows and goats are the Maasais' bank account - the Maasai do not keep their money in a bank. It's a reasonable idea in times of high inflation but a prolonged drought can wipe out a family's entire wealth in a few months.

Sponsored Children

All 15 children are all doing well. Three of them this term are top of their respective classes. For a letter to their sponsors, the older children interview their mothers to give insight into life at home. The children learn some surprising things and many of the mothers are quite emotional that they can tell their story.

Bernard, our secondary school pupil is now happy at his new boarding school. The job of a teacher involves some unexpected socialising tasks. They must teach that it is not ok to blow ones nose onto the floor of the classroom or spit in the bus on the annual school trip; that the toilet is not the area just outside the classrooms, it is the hut with a hole in the ground. Many small children are terrified of this dark hole in a dark place. There is a big hand washing campaign currently in Kenya and teachers are doing their part to encourage hygiene - almost impossible without running water.

We are invited to the Maasai Plains School end of term assembly and witness a song with movements to teach parts of the body. It is hard to imagine British 16 year olds enjoying a routine that brings to mind a constipated chicken.

End of term assembly
at Maasai Plains School



This private school in Kisamis tries very hard but suffers from the same problems as all but a few Kenyan Schools: lack of land, electricity, water, equipment and books, poor buildings and unqualified teachers. Most Government schools are seriously overcrowded. Staff are over-burdened, often disillusioned and frequently absent. This all means that children from rural areas rarely get good enough exam results to go to secondary school and university which perpetuates poverty and inequality in these areas.

The New School Build

Progress on phase 1 is fast. Peter, our outstanding contractor keeps a keen eye on our deadline but he has encountered many problems. Here are a few: The price of materials, especially steel, is rising rapidly.

The ground is full of huge, very dense rocks which only blasting with dynamite will shift. The very deep pit latrine is proving especially difficult. Peter is looking on the bright side though - the foundations will be excellent.

Machined stone from the nearby quarry is in demand from all parts of Kenya due to both its quality and the explosion of building projects in the bigger towns. Even though the stone was ordered in May, Peter's drivers have to queue at the quarry overnight and sleep in their cabs.

The walls go up quickly during our two week visit and most of the rooms are now ready for the concrete and steel ring beam which will support the roof.



Night Security guard in front of 2 classrooms.
If challenged, he would aim his spear for the thigh.
This local man made the earrings himself.

The contractor uses local labour where possible so the school is providing much needed income for Olepolos. The Mamas are quick to spot a way of making money by selling breakfast, morning tea and lunch to the workmen - everyone is happy.

Now the building is visible the community is becoming excited. Many people come to say thank you for such a wonderful building for their children. One old man even presents us with a gift - a goat! We hear so many times the phrase "without education you are nothing".



Tea and chapatis

Teachers

The four teachers' homes are at the far end of a long narrow plot, away from the children and overlooking a scenic valley. Our school is in an area designated by the Government as "hardship" because of poverty and lack of amenities such as shops, water, electricity and medical care. A stone built home with services will attract good teachers.

School Management

We have numerous meetings with head teachers and owners of private schools who generously give us advice and access to their financial planning. It is going to be a real balancing act to pay fair wages to attract good teachers whilst keeping the fees affordable for the poor. We conclude we will have to devise a scheme of bursaries and subsidised fees. We are told that once the school gains a good reputation then it will attract wealthy parents from Nairobi who will subsidise the poor from Olepolos. A school in the bush, far from city influences such as drugs, is appealing to parents. A reputation will take a while to build. All rests on the School's achievement at KCPE (Kenya Certificate of Primary Education) which is 8 years down the line.

We are looking for new sponsors from January 2012. If you would like to sponsor a child, for around the cost of a Costa coffee and cake per week, please contact me.

Solar

You may remember Susan, a Maasai woman we chose to run a small lamp rental business. All her lamps are now out on loan at 10 shillings (7p) a day. She is saving her earnings to buy more lamps and with the interest is able to buy a kilogram of sugar a month. One delighted customer says her asthma used to be so bad she could not operate the hand pump on the well. It has cleared up now she is not using kerosene and as a bonus, the lamp is cheaper to run. We tested a solar cooker with a pot of beans and were looking forward to them for dinner. After eight hours they were still hard and inedible. We were being a bit optimistic given the cloud cover all day and maybe we will have more luck in the hot season in November.

Susan at home showing off her solar panels



Thanks

A big thank you is due. Our amazing fundraisers find their contributions in many different ways. Here are a few:

A sponsored parachute jump

Jewellery parties selling Maasai beads made by the women of Olepolos.

Selling unwanted trinkets on ebay.

Shopping for elderly neighbours (and giving them the odd haircut)

Primary schools are doing something mysterious - maybe a non-uniform day or a coffee morning? Whatever it is, we really welcome their help.

Some of you help us by offering your time and professional skills.

To those of you who sponsor children, you would find it hard to imagine the gratitude of the children and their parents - they never forget to say thank you and send their greetings.

So, to all of you, thank you for your time, your generosity and for thinking of us.

Fundraising achievements

For the new school, we have raised an amazing £161,000. We need £17,000 to finish the classrooms and a further £12,000 to complete the dining/assembly hall. This is before we pay for the electricity supply and equip the rooms with cookers (for the kitchen), books, desks and chairs. If you feel you can help us reach the target, please contact us or go to the donate page on the website.

Thanks for your help.

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