

**Osiligi Charity Projects
Newsletter December 2010**

Hello,

We have just returned from a two week visit to Olepolos, home of the Maasai Warriors. Water is our main focus this time as well as tying up any loose ends on paperwork for the new school building.

Water

Now we are nearing the end of the dry season. Everyone scans the hills looking for the clouds that promise rain. It doesn't come and the land soon becomes a dusty desert. The Maasai start moving their cows and goats to land owned by their extended family that still has grazing. It can be up to 30 miles away. The watering holes are busy from daybreak, each herd patiently taking its turn. If there is no more rain in the next 4 weeks, cattle will start to die from lack of food. We survey the use of our well. The women race to arrive early each day before the water runs out but by 9.30 it's empty. At the end of the dry season, it's only supplying about 1,000 litres per day.

Olchorro Moreo watering hole



We tap a spring in a dirty watering hole (Olchorro Moreo) by damming the source and adding a pipe feeding a tap. We then seal the area around the spring from contamination and leave the existing pool and trough for animals. When finished, the women can draw clean drinking water from a tap. Previously they were collecting the same filthy water as their livestock. This process takes five days and employs 6 local men. We had to leave, so the project remains unfinished, but will be completed shortly.

We survey the site of another busy watering hole with a spring. This will be ideal for tapping when we next visit.

(Update, added 10th December. The rains have now come with a vengeance. There will soon be pasture for the animals. The well is now full again.)

New School build

We visit the lawyer in Nairobi to ensure the paperwork for transferring land and setting up a school is in order. His office is far from plush (we are pleased to see!) In the waiting room we play a Maasai game - how many people can you fit on one bench. It's much like the "how many fit in a truck?" game: the answer is "always one more". This is a perfect game for 30 degree heat. We have been lucky to get some free advice from a very kind lawyer in England before this meeting. It seems there are many similarities between the UK and Kenyan legal systems.

We meet a building contractor (one of three) who will quote for the project. His work is of a reassuringly high standard. We ask that up to 60% of people building the school should be local people.

Fundraising for the new School

We are touched by the support of schools, groups and individuals throughout the UK. They have helped us in numerous ways. Here are a few: table-top sales; selling Maasai beads on line; coffee mornings; non-uniform days; buying bricks, desks and chairs as gifts for friends and family. We would like to thank all of you for helping us to build our new school. I hope Esther's sponsor will not mind if I quote from Esther's letter: "Learning is a very good thing because if you are not a learned person you are nothing".

If you are stuck for some Christmas presents, why not help a Maasai child go to school via our 'buy a brick, build a school' campaign. More details on the website - www.osiligi.org/brick.html

The Warriors' tour

The troupe had what is probably their most successful tour in September and October. This year they performed to enthusiastic audiences in Scotland and East Anglia. Their tour culminated in the Ely Walks, raising £1,500 in sponsorship for the school-build project. All who took part had a wonderful time meeting the Warriors and walking across the Fens and around Ely with men skimpily clad in red skirts, beads and sandals.

Sponsored children

The charity is sponsoring 12 children at the existing local school in Kisamis. We have two leavers in year eight who are nervously awaiting their KCPE (Kenyan Certificate of Primary Education) results on 29th December. A mark of 300 out of 500 will secure a place at secondary school and both are fortunate to have found sponsors. Their previous results have been on the borderline so we are keeping our fingers crossed.

Kisamis Women's Group

On our last visit we made a 2-year interest free loan of £480 to the women's micro-finance group. They have been using it to invest in small businesses such as selling beadwork and fruit and vegetables at the market or for paying school fees. Each borrows money from the group for a month or two. All money borrowed has been repaid, with interest, on time. The interest earned by the group will be used to repay the capital to the charity. This visit we present them with a possible business opportunity: solar lamps. These marvellous lamps, available wholesale in Nairobi, can replace kerosene, a dangerous fuel not just from possible fires but from inhaling fumes and smoke in a hut with no chimney. Under fives are at particular risk and deaths do happen. The lamps are bright enough to do homework. They retail at about £15 each - much cheaper than the £20-£30 which people currently spend yearly on kerosene. £15 is a huge initial outlay for a typical Maasai family so we suggest different business models to the women's group including short-term rental and hire purchase. They seem enthusiastic and will try out the lamps themselves before thinking about a potential business. This way and scale of doing business is a little out of their comfort zone so we expect things to take a while. We are excited because women have no independent means and this lamp seems to be a wonderful opportunity on so many fronts. We are relieved to report the lamp is not "made in Kenya" (see previous newsletter) - it is German.

