



ACE Africa – Kenya visit (February 2011)

By Samantha Kite, ACE Africa UK Director

BUNGOMA



Day 1 - Josephine, Kabula



ACE Africa's CLI (Community Livelihoods Initiatives) leader Kennedy accompanied us on our visit to meet several local community members. Josephine was one of ACE Africa's first beneficiaries and was trained in establishing one of the first kitchen gardens as part of ACE's CLI income generating activities. Josephine is 42 years old and has five children. Her husband died 11 years ago and she has been HIV positive since 2004 when ACE met her. Since supporting Josephine, ACE has seen her grow in strength over the years. She has an incredibly positive outlook on life now, and is a great role-model within the community and an example to other HIV sufferers. She is

incredibly grateful to ACE for the support and counselling she has received over the years. She showed us a wonderful 'family book' that she has written about her family and her life and how ACE has helped her.

Josephine has developed an excellent kitchen garden growing many different nutritious vegetables such as cow peas, using compost from her own goats. With ACE's help, she has adopted different innovative gardening techniques such as a 'keyhole' garden, a 'sack garden' and a 'stick garden', which all enable one to grow a few vegetables even in very limited space and optimise



use of the precious scarce water resources effectively. She uses seed beds to bring on young seedlings and then transfers them to trenches for growing some of her produce, which again hold moisture well.

Josephine now mentors support groups herself, empowering others, encouraging them to start their own kitchen gardens and grow nutritious vegetables to improve their diet and help them improve their health, as well as enabling them to support OVC (Orphans and Vulnerable Children) with the surplus and sell a percentage to generate a small income.



Day 1 - Resource Centre, Bulondo

We then stopped at one of the ACE Africa Resource Centres in Bulondo where a 'demonstration garden' has been cultivated to help train community members. Some examples of vegetables grown at this garden are sweet potatoes, sun hemp, black nightshade, amaranth and cow peas. Produce harvested here at the demonstration garden is used to give to vulnerable households and emergency purposes. As we were leaving, we met Kennedy, one of the ACE Africa Bursary students, who is awaiting his final year results and hopes to achieve an A grade!

Day 1 - Mary, Bulondo

Mary is the Chairman of the Riziki Womens Group. ACE Africa gave them a Posho Mill five years ago, and they now grind their own nutritious flour, using blends of cassava, millet and maize. They have also recently received Government funding of Ksh 100,000 (£800 approx) from the Ministry of Agriculture for a large greenhouse which was brimful of tomatoes! They have set up guttering to catch water coming off the roof which then pours into a large barrel and collects and stores water to irrigate the tomatoes. While we were there, our Treasurer agreed to fund a further two 100 litre containers to help them retain more water.



Day 2 – Resource Centre, Kabuchai



ACE Africa's 'DJ' Dickson Juma accompanied me on our visits today. We met Martin, the Activator at the Kabuchai Resource Centre – set up in 2003 by ACE Africa. There are 600 households in the catchment area, and the ACE Resource Centre is the hub of many different activities for the local community. The centre offers training in agriculture and nutrition and has a seed bank for people to start kitchen gardens themselves. Throughout the area the ground was extremely dry and hard, with rains desperately hoped for in March. The centre are starting to help educate local people in food preservation methods, so vegetables can be kept and sustained through extended periods of drought.

Partnering with the Ministry of Health, the centre also offers a Comprehensive Care Centre, where people can visit a doctor and be prescribed drugs. Once community members have been tested positive for HIV they are referred to the CCC for ARV drugs.

The Resource Centre is also the meeting point for the Child Rights Committee. We sat in on a meeting organised by local community member Chris.





At this meeting there was also a class of local school children who were shown a computer for the first time, and given a demonstration on the basics of using one. An enterprising local graduate was giving these short educational sessions as part of the thesis for his studies. He distributed about 20 'child-friendly' laptops to give the kids a basic lesson. The laptops are then used to encourage the children to talk about Child Rights issues and discuss HIV and AIDS to help reduce stigma and discrimination. We spent some time outside watching the kids using the laptops, reading poems and singing songs about HIV and AIDS.

