

Children of Bukati Newsletter. January 2019

The Children of Bukati project that began in 2006 is now ending. We are not taking new donations. The remaining funds in our account will support students at university, technical schools and high schools.

In 2006, I went to Kenya to conduct research with subsistence pig farmers. Many of those were living on multi-generational farms with an acre of land on which to grow food to feed their families. Most farms that had a few adults and 8 to 14 children. Half of the children were orphaned, most of these were not going to school. Of course I thought about how badly these children needed to be educated. Where would this community be in the next generation if the adults could not read or do math or be the leaders to pull the community out of poverty.

The Children of Bukati Project was born out of this concern. The aims of the project were to encourage children to go to school by providing a lunch, creating projects to ensure sustainability, running the project through volunteers in Canada and Kenya to keep the overhead at less than 2 cents per dollar donated, engaging Canadians with these Kenyans through presentations, and supporting equal numbers of girls and boys. We monitored the project regularly – I personally made 14 trips to Kenya and there were 101 University of Guelph student-trips as well.

In July, 2006 there was a feeling of hopelessness in the Bukati Primary School community. During an assembly, the principal read the names of orphaned children. Kevin was a typical example. Kevin's parents had died in 1997, and he was living with his 79-year-old grandmother who was caring for 9 other children. In 2006, we bought pencils and uniforms and built a corn-grist mill at the school. In 2007, the villagers volunteered expertise and materials to build a kitchen. Our funds were sufficient to feed corn porridge to kindergarten children 5 days a week and other orphaned children 1 day a week. Our practice was to feed all orphaned and destitute children as many days a week as possible with the funds that we had available. Beginning in 2008 we fed orphans 3 days a week. In 2009, all children in kindergarten to grade 3 were fed regardless of their status (orphans or not). We developed kitchen gardens, and livestock projects (sheep, pigs, laying hens and dairy cattle). We grew tree seedlings that reforested the community. My husband and sons each carried 50 pounds of books in their luggage to begin a school library. It was the first time the Kenyan children saw a story book. Over time the library consisted of 350 pounds of books donated for the cause.

We purchased 11 acres of land next to the school to help the community become self-sufficient. A Canadian permaculture expert developed agriculture and forestry projects. We dug trenches to capture the water during the heavy rains to reduce soil erosion and extend the growing season, planted termite resistant bananas, grew dry land rice and planted peas with the corn so the peas added nitrogen and the corn provided a support for the peas, composted animal manure, and dug a fish pond to capture the water run-off from the school's well. Within a year, all 1200 children (orphans & non-orphans) at the school were fed 5 days per week.

In 2010, the children in grades 7 and 8 wrote and performed a song about the rights of the child – the right to food, a home and an education. This community was no longer living under the burden of hopelessness. They saw a future for the children and themselves. The numbers of orphaned children attending the school grew each year from 150 in 2006 to 850 in 2011.

In 2010 COB expanded to 2 other schools. At the Buduma School we provided the funds for the supplies and the community training to develop an extensive agro-forestry project. In 2011, we began an agro-forestry project at the Bwaliro Primary School. For project oversight and planning, we established a Kenyan community advisory committee with members representing parents, guardians, teachers, municipal government, and village elders. A team from the University of Guelph facilitated a strategic

planning session with this committee. We did not buy uniforms and pencils at this school, instead we used all of the money for food and projects. We re-cemented the floors of the classrooms and built desks to get the children off the floor to prevent jiggers. We dug a well to provide the community with safe water. We planted trees for nuts, fruit, animal fodder, and construction. We grew and sold napier grass for fodder, millet, maize, dry land rice and kitchen garden produce for the lunch program and tomatoes in a greenhouse to sell at the market. Then pigs, sheep and dairy cattle were added. The project greatly enhanced the academic success at the Bwaliro school. It placed first in academic performance in the region and 1st in science in the entire county. The numbers of orphaned students increased from 117 to 480. As in the Bukati school district, it was no longer acceptable for school aged children to stay at home. Although classroom sizes grew (100 students in grade 2), the children were learning because they were being fed at school, and so did not have to spend most of their days searching for food.

Community education events were held twice a year at each school. The older students taught local farmers improved farming techniques. Representatives of the school board, ministry of education, and other principals visited the schools to learn how to duplicate the project.

Independent community evaluations of the project were conducted in the school communities by University of Guelph students. They found that the children's nutritional needs were being met, the children had more energy and the numbers of children going to the local health clinic was reduced from 14 per day to 4 per day. The adults had more money because the children were being fed at school and improved farming techniques increased crop production. There was less conflict in the homes because everyone had more to eat, less community conflict, and a collaborative attitude through participating in the school. School attendance and retention increased, more girls were being educated and more students received a high school education.

All of the general funds donated to COB supported the lunch program and sustainability projects. We kept overhead at less than 2%. Funds were not used to pay for Canadians traveling to or living in Kenya. In 2006 we had 96 donors but these numbers grew by as much as 200 per year. Over the 13 years of the project a total of 2596 separate donations were made! Donors learned of the project through presentations given to churches, service clubs (Rotary and Probus), and groups of professionals and retirees. In 2008/09, Cate provided weekly pulpit supply to United Churches in Ontario, British Columbia and Nebraska. Donations to COB exceeded \$930,000 (approximately \$100,000 of this was made by our donors through Canada Helps). We purchased all sorts of interesting things such as corn, beans, cooking pots, fencing, the liner for fish ponds, pigs, chickens, tree seeds, dairy cows and importantly we paid the wages of the cooks. Over the years, we fed approximately 2.75 million lunches at the Bukati and Bwarliro schools. In addition to this, several of our donors sponsored high school and university students. In total 25 high school, 12 technical school and 6 university students were supported.

Thank you to Peter Guthrie, Karen Richardson, and Marg Baker, who spent hours on the project. Thank you to Randy Dewey for his hours of work, support and encouragement, to Doug Fitzsimmons our amazing web master, Norah Menzies who promoted the project far and wide, and Rev Jamie VanderBurg who organized 4 groups of students to volunteer, build classrooms and greenhouses and teach at the schools. Thank you to the principals and teachers at the participating schools who volunteered their time and leadership to enable the agro-forestry projects to flourish.

Thank you to each one of you for your generous donations, support and encouragement. Together we made a difference in the lives of so many school children and gave hope to them and the people in their communities. Bless you for your generosity!

Cate Dewey