

Suitcases For Africa Annual Report 2008

2008 was an eventful and ultimately positive year for Suitcases for Africa. The year began in tragedy as political unrest and violence broke out in Kenya following the failed election in late December 2007. Upwards of 1300 people were killed in tribal clashes and demonstrations before normalcy returned. This was to impact on our ability to visit the area due to the instability. Our projects are located in western Kenya where much violence occurred. This violence also impacted the problems already faced in the region. Prior to the violence they were suffering food shortages due to the international food crisis. The violence disrupted commerce and the problem worsened.

With this in mind in January we doubled the amount of funds we were contributing to our feeding program at Tirimas School for Orphans and Disadvantaged children. We are supplying them with daily meals of enriched soya porridge and local fruit and vegetables. We also doubled the funding for Sr. Agnes Khati's food supplementation and support program for The Khayega Widows & orphans in Kakamega. We advised her that we would fund a second group in Emalindi Parish for the same amount. This group was up and running in May and is called the Enanga Support Group.

We were able to assess, propose and complete several important projects in 2008 that were community based and beneficial to many in this poor, rural area.

At Tirimas School for Orphans and Disadvantaged Children in Mago we continued our support for the school by funding the construction of a new building to serve as an extra classroom. This was to ease serious overcrowding as the number of children being served there had increased to 120. They passed a very difficult rainy season cramped in two small rooms before the construction alleviated these crowded conditions. We also sent a small shipment of educational toys, prayer bears and books to the children as the beginnings of a library. We were excited this year to see the growing confidence of this grass roots, women's group. We have encouraged them to find their own funding sources and support in their community. As one example of this, under their own initiative, they have started a Goat Project in which they are raising goats to eventually trade for a cow so the children will have milk. With encouragement they have also begun a garden for their own local produce, another step towards independence.

St. Ursula School for Disabled Children in Chamakanga is another ongoing project we support. In 2008 we were pleased to tackle the Girl's Dormitory there. After 2007's water project was completed we made it our priority to have better living conditions for the children in 2008. On our visit in 2006 we found the

conditions very poor. The girl's dormitory has now been renovated. New ceilings were installed. The walls were plastered and painted in cheerful colors. Forty new iron bunk beds were purchased along with eighty new mattresses, sheets and blankets along with the installation of new mosquito nets. Many of these children have disabilities resulting from Malaria so the nets were of great importance. Several small rooms attached to the main room were renovated to become rooms for bathing the children. Canadian high school art students have created colorful wall hangings and paintings that will add to their enjoyment.

Chekomboro School for Hearing Impaired Children in Wodango was also funded for an important project in 2008. The school had no well and the rocky terrain in this location prevented any successful attempts in the past. Tekmak International Engineering Consultants in Kenya assessed the situation for us and proposed a roof top collection system. This involved a system of collection pipes on all the school rooftops. The water was to be stored in a very large underground storage tank and pumped up to a water tower for pressure. The project was successfully completed and water is now filling up the tank. Children no longer have to bathe in the river risking parasitic illnesses. In addition to the water project we continued the funding of the education costs of fifteen children. We gave a one-time donation of extra funds to assist in bulk food purchases, again due to the food crisis.

The fourth project funded at Chekomboro in 2008 was the setting up of a fund called the Relief Program. This program is to assist in the housing, feeding and care of sixteen children at the school during the two months of the school year that the school is closed. These children were identified as being abandoned or whose circumstances were very grave. They had no safe place to stay. The funds kept them housed together in rented accommodation. A cook and a house mother were hired to care for them during the period that the boarding school closed. It also funded the cost of their food and medicine. The program has since led to donors offering to sponsor the education of six of these children to date.

At Butiti Primary School we approved a project to build six new latrines with doors for the boys, the purchase of thirty new desks for classrooms and the purchase of cooking implements and utensils so that a kitchen could be set up for orphaned students to take some lunch at school. The work has been funded and the implementation will get underway in early 2009 when the school reopens. We were also able to send new soccer team uniforms for the girls. Three complete sets in different sizes were sent in 2008 (the boys teams were outfitted in 2007).

At Itegero Primary School in 2008 we had difficulty setting up a project as the proposals did not meet our requirements. The plans for construction of a new library were too vague and open ended for us to undertake. We have been in communication with them to help them choose a more feasible project for the new year. We have a member of our organization, Charlotte Marcella, going over to see the projects in January 2009. She will work there for two months to do follow ups on each project and research possible new projects we hope to undertake in 2009. She will work closely with Itegero Primary School to assist them with planning and requirements so we can continue to aid the students there with educational projects.

Over the course of 2008 we have been collecting hundreds of new books for the schools in our projects. They are being processed and stamped for the Libraries at the following three schools, Itegero Primary, Butiti Primary and Tirimas. They will be shipped in spring 2009.

November 2008 was a very busy and exciting time for our organization as Sr. Agnes Khati, who administers our programs in Kakamega, came to visit us for one month. She was graciously hosted by the Sisters at Villa Margeurite during her stay in Montreal. She attended fundraising events and visited many churches and schools who support our work. She thanked them for their support and shared stories with them about her work in Kenya. She also gave presentations on several occasions notably to young nursing students at McGill University. Many of our donors had the pleasure of meeting her. She returned to Kenya bringing with her a donated medical pack for physicians from Health Partners International containing \$5,000.00 worth of locally appropriate medications. She also accompanied a shipment of much needed medical text books, hospital privacy curtains and sheets desperately needed at her hospitals. In addition she also brought back a new computer to assist her in her work, and to make communication with us easier for her via email. As well she brought clothing, shoes and teddy bears for the orphans in our programs. These colorful hand knitted bears were made by a group called Teddies for Tragedies.

After a difficult start to the year with so much fear and suffering in the the region of our projects, Suitcases for Africa was fortunate to go on to have an exceptional amount of support from local churches, schools, companies and individual donors. Many fundraising events, both large and small, have enabled us to fund all these beneficial projects which improve the lives of many in Kenya. In the three short years that we have been in existence we have had tremendous support from our Canadian community and we remain full of hope and excitement at what 2009 will bring.

Darlene Anderson

President, Suitcases for Africa