



SUITCASES for AFRICA

47 Bras d'Or Avenue, Pointe-Claire, QC, H9R 1W6



ANNUAL REPORT 2011

2011 was starting with the forecast of looming famine and starvation. The reports began to come in early and they were alarming! Our two agents on the ground, Susan Nanjala and David Eshihuula sent us reports of drought, famine and rapidly rising prices on all commodities. The funds we sent for our feeding programs were no longer able to purchase as much food as in the past. The concerns over the early weeks of 2011 turned grave and yet still there were no references in the press or on the international news as to what was unfolding in Eastern Africa. We began to receive heartbreaking stories from David of whole communities where people could only eat one meal every four days, many surviving on unripened fruit or what could be scrounged from the ground. The elderly, the sick and the orphaned were especially affected ... the very people we assist.

The region of Western Kenya is already a place of severe hardship. According to the United Nations 2010 statistics, Sub Saharan Africa has the highest prevalence of hunger. The statistics show that one in three persons is malnourished and hungry as a general rule. In Kenya, the rural regions are the worst affected as there is very little infrastructure and little chance of employment. Most survive on one dollar a day as unskilled labourers or on the subsistence farming of small plots of land. How could they hope to manage with such a catastrophe?

Fr. Paul in Emalindi reported that he was beginning to bury parishioners who had starved to death. A tragedy unfolded in his parish when two brothers fought over a 2kg. bag of cornmeal until one was killed. The elderly father thus lost both sons as the surviving brother was jailed and he himself fell ill and became despondent. This rural community of Emalindi already had the highest score in the region for illness and poverty. How could they fall farther?

We immediately arranged for emergency food to be purchased and trucked into two of the worst affected communities. Our agent David, procured food for 52 households (400 people) in Emalindi and another 62 households in Shanyinya for a total of 1,000 people facing imminent starvation. The food was then rationed and distributed weekly as a stop gap measure as we planned for future self- sustaining projects for these

communities. The emergency food also brought hope to these communities that somewhere in Canada there were people who cared about their plight. Our donors and supporters were very responsive to the increasing need and they kicked into action. “The Empty Bowl Campaign” was then launched in the early spring of 2011 and many Canadians found ways to assist us to raise food funds. Warned of what was looming they held numerous fundraising events to help. Still, there was no global awareness of the dire humanitarian crisis developing in the Horn of Africa.

In January of 2011 we began three new Orphan Feeding Programs in new communities in the Diocese of Kakamega, Chevoso, Shamberere and Shitochi. We had visited these poor communities in the summer of 2010 with Health Co-ordinator, Sr. Agnes Khati and her team. We prioritized them for much needed support. Susan Nanjala is now working with SFA as our administrator of these feeding programs and her assistant is Peter Paul Aluka. They head a dedicated team of professionals who care deeply for the people they assist and they guide us in the proper care and management of these programs. Monthly support days are held at two of the communities, Chevoso and Shitochi. During the event a celebration is held with shared bread and milk or orange juice and also with the distribution of food supplements being given to each household. The administering of a deworming medication each month at this time also aids in prevention and treatment of health issues brought on by parasites acquired from unclean food and water sources.

The third community, Shamberere, has a feeding program in the form of a daily meal of beans, rice and fruit for the youngest children at the preschool level. The early years are a critical time when their bodies need nourishment. We have learned the importance of this from our work on the ground. People who are chronically hungry do not have the energy they need to live active lives. This makes it hard to study, work or fight off diseases and opportunistic infections. Hunger is particularly harmful for women and children. Malnourished children do not develop physically healthy bodies and mentally they develop more slowly. Hungry mothers often give birth to weak babies who are at great risk for disability and death. We have learned of the high incidence of complications during delivery for these malnourished mothers. The many resulting disabled children are then placed in overcrowded and underfunded institutions. It is a downward spiral of cascading crises.

