



Newsletter 4: Education Exchange visit to Wundanyi, March 2014

Summary of outcomes

Introduction

Dave & Sue Shorten spent seven days in Wundanyi, March 10th to 17th 2014. In an intensive programme of visits and meetings- organised with typical efficiency by Scaver Isuwirio- they visited all the projects which Education Exchange supports. This report summarises what they saw, whom they met and the discussions which took place.

Taita Environmental Initiative (TEI):

Loans: most loanees rely on agriculture to repay their loans through the cultivation and selling of crops. The most recent drought (there have been droughts in seven successive years) has meant that fewer repayments have been made (eg between October 2013 and January 2014 only six loans out of twenty have seen payments. This means that less money is available to give new loans and fewer new members have joined TEI. TEI had to divert some of the November Education Exchange grant to offset unexpected expenses (printer repairs) The March grant from Education Exchange should improve the situation- and recent rains have improved harvest chances.

Community Activities: TEI is developing a track record of supporting community projects which address inclusion issues. We visited Mwatate Children's Home, where TEI has provided wood for furniture and other practical help: we met the Wundanyi Disabled Persons' Group and learned how frustrating rules and regulations prevent disabled persons from effectively starting a business- all Disabled Group members are now TEI members and are encouraged to save and apply for loans. TEI has received a VSO grant to work with the Wundanyi Disabled Persons' Group. Support has also been offered to people living with albinism and dwarfism.

Future community plans: TEI will be involved with a Practical Action social audit for disabled people: amongst other things this will monitor whether public buildings are disabled-friendly, whether disabled persons are represented on community committees and make the case for legislation which encourages employers to employ disabled persons. TEI is also promoting the use of solar panels and of eco-friendly cook stoves which reduce firewood consumption. There will be more clean-up events in Mwatate and Wundanyi. There is an allocation of 41,000/= in the 2014 budget to support these community activities. TEI also intends to apply for grants from Safaricom and Climate Change Kenya. Education Exchange may choose to offer financial support to some of these community activities- if it does it will fund them through TEI, rather than independently.

Kenya Coastal Development Project: TEI has attracted a 1.5million KSh grant to carry out environmental improvements in and around Wundanyi: they will clean the river, fence off areas, get rid of ruts and plant trees. This grant will enable some members to be employed in these activities: there will also be tree seedlings left for TEI to sell or plant

New Manager post: Members agreed that the post of manager has now become so important that it can no longer be a voluntary post- if the current leader left how would he be replaced so that TEI would achieve continued success? Scaver Isuwirio was invited to become the first official Manager and he agreed to take up the post

Success stories: two examples how TEI loans have been used: Terezi used her loan to fund the final part of her teacher training. She qualified successfully and now has a teaching post and Dave & Sue visited Terezi at school and met her Standard 3 class. Gladys used her loan to contribute to the building of a new house on her

farm- previous loans have funded the purchase of good quality agricultural land in the lowlands. Dave & Sue visited her farm and saw the new building.

Ongoing need for support: TEI is developing into a vital community organisation addressing environmental and inclusion issues and making a real contribution to the economic health of the Wundanyi area. It will need ongoing support from Education Exchange to continue progress towards this vision.

Mvono Clinic:

Dave & Sue spent two afternoons with Selina, the owner of Mvono Clinic, and her son Julius, who is currently working at the clinic as he seeks employment after graduating from university in Uganda. An action plan for the next two years was agreed.

Focus on poor: there are three clinics in Wundanyi and Mvono provides for more poor people than the other two. This focus has meant that income levels are lower which results in a limited service and fewer treatments available. Support from Education Exchange will enable the development of two major improvements:

1. A wider range of drugs and better prescribing:

Mvono will stock a wider range of drugs. Currently the limited range of drugs means that people pay for consultation, but then go elsewhere to buy the medication- or don't buy because they can't afford the prices at other clinics. With a wider range of treatments, more people will be treated and more income will be generated, even if drug prices are kept as low as possible. Education Exchange has already sent (March 21st) the first grant to enable Mvono to improve its stock range and levels.

2. Laboratory analysis on site:

Mvono carries out very few tests and most patients have to wait while samples are sent elsewhere and results returned after days or even weeks. Phase two of the Mvono improvement plan is to create a laboratory facility to enable a full range of testing on site. This means that patients will have rapid diagnosis and then rapid treatment with the wider range of drugs. This will lead to improved income and an increase in patient numbers. The Laboratory facility will necessitate extra space: this is available in the adjoining building which is currently unoccupied. It will also need a significant investment in equipment.

