

BIRDS FOR PEACE

Introduction

The last Kenyan Presidential Elections in 2007 were domestically and internationally recognized to have been fraudulent. Nationwide protests took to the streets that escalated into unprecedented violence and rioting, resulting in the loss of 700 lives and the internal displacement of a quarter-million people. With the mediation of international organizations, a new government in which political power is shared equally between the two rival parties was installed. However, the aftermath of the unrest and destruction still reverberated through the nation.

On January 17, 2009, we received a letter from an acquaintance, Mr. David Njoroge Ngoco, the Chairman of the Muranga District Development Committee, sharing with us news about the nationwide famine due to drought and post-election scarcity. Muranga is one of the districts of Kenya's Central Province. It is situated 90km north of Nairobi and has a population of 24,443, with only half in urban areas. Though Kenya has ebbed from the headlines, there is still much need amongst its people. This past summer, our partner KULE Foundation led several groups of university students and young professionals to continue work in the district.

Proposal

This proposal is for the construction of a Chicken Farming Facility capable of accommodating 3,000-5,000 birds at Koimbi Orphanage in Muranga District, Kenya. Koimbi is a central and inextricable pillar of the district. The goal of this project is two-fold, with the primary effect being the alleviation of famine and providing the self-sustainability of the orphanage and the district. Secondly, through the opportunities presented during the construction process and the daily operation of the farm, this project strives to cultivate in the children (i.e. the next generation) and the local community self-empowerment, financial independence, and the urge for progress that is harmonious with nature. The vision is for this community and district to then serve as an exemplary community that provides a glimpse of a peaceful, stable, progressive, and involved society that can be best achieved in a peaceful environment, hence inspiring an improvement on the national level.

Why Koimbi?

Background of Koimbi

The children's home was started in 1977 by community leaders for the many orphans in the area. Currently, it is home to 48 orphan children, aged 3-18 years. To quote the Chairman, "their backgrounds were horrible". Their guardians live below the poverty line and they are not even able to look after themselves and their immediate families. "They could therefore hardly provide them with basic food, clean water, shelter, education, etc", he adds. Most of these children have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS. Officially, Koimbi Children's Home is a government undertaking and is therefore sponsored by the Muranga District County Council, but they receive too little to sufficiently sustain themselves. The staff only consists of five women.

Koimbi is strategic because they see children through both preschool and elementary education. Preschool is a key requirement for admission to the first grade. At the end of primary education, the children sit for the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE), which determines those who proceed to secondary school or vocational training.

Achievements

All the children receive a basic primary school education and most complete secondary education. *Five have proceeded to university, a remarkable feat.* But what is most remarkable is that all of them have gone on to become leaders in their own way, lending their youth and motivation to the needy, aged and feeble in the local community. On any given day, one can witness the children's joyful expressions through drama, song and dance, and poetry recitations.



Mcolisi Dlamini with Samuel – one of the children in Koimbi. Photo was taken on the small yard of the orphanage during KULE, July 2007

Project Details

The project will be undertaken by a joint effort of Jonathan Chew, Mcolisi Dlamini, Muranga District Development Committee, and Kenya KULE Foundation International. The Kenya KULE Foundation is a non-profit organization which aims to develop continuous long-term sustainable local projects addressing key global issues such as health, education and the eradication of poverty. KULE has long been a partner with Muranga and successfully completed a similar poultry project for women. In 2007, Mcolisi Dlamini participated in KULE and got a first-hand experience of the lives of the children in Koimbi. KULE was founded by Mr. Geoffrey Tindyebwa, a professor and the Dean of Students at Lester B. Pearson United World College of the Pacific. www.kenyakulefoundation.org

We have been in contact with Mr. Tindyebwa in order to understand Koimbi's most urgent needs and what we can do to make the most impact. He shared with us that a chicken farming facility has long been in the works, but lacked the necessary funding and support to succeed. He and Mr. D. Ngoco (Chairman of Muranga District Development) are enthusiastic about this proposal, especially during these uncertain times after the election.