It is for this reason SFA very often begins work in a new community with the setting up of a feeding program for orphans and vulnerable children as well as their community caregivers. Once the nutritional boost is in place we try to fund a self-sustaining project

to bring in food and funds for their future. In the past these projects have included poultry projects, farming plots and a women's sewing co-operative. We will discuss the new projects implemented in 2011 later in the report.

During the summer of 2011, three members of the SFA executive were able to visit and work at the projects for a month in July. Darlene Anderson, president, Wendy Buchanan, treasurer and Charlotte Marcella, secretary, had the opportunity to see the effects of the famine first hand. It was an often difficult and emotionally draining trip as we saw the impact of the drought and failed crops. Food was rationed by the Kenyan government and even when we had the funds to buy the food it was often difficult to get enough for the feeding programs. On one occasion food ran out long before the long line of the hungry ended. Many extra people often come out for the chance of receiving a little food on these days and that can usually be accommodated but not this time. It was an awful feeling of helplessness to be unable to give food to all who came.

By now the crisis in the Horn of Africa had reached unprecedented proportions and finally the news media began to cover the story. Our friends and family back home in Canada finally began to see the footage that was to shock the world. They emailed us that the world was beginning to wake up to the horror that was taking place in Somalia and bordering countries affected by the drought and increasing famine. Kenya was impacted in a huge way. The Refugee Camp in Kenya near the border with Somalia is called Daadab. Built to house 90,000 it was completely overwhelmed with the daily arrival of 115,000 refugees. The camp swelled to 400,000 and a second camp opened. It too became quickly inundated by those who had lost everything and had walked hundreds of miles to get help. Many perished on their way and thousands waited quietly at the gates hoping to gain a place, some food, water, shelter and safety from lawless gunmen and marauding terrorists who were attacking those fleeing.

The world watched in anguish as an estimated 7,000 died daily. The famine affected an estimated 80% of the population in The Horn of Africa. The possible outcome was estimated at 12,000,000 facing starvation. Kenya was overwhelmed. Kenya's food crops had failed too. There was not enough to feed their own people and yet they still kept their borders open to accept the flood of refugees pouring in for help. There were not enough food stores to cope. The International Aid and Development Agencies geared up as quickly as could be managed and the world began to respond.

In Canada the government announced an initiative to double all funds donated to organisations working on the ground in the Horn of Africa on drought and famine projects. SFA qualified and our donors and supporters were immediate in their response. In six short weeks we raised an astounding \$27,000.00. This money was then

doubled by the Canadian Government. We were very moved by our supporter response and immediately set up projects to disperse the funds (\$27,000) to those in greatest need in our community projects. The Canadian government assigned their matching \$27,000 to the camps.

With the help of our administrator, David Eshihuula, emergency food (some purchased from Uganda) was trucked into ten communities or schools in need, including two special needs schools for the disabled. When we had to leave in late July we left what food we could with some of them and were heartsick that we had no more. Dividing up the meager remains of our funds for food was a painful process. We left intent on raising more to cope with this unprecedented situation. Our faith in our donors proved well founded once more with the emergency funds that came in. We were overjoyed to be able to renew the food stores for those communities for a little longer as we planned long term solutions for food security for them. We began immediately to fund more local projects for long term food security.

One of these projects was to fund 45 poor households, in many cases headed by widows and orphans, to plant their small farm plots with better choices of drought tolerant crops such as soy beans. The soy beans are a highly nutritious source of protein and require only a short rainfall to get started. Fertiliser and good quality seed were supplied and the crops went in. Soy has the added advantage of a short growing season. David visited and monitored all of the scattered lands on a motorbike to oversee the planting, weeding and any special needs. In one case David found a family who needed extra assistance from the community because the elderly head of the family had become paralyzed and had not been able to plant. Seed from these crops will be reserved for the next planting, enabling the families to sustain the project.