Day 2 - Eunice and Sarah, Kabuchai

Martin then accompanied us on a visit a local household, where Eunice is caring for her very sick 'co-wife' and sister Sarah. Their husband had died a few years ago. Sarah was very ill and clearly in a lot of discomfort. She has TB and when she was diagnosed with HIV, she began taking ARV drugs, but reacted badly to them. When she became very sick and bed-ridden, Eunice reported her case to the Activator. Eunice now collects medication and nutritious flour from the resource centre to care for Sarah. Anton from ACE Africa recommended ACE help Eunice to establish a small keyhole garden to enable her to grow a few healthy vegetables at home to encourage Sarah to eat nutritious food to help regain her health and strength.



Day 2 - Rosemary, Kabuchai

Rosemary is HIV positive and was bed-ridden for 3 months before becoming an ACE beneficiary through the Activator, Martin. She has 9 children. Her cd4 count was 216 when tested, but she is responding well to treatment and her cd4 count is now up to 380. She feels much healthier and stronger now, as well as having a much more positive outlook on life. Rosemary's husband initially refused to be tested, but eventually agreed to do so, and was also tested positive. His cd4 count was 54, but he too is now taking ARVs and benefitting from nutritious flour from the resource centre.

Day 3 - Southend Academy, Bungoma

We were given a wonderful welcome at The Southend Academy and were greeted by Head Teacher Moses and all of the 100 children in this local primary school close to the ACE Africa Office in Bungoma. Through ACE, the Southend Academy Art Room was set up by the Dwyer Family 2 years ago in memory of their daughter Rosie, a brilliant art student who tragically died at only 19 years of age. The art room is a wonderful happy place with colourful pictures by all of the school children. We met the new art teacher David and all of the other teachers at this lovely primary school. Unfortunately we didn't have long enough to spend there, as we had a long drive to Mukumo.



Day 3 - Barbra, Sacred Heart School for Girls, Mukhumu



This was a chance for me to meet Barbra Andole the child I am sponsoring the ACE Africa Bursary Programme. Barbra is a 14 year old girl who lost both of her parents nearly 8 years ago and has been cared for by her maternal aunt in Bukembe near Bungoma. Barbra managed to do well at primary school (which is free in Kenya) and had a high enough school in order to proceed to secondary education, but was unable to afford the tuition fees. Barbra was one of several children selected for the ACE Africa Bursary programme and I was chosen as her sponsor! Wilberforce from the ACE office kindly accompanied me to mukhumu to meet Barbara, who was now 3 weeks into her first year of secondary school.

Mukhumu Sacred Heart is a catholic school for over 1,000 girls, and is considered to be one of the best provincial girls' schools. I had a lovely chat with Barbra, who is very sweet and amazingly open considering her tragic family life. We chatted for an hour or so and she showed me her classroom and gave me a little tour of the school. She hopes one day to become an engineer, so over the next 4 years, I will try to encourage her with her studies and hope that she does well enough in her exams to gain a place at university.



SIAYA 



Day 4 - Joshua, Segla area

We left Bungoma this morning with Augustine Wasonga (ACE Africa Executive Director), Dennis Amonde (Project Manager for Siaya), Fran Howard (UK Treasurer), Francis Juma (ACE Africa Chairman) and drove about 2 hours to the ACE office in Siaya. There are about 600,000 people living in the Siaya region, and ACE Africa now help local community members in about a quarter of this region, having established five Resource Centres which act as a hub where local community members can meet, collect medication, receive training on agriculture, collect seeds from the seed bank, and receive

nutritious flour to care for those in need. It is also a centre for the Child Rights Committee, support groups and area advisory committee to meet on a monthly basis.

On the way to the ACE office, we made a stop in Ugambe village in Segla to visit Joshua, a recently orphaned child who is now an ACE beneficiary. Joshua is 14 years old and was identified by the Area Advisory Committee member as a vulnerable orphan in the Segla area. His father died 4 years ago and then his mother last year. His siblings are with other relatives and are attending school. Joshua was provided with shelter to enable him to continue to live on his parent's land (according to tradition, local Luo culture means that the deceased parents' home may not be lived in).