We plan to undertake this project concurrently with this year's KULE Summer Mission to Muranga where we will be joined by the KULE team. Our accommodation with host families will be arranged by KULE and we foresee little language barriers as the locals speak both Swahili and English. The plan is to involve the people of Muranga in the construction and ease the current tensions brought by

the drought and precarious political climate. In fact in 2007, when KULE embarked on the construction of the now complete well, the local community voluntarily lent their support, expediting up the process exponentially. We hope to emulate this success and attract the same or perhaps even higher level of participation than before. By using this project as a platform, especially the construction phase, we strongly believe that we will have the opportunity to demonstrate peaceful discussion, disagreement resolution, and cooperation in action using practical, daily examples.

Furthermore, we believe that we are better equipped for the project this year as we are majoring in Mechanical Engineering and have taken classes in Mechanical Designs, CAD, and machine fabrication. We also foresee partnering with Engineers Without Borders. We are committed to making this project a campus-wide movement that involves and creates awareness amongst students and faculty alike, pre and post-construction.

In order for the success of this project to be sustainable, knowledge on bird care, optimum production, nutrition, marketing, and financial management is needed. Mcolisi Dlamini and an English professor here at Union College both have personal experience rearing chicken and will bring their experience to the project. Veterinarians and the Cornell Cooperative Extension (<http://www.cce.cornell.edu/home>) will also be consulted. Furthermore, two water tanks will be installed at the home to support hygienic and clean operations of the farm. As for financial education, we will work with the Economics Department of Union College to summarize key economic principles to train them. In addition to the construction work, we plan to spend time and motivate the children and the local community. The Kenney Community Center of Union College has agreed to design and assist us with such community-building activities.

Timeline

We anticipate delays and unforeseeable circumstances due to lacking road conditions, facilities, and communications.

Phase 1 (Approximately 1 week): Collaboration and acquisition of building materials, equipment and labor.

Phase 2 (Approx. 2-3 weeks): Construction of facility

Phase 3 (Approx. 1 week): Finalize farm (chickens, feed, vaccination/immunization, and education)

Impact of the Project

Immediate Impact: The project will immediately supply the orphanage and local community with a steady source of food, business income, and hope. This would undoubtedly come as a sigh of relief to the orphanage, where support is usually intermittent and concrete planning for the future is difficult. For the local community, economic vitality, empowerment, and independence are fundamental and will lead to achieving real stability and sustained peace. The focal point of our project is education and empowerment. The farm will teach the community the interdependence between human and nature, besides giving them a sense of ownership, marketable skills and most importantly, confidence. This will translate into an innate urge to self-betterment and seek peace.

Long-term Intrinsic Impact:

A) For the Orphanage - The work done by the orphanage thus far has been nothing but laudable. It has had, and is continuing to have, a great impact on the children, their families and by extension the community in the Muranga region. The project will first start by becoming a source of inspiration to the children, inculcating in them responsible values, and a positive outlook filled with hopes and dreams. It will empower them with a sense of purpose, giving them independence and restoring confidence that will overflow and inspire confidence in others to succeed. In effect, the orphans will become agents of peace and advocates of human rights. We believe that human experiences and emotions transcend geographical boundaries, cultures, and creed. The stories that these orphans will tell will inspire future generations to come. We hope to be able to chronicle their stories in a book.

B) For the Community - The community will serve as a first-hand model that proves the development of self and others occurs best in peace. We believe that this project will demonstrate at the grassroots level that peace can only come from respect, trust, sustainable economies, and the certainty of a future. The eventual result is for the community to then mediate and help others from this experience, simultaneously creating a responsible nation with a united and shared destiny. Thus the grant will be akin to setting up a beacon. Its effects will radiate through the dark night and will always be the foundation of strength and a reference point for others.

We will be humbled and grateful should our project be selected as one of the Projects for Peace. It is our desire to improve quality of life while respecting the local culture and we are committed to making this project a campus-wide movement that involves students and faculty alike. We sincerely hope that we will be able to make this project a success, both for Union and the people in Kenya. This project is just the beginning. The seeds of peace have been sowed and can now only flourish. It is our intention to return to see future projects through and make sure they keep growing. Kenya and its regions are in dire need for responsible, peaceful, and enduring communities that are only made possible by the people and facilitated by the government. We believe in this project because it empowers the locals to be agents of peace and encourages entrepreneurship as a way of life.