

Drought & rains

"Rain rain go away, come again another day". You will never hear this in the Maasai areas of Kenya where rain, however heavy, is always seen as a blessing. Remember the pictures of droughts earlier this year? Kenya is a country of many droughts and for a community that relies on its cattle for survival, rain truly is a blessing. Before we arrived, there had been no significant rain for about 6 months, the lands had turned to desert and most people had moved their herds out of the area to places with some remaining grass. Now is the time of the short rains that will last for about 2 - 3 weeks. On the day of our arrival, heavy rains fall so the herds are slowly returning.

The Warriors tour

This year was another successful tour for the Osiligi Maasai Warriors who toured Scotland, and Southern England in September and October. Many venues were sell-outs. The Warriors returned to Kenya a little richer with money to pay the many bead makers. The charity gained donations, many new sponsors and much needed publicity. Our thanks go to all. The humble lifestyle that the Warriors talk about during the tour is indeed reflected in their community. A common expression we often hear is that if you wait, a string turns into a rope. The Maasai are very patient people who are happy to wait for better times regardless of how difficult life is in the mean time. We often see such extreme poverty and wonder how people survive.

The school

The new school opens in January 2012, so this trip is mainly about setting up the school. For an extremely poor rural area like this, the school truly is magnificent. It is well constructed, will last many many years and will educate thousands of children, and some adults over its lifetime. Near the tourist trail of the Maasai Mara, there are similar schools funded by Westerners but away from the tourist trail, there is nothing. Olepolos, a 3 hours drive from the Mara, is somewhere where white people rarely visit.

Child sponsorship

Through people's great generosity, we have 38 sponsors for next year. The school is starting with 2 classes of 20, so we are looking for the last 2 sponsors to allow every child to be sponsored.

We awake to a crowd of about 40 mothers and children. Similar crowds appear every day before breakfast for the next week. Helen and Peninah have been busy locating the poorest 40 children of the right age in the area and these

have been asked to come. To us, they are just numbers who over the next few months will grow names and personalities, however, Peninah knows everyone within a 10km radius.



The mothers and children outside the new school

Many children have only one parent (women with children rarely re-marry) and the rest are from parents with no jobs. Nearly all the parents are illiterate. Many of the homes are made of dung and sticks with no means of light. All the children will struggle to complete any homework and any done is likely to arrive back at school covered in dung with the odd page chewed by young goats who share the house at night. This is not the best catchment area to produce good exam results, but we can guarantee that this school will give the best value added of any school for miles around. From previous experience, some children will turn out to be real gems despite their backgrounds. One of our highest achieving students from past sponsorship is a girl from one of the most deprived backgrounds we had seen. At 7, she had never attended school, and when she first attended, she always arrived smelly and dirty. After 18 months she comes to school clean, confident and doing so so well at the top of her class.

A green school (with a blue roof)

As money allows, we want to make the school into a self-sufficient 'green' school with zero waste. We have started along this route with off grid solar electricity, rain water harvesting into a 50,000L storage tank, water re-use and

fuel efficient cooking stoves for the school kitchen. Over the years, we will add further storage tanks, biogas, composting toilets, solar hot water and a vegetable garden. The Maasai lifestyle has traditionally been one of the most environmentally friendly lifestyles in the world. The Kenyan government (see previous newsletters for the reasons) is forcing change on them and currently change is bringing waste. The school will help to redress the balance slightly by ensuring that all the children educated by the school, along with the wider community, are aware that progress does not have to equal waste and unsustainability.

It's the end of the school year so schools close early on the last day. A couple of hours after school, these two 11 year old girls are out collecting heavy and thorny firewood.



Education in the area

We asked one of our 13 year old sponsored students to talk about his previous education. Until 2 years ago he was in the local government school. His class size was 58, and the teacher only turned up a few days a week. His mother put him into a private school, even though his parents had no money or jobs. To pay the cost, she would make Maasai beads to sell. It took her a day to make a bracelet that she would sell for about 70p. Education is so important to the Maasai that they make great sacrifices to have their children well educated. This new school will make their desires for education a little more attainable.

Airport Security

You may have noticed from previous newsletters that one of our concerns about the Kenyan education system is that it produces children who are able to quote long lists of facts and figures, but are unable to apply that knowledge. Somehow schools remove any creativity and thought from the child. This produces adults who do their jobs with zero thought. On our departure from Nairobi airport, we came across yet another example. There was the usual high quality security screening where sharp items are removed from hand luggage. After the screening there were chairs for people to use when replacing their shoes. Temptingly, next to one of these chairs was an open box full of all the items that had just been confiscated - knives, machetes, long screwdrivers - just waiting to be put back into hand luggage.

As always, we need your money to help complete the projects. We still don't have enough to finish off the school, and this is before we start on the intended 'green' projects. Any donations during December, regardless of how small, will be thanked with the gift of some Maasai beads. Short of a Christmas present for someone? How about buying a desk or chair for the school - see www.osiligi.org/donate.html for more details. We also need 2 new sponsors. Do you know of anyone?

Thanks for reading this.

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Useful links:

The charity website www.osiligi.org

Facebook page www.facebook.com/osiligi

(Apologies for this newsletter not being up to the usual literacy standards. On this trip, Helen has been extremely busy choosing sponsored students and interviewing teachers, so it has fallen on an engineer to do an author's job.)

