



Newsletter: March 2010 Douglas McFalls

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Short Updates:

Emergency Food Program: Because of the abundant rains, the school committee has decided to put on hold our emergency food program at the end of the term and initiate it again in September when food supplies are generally lower and threat of malnutrition the highest.

Rains: All is lush and green. The rains have been plentiful, too plentiful and though the corn harvest was good, the bean rotted in the ground. The remaining cattle, though few, are fatter and healthier. It is hoped that the five year drought is over.

MaKuYa Traditional Arts and Cultural Festival: Preparations for year three are beginning this month. I'll be spending most of my time through August in Tanzania. It keeps expanding and getting better each year.

Feature Story - Teacher Payment Crisis – Number One Priority

“I Have No Goats Left To Sell”

ADEA TO COVER SCHOOL FEES

At the end of 2009, we had to take a serious look at our low monthly tuition rate of 100 Ksh (\$1.30) per child. This was well below the majority of the private schools in the region and we felt then that the majority of parents could afford this new amount (albeit a challenge). But the drought devastation to the Maasai herds made a payment increase impossible for the majority of parents. In the past they would reluctantly sell a goat for school fees, but now there are no goats to sell. These past months, too much energy was spent by Tipape meeting with parents who protested the school fees. Many children were being sent back home due to failure to pay school fees. In response, I (as ADEA USA Director) have decided to take on the challenge to cover the teacher fees to ensure that the children are not deprived of education while the communities wrestle with the deeper reality of the poverty they are experiencing. An equally important motivation is that I want the teachers to focus on teaching and improving the learning environment – not heckling struggling parents or suffering from irregular wages.

The cost for our teachers and director is \$654 monthly or \$5,880 for the balance of 2010. If you would be interested to support this effort – to put us in a good position for this - it would be greatly appreciated.



The Barter System - Payment with Bead Work: Though I wish to relieve the financial strain of school fees so that children are not deprived educations and parents can focus on home needs, I feel that some contribution is important. We will offer an exchange for services – the production of beaded pieces in exchange for tuition. The Maasai are masters of bead working, and can produce quality pieces.

It is conceivable that through the sale of these beaded pieces ADEA might come out ahead with vendor relationships for reasonably priced beaded items and have the funds pay the teachers and to invest in curriculum and other school needs.

You've seen the discs, we are now working on some "spirit bracelets". If you've got school or club colors, we'd be happy to make some bracelets. (Unfortunately: Grey and Purple beads are currently unavailable in Kenya). We can even send some samples. This bracelet technology was originally designed for the Maasai warrior so they are strong. They are made of Czech glass beads and rubber tubing. They can endure a day at the beach or a night of crazy dancing.



If you'd be willing to try, we can send them to you free, and ask you to sell them for whatever price you feel you can, and return a fair percentage to us to help us continue to pay our teachers and keep this program going. I am happy to send samples in advance.



Encouraging stories from of our teachers:

Last night I had dinner with one of our teachers, Maiyani Loomu. I asked how he is feeling about the new school year after our intensive teacher planning meetings before the first term. He was very happy and encouraged at the progress and team spirit of the teachers. Then he began to share with me about the impression of

our school from the community. He told me of a neighboring government school in Nasepa where there is a new teacher. Recently she approached Maiyani and asked if it were possible that her four new students had come from his school. "I ask because they are different from the other students, more advanced and more enthusiastic about learning." She

gave him their names and it was true. *(The story gets better, but I'll let Maiyani share in his own words below).*

Another story (confirmed by the father and classmates): A girl transferred to an in-town academy after completing preschool with us. She was given a placement test with a doubting teacher that this child would know much of anything having come from our rural school. She scored 100% on all three tests. Oddly, this frustrated the teacher, and she tweaked the girl's ear – then placed her in second grade.

Yesterday, I met with Thomas Kasaine, another of our teachers. Last week, while visiting one of the local government schools in town he attained a copy of their placement exams. Giving it to four of our average students, just to see how they were doing, he found they placed well above their Boma School grade level. Sitting with teachers from our neighboring government school (remember the one that was taken from us a few years back), they asked fourth graders of theirs to read the exam – they struggled to do so, where our first graders could do it well!

Recently, a visiting health educator was visiting a group of women near our Esukuta School. He overheard the afternoon class instructor (we double up classes due to lack of space). Because of the manner of teaching he asked the women, “Is that a secondary school?” It was our preschool!



The secret to this success: Loving Teachers and US Based Home Schooling Books

These stories (and more) affirm our choice to use A.C.E. Home-Schooling books. They have allowed us to hire local Maasai teachers with only secondary school training to teach at a level far above their ability (like a home-schooling parent) and even above trained teachers. Speaking with our Esukuta Preschool teacher Antipapal Saimon, he shared how other teachers are wondering how we can teach so well when our teachers have only received form four (10th grade) education levels. He said it is because of the home-schooling books we use. “Teaching is easy. Everything we need to know is in the books and is prepared for us.”