Staffing: there are currently three paid staff: medical practitioner, receptionist and caretaker. There are no immediate plans to increase staffing- but in the medium term (by 2015 if all goes as planned) there are plans to employ a laboratory technician and a pharmacist (estimated salary for each 72,000 shillings (£500) per year)

Approved clinic status: approved clinics can treat more affluent patients (eg western NGO staff and senior civil servants). With the planned improvements, Mvono will qualify for approved status, which will bring in further income

Summary: this is a highly practical and worthwhile project which fits perfectly with Education Exchange's aim to relieve poverty and improve health. Staff at Mvono are realistic and determined. The next two years will see great change and improvement- and Education Exchange needs to raise significant funds to support this project.

Mwangeka High School:

Sue and Dave met a total of 17 students who have had fees paid by funds raised at Mary Yuill's twice-yearly sales. Last year's funds helped a total of 38 girls with sums ranging from 5,000 to 10,000 shillings (fees for the year are 30,000 shillings). The most impressive feature of these conversations was the ambition and determination of every girl to do her best in the Form 4 exams (they need 63 marks to gain university entrance). Also very satisfying was the range of careers that the girls wanted after university: not just the often-expressed wish to be a doctor, teacher or nurse- but imaginative ambitions: journalist, fashion designer, bank manager, architect, accountant. In the ten years Education Exchange has been working with Mwangeka we have seen the school grow and thrive: new buildings, more students, better facilities. Mary Yuill's fundraising has been a real support to these improvements

Upper Planet Training Centre:

Budget position after two months: student fee income is down (see next comment) but Cybercafé and Photocopying income are above predictions. MPesa income (telephone banking) is below predictions but steady and rising slightly

Local competitor: a new training centre has opened up nearby, offering the same courses as Upper Planet for a third of the price. Although we have lost business to this newcomer the quality of this offer is in grave doubt and we expect students to return to our high quality provision. We agreed to monitor the situation closely over the next few months and then develop a programme of special offers to tempt people back in the summer if necessary.

Second half of the year: in 2013 we had far fewer students July-December than January-June and consequently made a significant loss in the second half of the year. We agreed a number of strategies to meet this challenge:

- Reduced price computer packages from July
- Extra training module in our offer (Corel draw)
- Promote accountancy training packages to financial staff in local business
- Visit all local secondary schools to recruit Form 4 leavers
- Promote teacher IT training with local school staff

These new initiatives will require George Mwakisha to spend significant time May-July in visiting local schools and businesses to promote Upper Planet training. There will also be a flood of posters, leaflets and fliers.

Target markets: The absence of IT on the Kenyan secondary curriculum still represents a major opportunity for us which we need to maximize- Form 4 leavers (aged 17-19) need IT for jobs and University students have to use IT for coursework, resulting in many paying people to type and print their work ! Many adults in work now need IT and training is necessary to keep them up to date. We must get into this market

MPesa: the telephone banking agency brings in a regular supply of customers and commission. It is important to maintain good balances both in liquid cash and digital cash as higher sums of money both saved and withdrawn offer better commission rates

Success stories: Crispin left Kenyatta High School, graduated from Upper Planet and is studying Computer Science at university in Nairobi; Eunice trained at Upper Planet and is now a secretary in a Wundanyi business; Chao trained at Upper Planet, bought her own IT equipment and now runs her own photocopying printing and design business; Martha trained at Upper Planet and is now a university student in Mombasa. She uses IT every day in her studies

Summary: Upper Planet is thriving and offering an important service to the local community. 2014 brings challenges, particularly in maintaining strong income levels, but because of George's skills we offer a top quality product which always will need adapting and refining.

Conclusions

It is extremely rewarding to see progress made since our last visit in April 2012. In the intervening two years Education Exchange support for TEI, Upper Planet and Mwangeka has enabled all three to grow: more students and participants, more activities, more success. Rural Kenya is an unpredictable environment, always at the mercy of both economic and climate pressures. People live hard and insecure lives and in our small way we are making a difference to a growing number of the local population, many of them vulnerable: this will increase significantly as our work with Mvono clinic begins to have an effect.

Our four leaders in Kenya: Scaver, Christine and George and now Selina are strong people with vision and courage. We salute them and will continue to support them for as long as our donors enable this to happen. Spread the word!

Dave & Sue Shorten

March 2014