We have the good fortune here to be close at hand to the McGill Conference on Global Food Security which is held every fall in Montreal. It is visited by experts and researchers studying the latest on Global Food Security issues. This year was the fourth conference to be held and the second year attended by members of SFA. The executive members were fortunate to attend the lecture by Keynote speaker David Morely, president and CEO of Unicef Canada. His talk was entitled "Hunger and Humanitarian Crisis in the Horn of Africa". It was a very powerful presentation that was given by someone who had visited the camps and he spoke both from his heart and his expertise on the issue of food security. As he spoke about the way forward and how the world can best assist and improve the plight of those who bear the brunt of food insecurity in developing nations, we were heartened to hear that SFA is in fact heading in the right direction with our goals and projects. The projects he described were the same we have

come to learn are best from working in the field and from the expert guidance of our team in Kenya. All are in agreement that the funding of drought resistant crops and the support of small scale farming is the best way to improve the situation of hunger and also best environmentally for the future. The large scale farms have stripped the soil, distanced the people from production and placed great stress on the planet. We came away encouraged that scientists and humanitarians can work to affect changes for the future through funding and education on self-sustaining local food production once more.

This was exciting news for us and inspired us to keep going in this direction. This summer we saw the working community poultry projects we had established over the past year in Emalindi and Shanyinya. They were thriving and cared for by locals trained in poultry management by a local animal officer. It was part of our funding to ensure that the projects would run efficiently. Eggs were abundant and there was great pride in those communities.

At the Emalindi Poultry Project, Fr. Paul explained how the eggs were helping to strengthen the sick in the community when added to their diet. He would mix eggs into their food when visiting those who were very ill. The extra eggs produced were sold and the funds recorded in a ledger and reserved. These funds were then used for those in the community who needed medicine or medical treatment but were too poor to access it. The funds would pay for pain medication or treatment.

In the last weeks of 2011 another community poultry project was constructed at the Emalindi Orphan Hostel. The hostel is run by Sr. Beatrice & Sr. Salome whom we met in the summer of 2011. They have been struggling to find food for and feed 113 local orphans who have no other means. We were very touched by their situation and can only imagine how great the anxiety must be to find food for the children on a daily basis so they can at least eat once a day.

In 2011 we also began a new pilot project for raising cows. Maisha Mapya is a self-help group of widows and widowers who try to assist each other and maintain a positive outlook while coping with HIV/AIDS. We began with the purchase of two milking cows. A group of 4 will each raise a cow, supplying milk for their children and selling the excess milk to help sustain their families. The funding includes the building of a small shelter for the animal, vaccines and inoculations, the seed for planting Napier grass for fodder and training by an animal officer in care and management. Each year the serviced cow will produce a calf which will then expand the project. We also hope to expand the project as people donate funds to purchase more cows. Our goal is to leave

communities with the means to be self-supporting when we move on to a new location in need.

Other very important goals for SFA in 2011 have been to bring clean accessible water to as many people as we can and to improve sanitation. These twin goals are extremely important in saving the lives of young children especially. The health benefits of clean water and proper sanitation are immeasurable. The high mortality rate of children is a direct result of the lack of these basic necessities.

In 2011, three community wells were installed. Each one will bring better health to an estimated 500 individuals. One well was installed in Shanyinya. Called "Isabella's Well", it was built in memory of a young, 10 year old girl we met in 2010 who passed away due to water-borne illness and AIDS. We had a joyful celebration in her village this summer knowing many children will now be saved by this well.

A second well was built near a clinic in Mukomari, a very remote area near the Great Rift Valley. It was built in memory of Mr. John Jackson by his loving family. It is a gift of life. We learned that in Kiswahili "Magi Ni Jema" means "Water is Life". What more profound gift can there be?

The third well of 2011 was dug on the grounds of a struggling new school, called St. Paul's Primary School in Mwirembe. There was no water in this remote area and children had to haul filthy water from a local stream where cattle also bathed. Our visit to see the well in July opened up a whole new set of challenges. We saw the conditions there and it was unacceptable to us as teachers. The joy, the gratitude and the hope of those children stole our hearts. Seeing the total lack of resources available to the children and the hardworking teachers made us determined to assist at this school.