Sure, there are weaknesses to the idea of US based learning – we are adding Swahili and African Social Studies. But the strength immeasurably outweighs the weaknesses. To acquire all the books we need will be a costly challenge but well worth it. *If you know anyone using the ACE (Accelerated Christian Education) home schooling system, please ask them if they would donate their used workbooks)*

I am encouraging all the teachers study through the workbooks themselves, to enhance their own education. [This will likely be linked to future pay raises as well – just as a motivation.]

The Gift of Free Education for All

As I have seen and heard the suffering of parents to secure sufficient money to educate their children, I have reflected on how blessed we who live in countries who have made it their wish (manifest in government policies and taxes) that all children should have free access to good education, no matter the economic status of their parents. What a joy it must be for American (and other nationalities) parents who don't have to ask the question – "How can we afford to educate our children, and which child will get to study?" I see now what a gift that is, and am saddened education is not universally available because of cost – especially in nations where donor aid does make it possible. This is a peace of mind that I hope ADEA will offer the Maasai families here with our efforts to eliminate cash based school fees.

With their life crises multiplying, the families here want to educate their children. And more and more want to educate their children in our schools as they see the love of the teachers, the high standards we set, and our respect and inclusion of the Maasai culture. We hope are new efforts will make their hopes possible.



Classrooms: The reality is that more classrooms are needed. Already we are doubling up morning and afternoon classes in our two-room schools (Lemong'o is still meeting in churches). For the sake of sanity, our current priority will be teacher wages and books. For now we'll tell the parents, if they can build a classroom, ADEA will fund the teachers and books. Hopefully this teacher program will shape up quickly and we can move onto the building challenge, but I am learning, if you take on too much, very little gets accomplished (and you can go crazy at the same time).



A Program to Consider: TEACHER TO TEACHER SUPPORT:

One possible and interesting way to address this teacher wage problem is the instigation of a Teacher-to-Teacher program. For this program, teachers/educators abroad would join together to support the Boma School Teachers. With the power of modern technology we could put our teachers in contact with teachers and classrooms around the world, enhancing learning and encouraging exchanges.





Comment from Maiyani Loomu – our Esukuta Preschool teacher

Toward the middle of January, some of our children transferred to other schools due to the raise up of school fees. Fees were increased to be like other non-government schools to assist teachers to get something little to help themselves. We have been following our transferred children very keenly. We discovered that children who were in our preschool classes, when they go to other schools, they join grade two.

We realize that the pupils who transferred to other schools are getting good positions, and these students were not even in the top ten of our school.

Many of the parents are not appreciating our school for the building we have, but for the best work the teachers are doing. The physical environment of our school situation is not the best, but what matters a lot is education of the children.

Children from other schools have been passing near our classrooms and admire our children and school. The school directors, administration and the whole team joined hand-in-hand to make sure that they get all the necessary material that allows our students to have a better education.

Teachers have been reporting to school in time and we have tried to fix ourselves to the tight school timetable.* We make sure that we stay in school until the usual time. We had no absenteeism during the school time. Our children also were very punctual and arrive in school in time, except those who came from far. We had a number of children who have dropped out of school due to some reasons: school fees, family affairs and illness. Our system of teaching, A.C.E., is the best teaching, I think, in the region as children who transfer from our school do perform very well in other schools.

*We purchased clocks and bells for each school which has greatly improved the class structure and punctuality of the students and teachers.

**THANKS TO ALL OF YOU WHO HAVE SUPPORTED ME AND THOSE I WORK WITH
AND THANKS TO THOSE OF YOU WHO READ THESE NEWSLETTERS.**

Douglas

For contribution information see top of the page or ADEAAfrica.org (there's pay pal).

PS:



A MENTAL HEALTH BREAK:

Sometimes work and life can become overwhelming. Last month, the combination of the Maasai drought challenges, teacher and building needs, an inside-job robbery at our Mtwara office, uncertainty with MaKuYa Festival funding, my bicycle being stolen when my housekeeper lent it during my absence, and the intense heat and humidity pushed me to make the decision to take a needed holiday away from East Africa to collect my head before regrettable damage might occur from a short temper or thoughtless decisions. I am grateful to our close family friend, Grace Murphy, and her family for welcoming me into their home in Cairo(they did their best to help me fulfill my quest to add a few inches to my waistline). It was a glorious rest, and refilled my intellectual and artistic cup with glorious architecture, pharaonic wonders, museums, wonderful food, beautiful crafts and classical performing arts. I have recently returned fully restored and ready to take on the challenges of ADEA again.

Spiritual Note: Pay attention to yourself – and make time or space to get away to clear your head and heart, sometimes just for relational damage control. In the alone time you can get yourself back on the life path you truly want to be on. I know that was the case with me.

[Psalm 143 was my mantra for the month]