Maasai women in ceremonial dress



One took a fancy to Roger's sunglasses

A Maasai girl

Poem recited at Maasai Plains School by year five girls, aged 11:

A Maasai girl, a Maasai girl, very disadvantaged
They are not given chance for education
A Maasai girl, a Maasai girl, very disadvantaged
At the age of thirteen years they are forced to marry very old men.
A Maasai girl, a Maasai girl, very disadvantaged
At a tender age they are babysitters and before fifteen they are mothers.
A Maasai girl, a Maasai girl, very disadvantaged.

One girl learnt this in church then passed it on to the others.
Their Head Teacher, Catherine is vocal on this subject, fighting hard to keep girls at school. She warns them to watch for signs of impending marriage: purchase of cows and goats and men coming to the house for discussions with the father. Catherine says it is always the old men who

decide the future of these girls. She will challenge them if a girl is to be removed from school. Feelings run high and knives have been drawn in anger- an extremely rare action for the peaceable Maasai. They are quickly returned to their sheath. Things are changing though - the younger generation of fathers generally encourages all children to stay at school.

A wedding

We are invited to a Maasai wedding. I would like to have said the bride looked radiant. More of that later.

About 150 people walk miles through the bush to the groom's home, women in Maasai dress, men in western clothes. The bride, in red with beads and small mirrors sewn to her dress arrives in a truck. She walks to the gate of the groom's home accompanied by shouting and singing. Brightly coloured cloths are laid before her on the dust. She stops at the gate, refusing to advance until her parents have sold her for a suitable dowry of cows and goats. The bride enters her mother in law's home with whom she will spend her first night of married life (some wedding night!) The next night will be spent alone with her husband.

Food is served. The honoured guests sit on plastic chairs under a tree. Women and children form a group and sit on the ground apart from the men. Never the twain shall meet. A cow, specially slaughtered for the occasion is served with volumes of rice, potatoes and chapati. The cooking pots are huge, about three feet across.

From left: Groom, bride, bride's mother



After lunch, the bride and groom arrive and sit side by side. Their parents publicly advise them on married life. Two pastors give more advice in animated Swahili and Kimaasai. The audience find it funny. The groom is reminded the bible requires him to love his wife. She is told to obey him, love him and be faithful. Equality rules! Gifts of money are publicly presented. Each person is exhorted to give more.

The pastor tells us this is a happy occasion. It's a pity someone forgot to inform the bride. She is silent and sad, head downcast throughout the five hour ceremony. This demeanour is not a requirement. We are told she is fourteen, has only met her husband twice and is far from home. She does not speak to him or look at him. She however is one of the luckier brides. Her husband is only 22. Traditionally a man counts his wealth and status by the number of his wives and children. Many girls younger than this bride are married to men in their sixties.

A cornerstone of the Osiligi Charity is that we avoid actively changing Maasai culture, even where it appears unjust to western eyes. Nevertheless, our provision of a good quality boarding school and sponsorship will inevitably change the outlook favourably for many girls.

Incidentally, the government is now advising a family limit of four children, to help with the problem of overflowing schools.

Respect

We could learn a thing or two from the Maasai especially their treatment of the elderly. They say that old people gain knowledge and wisdom with age and so must be respected. Even those just a few years younger will consult them and defer to their opinion. Children must never interrupt a conversation.

This requirement for respect can be a double-edged sword. Because the elderly make the decisions it means that change, beneficial or otherwise, often doesn't happen. This has the benefit of keeping Maasai culture but as we found to our cost when trying to implement a particular clean water scheme, it can impede progress. This was very frustrating for us as the scheme would have brought significant improvement in health with no detriment to anyone. We are not sure whether the digging in of heels is due to resistance to change or a need to hold on to power.

A curious aspect for the westerner of this culture of respect is that horse-play and joking with children is considered inappropriate behaviour by anyone

who has reached maturity. For boys, maturity comes after their circumcision ceremony when they have completed primary school, aged around 15.

Reading glasses

Word has got out that we give out free glasses for close work. A man we meet wants to be able to see long distances. We try to point out, tactfully, that our reading glasses will not help. He is insistent so we bring a strong pair anyway. He puts them on and gazes into the distance, delighted. There's no way he's going to part with those.

Dadio and the thorn bush

Can you remember Dadio? He's one of our sponsored orphans. He began school in May looking pristine in his new uniform. He is now sporting a rather fetching off the shoulder number. In fact he has lost an entire sleeve from his only school jumper. We blame the Maasai 'tooth pick' - the acacia bush is covered in, well, very sharp tooth picks.

We wish all our supporters, in the UK, Kenya and elsewhere in the world a very happy Christmas and thank you for your help this year.

For more information see our website www.osiligi.org

Helen Pannell