

Osiligi Charity Projects
Newsletter May 2010
Kisamis, Olepolos, Kenya

Hello,

Family and friends are both alarmed and sceptical when we say we are working in Kenya. "It's impossible to get anything done there! You'll be ill!" Well, there is much progress to report since the February newsletter and toilets hardly feature.

We are now a UK registered charity. This allows us to reclaim gift aid on donations.

We have received 11 generous offers to sponsor the education of children and appointed a Maasai administrator to look after them.

The community has a clean source of drinking water via a well and hand pump.

We have begun a partnership with a women's co-operative.

We have appointed an architect for the new school build.

All this has been achieved without a penny being spent in the UK. All the donations go to the projects in Kenya.

Visit in May

The well - kashanga (kimaasai)

Roger and I visit Kisamis for two and a half weeks, the time Roger, an engineer, thinks we will need to complete the well project.

The large concrete slab takes two days of hand mixing in blazing sun. The three Maasai labourers work like Trojans from dawn till dusk, grateful for the work. It's a rare opportunity for unskilled men. Other workers turn up hoping for some paid work.

A bit about tools: The Kenyan High Commission assured us we would easily find all the tools we would need and they were right - well, kind of - saws are

blunt, heads fall off hammers, spades crumple and sand paper has no sand. Beware the phrase "made in Kenya"!

We leave the slab for six days to harden, and carry filthy water from the nearby watering hole to dampen it twice daily. Luckily Mother Nature is doing most of this job for us - it's the end of the rainy season. And boy, can it rain! Lorries slide off the roads or get stuck, blocking everything. We receive a mud bath trying to free Tajeu's truck. Even walking becomes a challenge but the sun is so fierce the mud dries in hours.

Needless to say, the 3 metre plastic pipes (Made in Kenya!) for the pump are bent like bananas. We build it with Koilel and Charles, local Maasai "techies". They will maintain the pump so it's crucial they know how it goes together.

Here's a sobering thought - on our travels, we see five recently built charity wells and only one works. They all have the same, simple "Afridev" hand pump as ours so probably only need a replacement washer and of course someone with knowhow, (like Koilel and Charles). We have always been critical of 'single issue' charities that go into an area, do their bit, and then move onto another area. Usually, no local person has 'ownership' of how to maintain the equipment. Seeing the disused wells just emphasises our commitment to work with the community in whatever ways we can find to relieve the effects of poverty. Building a relationship in an area is much more difficult than building 'things'.

Monday 17th May. The pump works. Tajeu's wife Peninah is incredulous at the 20 bottles of liquid bleach we put in the well to kill any bacteria (it's chlorine, the only source we can find). The water tastes like a swimming pool but improves every day. In another week it will be good, clean, safe water. A thermos flask of something hot appears - we celebrate with a drink of liquid porridge! Many more pictures of the building of the well can be seen at www.osiligi.org/pump.html



Celebrating completing the well

Sponsor children

I was keen to meet all the children, ideally at their home so that they would be more than just a name on a page for their new UK sponsors. I hadn't realised what an unrealistic aim this was. Any request for a home 'address' was met with

"She lives over there (vague gesture), in the mountains."

"How far?"

"Very far"

"Can we go by road?"

" No, no road."

" How many minutes walk?"

" One hour, actually, more."

So, most of our sponsor children walk more than two hours a day, just to get to school.

We look for a Maasai sponsor administrator and Peninah, Tajeu's wife volunteers. She will be very good at this role. Her job is to ensure the

children attend school, encourage them to keep in contact with sponsors and help with small problems such as outgrown shoes, and giving them writing paper. She seems to know everyone in her community so is a good source for identifying needy children for sponsorship.

I am surprised to learn that Peninah has invited all the sponsor children's parents to her house to meet me. I feel honoured and humbled that they all come - it is, after all, a long walk. A father, Gregory Mulimi, says "I can not find the right word to say but a great burden has gone. Thank you from my heart"

The sponsor children, all now attend the Maasai Plains View Primary School which gives a good opportunity to meet them. At break time they are summoned to the Head's office, a dark, tin room. I want to find out a little about them but many, especially the younger girls, are shy and overwhelmed. They are delighted to be at school and all seem to love reading story books in English. All wear uniform but for some the clothes have more holes than fabric.