This now brings us to the discussion of sanitation and the huge importance of providing better toileting structures. The first hurdle to overcome at this school, after clean water, was to provide decent sanitation. Broken down, dangerous latrines meant to serve 25 per cubicle were in use by a staggering 125 students per cubicle! Illness proliferated. On the very morning we arrived one shack had collapsed and was cobbled back together by the teachers before our arrival. The danger to students was highly visible. We agreed that construction should begin that very day. There are now eight new concrete latrines built to the highest standards with holes deep enough to serve their needs for 15 years. This is big step forward for their health and safety. We also built the same style of eight new latrines for Itegero Primary School in 2011 as their existing latrines had also been illegal and dangerous.

Our work would not be complete in 2011 without the projects for disabled children which we hold dear. Through our connection with David Eshihuula we have become keenly aware of the extra hurdles these children have to clear. They are often marginalised and forgotten with very few resources available for their education and care. This is beginning to change more and more as communities are educated to learn that these children do have something to give to the social fabric and they can be assisted to reach their best capabilities. Often hidden away, they are now being brought out because of the great work of dedicated educators. The educators we have met at the various facilities we support have impressed us with their skills, their knowledge and their compassion. David is himself currently working on his PhD. in Special Education. Josephat Karani, the principal of St. Ursula School, has just completed his Master degree specialising in Autism. We spent delightful days once more this summer helping these children sew blankets from knitted squares made by our supporters in Canada. As always it was a moving and rewarding experience to hear the children's shrieks of pride and joy as they accomplished each task despite the challenges of their disabilities. SFA also supplied hearing aids for another group of hearing impaired students which brings the total to 36 children who have a better chance in the hearing world.

While visiting at St. Joseph School for Disabled children in Malava this summer we heard a heartwarming story from Sr. Josephate who runs the facility. Sr. Josephate told us of the difficulties in convincing those in the communities of the importance of not hiding the children away in shame. They often make very many visits to a home where they suspect a child is hidden before they can be convinced to bring the child out to them for care and attention. They work hard to educate and remove old superstitions and fears. The children love to sing and they were clearly overjoyed to sing while we were there. One little girl was dancing her socks off! This year there was a singing competition held for all the local schools to compete in. You can only imagine their pride and delight to learn that the children of St. Joseph won the competition this year! The parents of the children and the entire community had their eyes opened in such a joyful way that... yes!... these children had talents and could flourish too.

Another delight for us this summer was to see a young child named Charity whom we also saw in 2010. At that time Charity was totally locked away in another world, unresponsive and needing to be spoon-fed. One year later, although still in a wheelchair, she was engaging with us in fun and games. She was laughing happily while throwing and catching a ball with us. Through 2011 we have been funding crucial yet previously unaffordable medications for these children so they can better cope with their illnesses and have an enhanced quality of life. It is our hope to continue with this throughout 2012. We are thankful to David, Josephat Karani, Sr. Josephate and all the

caregivers for the special work they do and that they do it with great love. We are proud to partner with them.

In the final section of this report we will focus on the education projects of SFA in 2011. We always put great emphasis in supporting and improving the educational resources for young children in Kenya.

In theory, education is free in the primary grades in Kenya. The reality is... it is not! Many children can barely exist as they are lacking even the basic necessities of life. The added costs of compulsory school uniforms, school supplies and exam fees make school unattainable for families living on a dollar a day. There are many child headed households where children must work to support siblings or to assist a widowed mother. They often have many exhausting chores like hauling water for miles each day and finding firewood. If they do get to attend a school they are often in poor shape, walking many miles on little food, lacking books, desks, and supplies ... hardly conducive to learning.

The school structures themselves are run down and the classes are over-crowded with 70 to 90 pupils per teacher. In the case of St. Paul's School for example, there are over 500 students, only 48 desks and no books. The 10' by 10' preschool mud classroom which held 100 children had no learning materials at all. Several classrooms were made hastily and temporarily from mud and dung by the parents so the children could have at least some shelter from the sun and rain however these rooms are small, dark, dusty and stifling in the heat. It makes for a great challenge to learn in these situations.