Thanks to funding from Paul Daniels, ACE Africa organised for new shelter to be built for him. A solar rechargeable lamp has been provided to Joshua to aid in provision of light during dark. Joshua's neighbours will help with securing the walls with mud as soon as the rains come. ACE has arranged for Joshua to receive training in a 2 year masonry course starting in March at the local polytechnic. ACE will also help him set up a small kitchen garden at home. During this visit, ACE UK treasurer pledged for a drip irrigation kit to help sustain the kitchen garden.

Day 4 - Kupa Womens Group, Seg

We visited the Kupa Women's Group – an enterprising group of women who have set up a thriving business at the local market centre- sega. Their leader Salome explained that they started as a youth group back in 1982 and later became a women's group. This was one of the two ACE's first beneficiary groups in the Siaya region. The group was trained in soya processing and marketing, and were given a soya milling machine as a start up grant from which to grind soya beans and make soya flour and



set up an income-generating business. Some of the flour is donated to local orphans and vulnerable children and some sold to local people and organizations including ACE Africa (K). The soya machine is used to mill pure soya, as well as combinations of millet and sorghum to produce different types of flours.

ACE gave the group 2 machines to make soya milk and grid soya as well as two bags of soya beans, some of which are planted and some used to grind. Once they were set up with their soya machines, the group has grown from strength to strength. They have moved to larger premises to enable them to store sacks of grain and ground flour safely.

ACE trained the group in writing grant proposals and helped the group write a grant proposal to the US Ambassadors Fund. Their proposal was successful and they received Ksh 615,000 (about £5,000) in vouchers which enabled them to buy two refrigerators to store soya milk and perishables and fruit blender machines.



We were given a demonstration of how the soya milk is produced, and saw them roasting the versatile soya beans as well to make delicious snacks which are also sold to generate income.

The group have now bought a posho mill and are supporting 100 OVC (Orphans and Vulnerable Children) on a monthly basis as well as earning a living themselves. They are a fantastic role-model and great inspiration to other local community members.

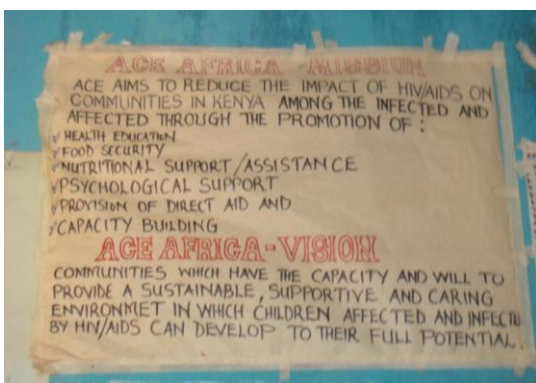
Day 4 - Resource Centre, Rarieda

We made a quick stop at the Resource Centre at Rarieda to see a demo 'drip irrigation system' – a simple but very effective way to irrigate a small kitchen garden and maximise the use of the limited supply of water. This 50 litre container and full system costs about Ksh 4,200 (about £30), although a 100 litre system is recommended for most small kitchen gardens. This is one of the latest resource centres in Siaya.



Day 4 - Osiepe Group

We visited the Osiepe Group to see their very recently acquired grain amaranth mill (given by a generous UK corporate donor). With this the group produce 200 packets of flour every month which is given to ACE to help vulnerable people suffering from malnutrition. They sell surplus packets to community members. On top of this, the machine has enabled the group to make over Ksh 6,000 every month profit (about £50) from grinding flour themselves and providing a service to other local community members.



Day 4 - Resource Centre, Boro

We visited the Resource Centre and Dispensary in the Boro area. When the centre was funded in 2008, Charles Onyango became the Activator, and works closely with ACE to provide various services to the local community. The Advisory Committee comprise about 22 local people and Child Rights Committee meet at the Resource Centre on a monthly basis and work closely with ACE. Any cases of child abuse are referred to the Activator and then to the committee.

There has been an incredibly positive response to having the Resource Centre. Nutritious flour is distributed from the centre. Beneficiaries are regularly weighed to check that they are putting on weight and becoming healthier through body mass index tracking. Extremely malnourished sick people are subjected to the nutritious flour for 6 months before they regain their strength. Nurses at the Dispensary provide monthly reports on beneficiaries' health especially on medical diagnosis and drug prescription.