Teachers here say children will always want to go to school if only for the sugary, milky tea or porridge at morning break, usually their first food of the day. That may well be true but their enthusiasm for learning and to do well at school is unquestionable. Many of the older children ask me to say hello to their sponsors and to say they are grateful for the opportunity they have been given.

The Maasai Plains school is poorly equipped. We hand over a number of literacy and numeracy teaching aids, found on a free internet site which we have printed and laminated. Catherine, the Head Teacher asks us for science posters and equipment for the 9-16 year old children. We are surprised to find that our oldest sponsored child is about to turn 18 but she is not exceptional - the oldest "child" at the school is aged 24, having lost many years of schooling due to the inability to pay the school fees.



Two sponsored orphans, their grandfather and the sponsor administrator, Peninah

Reading glasses

Peninah invites some of the older Maasai to her home. We have brought from England a few pairs of cheap reading glasses. These will help the women in particular to continue making beads which they hope to sell to buy food. The numerous people who seem to have cataracts are disappointed our glasses will not help. We resolve to bring more on our next visit.

New School build

Tajeu has been busy costing the mountain of legal and other processes needed to build a school: land surveys and transfers to a Trust, registration of the school with the local authority and Ministry of Education, provision of water, electricity and fencing. Lack of previous experience, problems with transport and poor communication facilities make for a challenging job - he deserves much credit.

He gives our school a name: Osiligi Obaya - Source of Hope. So we have a name but what will it be like? All we know is that we want it to be a centre of excellence but to be affordable - a tall order.

Tajeu is convinced that Maasai children need a primary boarding school - none exists in the Maasai area though they are commonplace elsewhere in Kenya. The Maasai Warriors troupe's community is spread over an area approaching the size of Wales, with few roads so access to school is a real problem for many. We are sceptical but after visiting two primary boarding schools in another district are heartened by what we see - happy, thriving children. Their only complaint is the food: rice and beans for every meal, seemingly the only menu available in all schools we have seen. Our only complaint: the toilets. School toilets are never a place one would choose to linger but these take the biscuit.

One issue pops up continually. You cannot attract good staff to a rural area without providing them with a basic home on the school site. This was unforeseen and we can see the costs of our school rising. The good news is, bachelor teachers like to share, even four to a house in bunk beds.

We will build a 10 classroom school in two stages, phase 1 and 2. We select a local architect, Steven, who has experience of building schools and draw up a sketch of stage one. Construction will begin in January 2011 ready for opening of phase one in January 2012.

Micro finance

We are invited to a meeting of the Kisamis Womens Co-operative, a group set up by Tajeu's wife Peninah and with 30 members. We are impressed by its organisation and determination. Each woman has contributed 1,000 Kenyan shillings (just under £10). The group loans money, with interest, to its members for projects such as growing and selling vegetables and paying school fees. The money is always paid back, on time. Peninah is proud of her group and says "give a Maasai man 500 shillings in his pocket and he has no money. Give a Maasai woman 500 shillings and she will make every penny count".

Roger looks a little out of place but is welcomed none the less and we are given a delicious meal of stew and chapatti. Maasai men would not cross the threshold, apparently. We are impressed and resolve to make a small interest free loan to the group.

Being Maasai

We ask Tajeu what particular difficulties the Maasai face.

Education and health is top of his list:

There is poor or no road access to hospital. It can take a day to get to hospital in an emergency such as childbirth.

Malaria is a problem and nets were handed out by an American charity but no one knew what they were for or how to use them.

Many people have unspecified eye problems.

They would like to learn about sustainable agriculture.

In spite of leading such tough lives, the Maasai are a very happy people. We ask Tajeu to tell us what he thinks is good about being Maasai.

"That is a difficult question. A very difficult question."

We won't let him off the hook. He thinks for a few minutes.

"Maasai are happy, satisfied with their life, whatever comes, no matter if it is difficult. They are patient, disciplined, kind, honest. No greed or jealousy. They are positive"

What's next for Osiligi Charity Projects?

I will be writing to all the sponsors to give them some information and photos of the sponsor children.

We will be working, full steam ahead, to raise money for the new school build.

The troupe will be touring again from August - October, in Scotland and Suffolk.

Thank you to all who are supporting us in whatever way.

Much more information on the website www.osiligi.org

Helen Pannell