SFA is committed to improving poor conditions like this by setting up well functioning schools. We have achieved this in the past with several schools in the region, notably Itegero Primary (Ebi's former school) where the school has been upgraded and the students are now well equipped and thriving.

We have begun this year at St. Paul's School by delivering many suitcases full of excellent books and supplies on our July visit. As the year comes to a close, a strong new classroom is currently under construction so that the grade 8 students will have a place to learn instead of under a tree, as would have been the case. We hope more will follow as funds permit. The beginnings of a library will continue to grow so eager children can read and learn thanks to our great supporters. In the final analysis it is education that will help shape the future of Kenya. It is our goal to help these children develop skills and the ability to have a future in supporting themselves and their families.

In support of this goal we have a number of scholarships in operation. Currently two students are funded for high school for four years in the "Man-Man" Scholarship. Also two young girls are receiving vocational training to become tailors or seamstresses, one of whom, Lydia, is hearing impaired. The second of these girls is Phyllis. This young woman supports 11 siblings and cousins, her own young baby and her 96 year old grandmother. Her burden is due to AIDS which has killed all of the adult members (the middle generation) of her family. Upon her graduation from the training program this year we will fund her with a sewing machine and the start-up material for her own business so that she can manage that huge responsibility. There are many like Phyllis. It has been estimated that for every working Kenyan there are 10 dependants to support. With the help of our supporters we can assist one student at a time.

Individual SFA supporters also currently fund 27 young students in the community of Khayega. Funds provide for a school uniform, school supplies & exam fees and a meal a day so that they can attend primary school. It is the gift of a future for them. Although they still struggle with the heavy burden of chores and responsibilities beyond their years, they can be assured of a place in school and the potential to change their lives in the future. We thank the sponsors immensely for their generosity.

This report would not be complete without the mention of the visit we had from Fr. Paul Nsindaganwa Shikami in November of 2011. Fr. Paul is the parish priest of Emalindi. As indicated in this report, it is a very poor parish where we have been working extensively these last two years. Fr. Paul who had never flown, nor ever left Kenya, undertook at his own expense to make the long journey to Canada to visit. Why? He wanted to personally thank everyone who has been helping his people and giving hope to those who had none. Upon his arrival Fr. Paul went directly from the airport to an Open House event and began to shake hands. He did not stop for 40 days! He attended every event and accepted every request to speak. He thoroughly enjoyed the many supporters and friends he met, had a taste of snow & cold, tried many new foods and experiences. We would like to thank all those who hosted Fr. Paul. He returned home with many photos and stories to share with his friends and villagers sure in the knowledge that Canada cares.

As the year 2011 draws to a close we look back on it as being a very intense and emotional year, a year of great famine, and yet also a year of great hope. We are encouraged and inspired by the many good people we have met here at home, both young and old, who have not looked away from the difficult scenes of hardship or sorrow. Instead they have stepped forward to try and make a difference, to correct an

imbalance and to give hope in the face of a seemingly insurmountable crisis. As we watch those affected fight whatever comes their way with courage and dignity it is the least we can do to walk with them by bringing them hope, that they are not alone, that the world sees and will respond. There is still a great distance to go, but every step brings us closer to a world where social justice and equal access to the basic needs of life are available to all.

We are excited about new projects planned for 2012 involving improved medical access for those who have none in this region. SFA Secretary Charlotte Marcella is now in Kenya. She has obtained a 6 month leave of absence from her job in Canada in order to work on the ground with our Kenyan team to help these new projects to get up and running. We wish her well and will keep you well connected with updates on our website at www.suitcasesforafrica.com

You can also follow us on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/suitcasesforafrica>

It is with great hope that we launch into the New Year. Thank you for your continued and important partnership and best wishes to you from all our members for health and happiness in 2012.

Yours sincerely,
Darlene Anderson
President, Suitcases for Africa