Charles is trained in adult education and, as at other resource centres, there is an agricultural specialise- gardener who is able to train local community members in kitchen gardening. Charles regularly visits vulnerable households using his bicycle and works closely with ACE staff and volunteers to care for them.

Day 4 - Monica, Boro

I was struck at how remote some of these communities are, and the condition of the local tracks riddled with pot-holes must make it very difficult to make regular visits. It was bad enough in the dry season, so I can only imagine the difficulties in the rainy season when the tracks become thick muddy rivers and the 1 ACE vehicle struggling to reach local people.

We tried to visit Monica, a very sick and recently identified vulnerable community member, however, when we arrived she was nowhere to be seen. The neighbours (mostly co-wives living in neighbouring shelters) waited with us, but she didn't return. This was ACE's first visit, having been contacted by the Community Health Worker, to provide counselling and assist with providing nutritious flour. ACE occasionally encounters situations like this, where they travel many miles to visit beneficiaries who aren't there when they arrive. We had to leave in order to visit our next beneficiary some distance away.



Day 4 – Visit 7 – Florence, Boro

Florence was identified in 2006 as very sick and suffering from symptoms of HIV. When ACE met here, she was immediately given nutritious flour to supplement her diet, after which she began taking soya flour. Florence's 13 year old son Simba was looking after her, and as a consequence he dropped out of school. With ACE's help in supporting Florence, Simba is now back at school in Class 6. Florence has 3 other children.



Fran Howard assisted Florence by funding an emergency temporary shelter for her and her family. With the recent grant from Allan & Nestor, a new larger and a semi-permanent shelter has just recently been built, and Florence is delighted. She is also thrilled with the Ksh 2,000 solar lamp (donated by Paul Daniels) which has saved her using expensive paraffin. She has regained a lot of her strength now as a result of the nutritious flour supplement, and she now works at the local sugar cane plantation from 7am to 3pm every day to earn a small income of Ksh 180 per day (about £1.5).

We also met the local Community Health Worker Mary who visits Florence and partners with ACE to help her.

Day 5 - Wilfrida, Leonora, Maureen - Segere Primary School,

Today is my last day in Siaya before heading to Kisumu this afternoon and my early flight to Nairobi tomorrow morning. We have several visits organised today.

Our first visit was to the Segere CtC Primary school to see how the roll-out of the CtC clubs in local schools has helped improve the lives of the local community members. Segere Primary School Deputy Head Philip explained that there are 680 children at the school aged 6-15 years. The primary school curriculum includes Mathematics, English, Swahili, Science, Social Studies and CRE, as well as creative arts and sport.



The CtC (Child to Child) programme was established at Segere Primary 3 years ago and Edith, Chris and Penny are the trained CtC teachers. ACE has set up a CtC club at 38 other schools in the Siaya region, which covers 85% of the Central Alego region. The CtC club meets every Friday to engage the children in activities such as poems about AIDS, TB, malaria and other diseases and explains how to prevent them through hygiene and healthy

eating. It also addresses the stigma and discrimination around HIV and AIDS and encourages children to discuss issues openly and not be embarrassed or ashamed and explains treatment available. The club also manages a CtC garden in a section of the school. ACE has provided technical support, seeds and tools to the club. Moreover, CtC assists with the provision of food for the vulnerable 40 or so children at the school. It teaches children to all feel equal and provides the love that some are lacking at home. CtC helps distribute sanitary towels, uniforms and blankets as well as nutritious flour for those who need it. Since ACE set up in Siaya and started establishing CtC clubs, several schools have approached ACE to assist in setting up a CtC club in more schools.



