

the Seed

a magazine of missionary concern

March 2007 - Vol 19 No 3 - Kshs 80.00

special in this issue:
second
instalment of
TEACH YOURSELF
THE CATHOLIC
FAITH



WORLD SOCIAL FORUM



CHANGE OF GUARD IN MARSABIT



SCHOOL-TO-SCHOOL COOPERATION

**NOTICE THE NEW
COVER PRICE:
Ksh 80.00**



Story by Rosemary Nchinyei, Photos by Yarumal Missionaries

SCHOOL TO SCHOOL

A HELPING HAND FROM GERMANY TO TUUM

A Forgotten People?

Education in Northern Kenya has never been given priority. Children in this part of the country have always adopted their pastoralist parents' lifestyle. There is however, a small percentage that has managed to go through some formal schooling, but the ratio is still quite low compared to those who stay home, undecided whether to enrol or not, and so remain illiterate.

Despite the free primary education provided in Kenya, many children in Northern Kenya still cannot access education due to their nomadic life.

Samburu is one such district in the Northern frontiers of Kenya which is riddled with similar problems. Illiteracy levels are still high despite efforts by the Catholic Church to reduce them. Since the communities living in Samburu district are mostly pastoralists, they often move from one place to another in search of greener pastures and water for their livestock. Children from such communities thus never get the chance to attend school regularly as they are interrupted when the parents have to move.

Education has never been a factor for consideration when Nomads

move; the well-being of their livestock is usually more important, and with good reason, since this is their only source of livelihood. Sadly, much attention has been focused on the animals at the expense of education.

Poverty, a stumbling block

Besides this nomadic lifestyle, the people there are also encumbered by cultural beliefs and taboos. For instance, girls are either married off early or they are sent off to look after sheep, for the community believes that this way, the sheep will multiply in big numbers. Poverty is the other stumbling block in the struggle for education. Most families here cannot afford three meals a day, barely managing to get one and at times they even go days without food. Hence the children are forced to drop out of school for the simple reason that they cannot learn on empty stomachs. No scholar in the world would be able to convince such children of the importance of education if their most basic need is unmet.

A Helping Hand

It is in light of this dismal situation that a German organization decided

to lend a hand to the Yarumal Catholic Missionaries in starting and funding a school in the remotest part of Samburu district, Tuum.

According to Mr. M. Hopf, the chairman of the German based NGO formed by teachers near Cologne, education is the most spectacular form of foreign aid, as it is the basis for people in developing countries to become self reliant. The grey haired old German sits up on his chair, takes a deep breath and explains what drew him to the Samburu. "From various media reports and electronic telecasts, I learned that the Samburu were a culturally laden community where the girl-child was denied education in favour of marriage. I tried to figure out how the place looked like and I imagined it must be a remote area. It brought to mind the Maasai, whose culture has been so exploited in the advertising world by the tourism sector in Kenya and I felt that these were also other beautiful people, who perhaps had been merely cut off from *civilization*."

Mr. Hopf says his passion for children has been the driving force behind his wish to give them a better chance in life and at carving out their destiny through basic education.



The Tuum District Education Board school sponsored by a German based NGO formed by teachers near Cologne, during the inauguration ceremony on April 14, 2006.

Tuum is on the left side of the Mount Nyiro, towards the Suguta Valley, on the way to Lake Turkana. Many Turkana and some Samburu live in the area.

Elegance in the Heart of Samburu

Tuum District Education Board (DEB) primary school, as the new school is called, is the latest addition to a number of schools sponsored by the German teachers NGO. The elegantly designed school in the heart of Samburu land is extremely significant to the residents of Tuum, who in the recent past have been wondering where to take their children as the available Catholic schools are not able to accommodate the huge enrolment of children.

Poverty levels in Tuum are shockingly high and when asked how they planned to sustain these children in school, Mr. Hopf didn't hesitate. He explained that there was already a feeding programme in place in which the pupils are given lunch and dinner in school, adding that it was quite impossible to teach children who are hungry. These major meals, he said were provided even for the day-scholars, a feat that even the private schools in Samburu, have not been able to achieve.

At a colourful inauguration ceremony, the German supported school in Samburu was officially opened on April 14, 2006. Parents and friends of the school graced the occasion with song and dance in appreciation of such a remarkable initiative. Mr. Hopf and his Spanish partner then handed over the nine classrooms to the Parish committee who will be running the school.

The nine classrooms are strongly built with massive stones coated with termite proof paints and rust proof iron sheets, to guarantee a long life to the school buildings.

There is Hope

He also said that various sponsors from Germany were in the process of expanding the school and various facilities like a school kitchen were al-

ready under construction. When construction of the school began in 2002, it was supported by a Spanish NGO, "Proyecto Escuela". In 2005, the state government of North Rhine Westphalia took over and currently it is run by a few private sponsors. These sponsors mainly comprise the parents, friends and the 1200 students in the mother school in Germany, Willy Brandt Comprehensive Kerpen, near Cologne.

During his visit to the German embassy in Nairobi, the German ambassador to Kenya promised Mr. Hopf and his team support for their initiative Kenya.

This project was initiated, mainly for the marginalised groups in Northern Kenya, and Mr Hopf says that it is his wish to see the Government of Kenya come in to support the project in whatever way possible. One way to begin would be to look at the infrastructure, which is in a pathetic state, making access to the school a nightmare.

The German NGO is focused and determined to start and support many schools in Samburu and other parts of Northern Kenya, their only aim being to help the less fortunate achieve and make their dreams come true.

Mr. Hopf said it was his wish to see a country like Kenya become self reliant, and he feels the only way to empower it, is to eradicate illiteracy, especially among those who are particularly marginalized, like Northern Kenya.