Before we met the three orphaned girls in this particular case, their CtC teacher Edith gave us a bit more history about them. Wilfrida (class 7), Leonora (class 6) and Maureen (class 6) were orphaned in 2006. Edith had been particularly concerned that Maureen was very malnourished. She talked to Maureen and also her cousins, and then went to visit their aunt, and advised her that Maureen should receive hospital treatment. The case was then referred to ACE through the CtC Club and Resource Centre. Christopher, a field officer from ACE went to visit the children's aunt in January with the area Activator Charles. The aunt explained that Maureen had not only been through the loss of both her parents, but she was also finding it hard to adjust to living in the rural area, having spent her childhood in the urban part of Nairobi. The aunt was struggling to look after the children and they were living in extreme poverty with not even a mattress or blanket to lie on. The children were all enrolled on ACE's nutritional supplement programme, given sanitary towels and a blanket and assisted with counselling. The girls are now much happier and healthier.

Day 5 - Jennifer (the children's aunt), Segere

After leaving Segere Primary School, we visited the children's aunt Jennifer. Jennifer is 58 years old, widowed and has been struggling to look after the three girls. Her sons all died some years ago. Jennifer explained how Maureen had really suffered when she first arrived in Segere from Nairobi. She reacted very badly to the change in diet and became jaundiced and very sick. As we saw when we had met her earlier at the school, she has benefited from the nutritious flour supplement and is now much healthier. We saw the tiny mud hut where the three girls sleep. The hut doubles up as a kitchen and Jennifer had a small bowl of nutritious porridge on a fire in the corner. A sack cloth hanging up acted as the children's mattress and a blanket donated by ACE provided their meagre bedding. Jennifer does the best she can for the girls, selling small pieces of charcoal to earn a little income. Her knee is very sore, but she struggles to the water pump about a kilometre away, with the girls sometimes helping. Jennifer grows vegetables when she can in her small kitchen garden, but the dry spell has made this virtually impossible at the moment, so she is looking forward to the rains. She is very grateful to the help she has received from ACE Africa.



Day 5 - CtC Club, Osoro Primary School



Our next stop was the Osoro Primary School where we met Eunice the Deputy Headmistress. Osoro Primary School has 640 children and 13 teachers, some whom are funded by the government and some funded by parents through Parents Teachers Association (PTA). About half of the school leavers go on to Secondary school every year. Of these, a very few will then go on to university. A couple of alumni have come back to visit the school and talk to the pupils to mentor them and inspire them to do well in their studies.

We chatted with Rosalyn the CtC teacher there, who explained how the CtC club has been such a benefit to the children. Through CtC, the children have learnt to understand the importance of hygiene – they help make ‘leaky tins’ in order to wash their hands before eating. The children are taught about HIV and encouraged to have open discussions about it in order to reduce stigma. Through CtC, the most at risk children have been donated uniforms by ACE Africa, and the girls supplied with sanitary towels. CtC has helped reduce truancy and keep children in school. A group of the girls then read the most wonderful poem which they had written entitled “I want education not marriage”. It was a very powerful poem, with the aim “I was born to lead” – very inspiring, and I left hoping that they all live up to their poem.



Day 5 - Boro Secondary School

David, Deputy Head Teacher at Boro Secondary School introduced us to 2 ACE Africa Bursary students - 18 year old Daniel (sponsored by the de Winton family) and 17 year old Evans (sponsored by Winchester College). We chatted with both students, who were in their final year of studies, and both very grateful for the chance to be given secondary education, thanks to the ACE Africa Bursary programme.

Day 5 - Joyce Wang’s fish-farm

En-route to our next stop, we pick up Vitalis, a volunteer on the Community Child Rights Committee – I remembered seeing his name on the list at the Resource Centre the day before. Anything more from your interaction with him!



Joyce is the mother of one of the boys in the CtC club we met at the Osoro Primary School, and he joined us at the momentous harvesting of the fish! ACE Africa helped Joyce’s family establish a fish pond when, after a visit by ACE UK trustee Peter Lever, they realised that they had a natural well that could be used to provide year-round water for a pond as well as irrigation for a kitchen garden. ACE



helped excavate the pond in May last year, and provided fingerlings to start their fish-farming. The family were also trained in kitchen-gardening skills and again, used the well to irrigate their crops. The fingerlings are generally kept for six months before harvesting, and we had the honour of watching the first harvest. ACE have established 8 other fish farms in the Siaya area, and generally stock the ponds with tilapia and cat-fish to keep the tilapia population at the right level.

Boniface, a local community member trained by ACE in harvesting fish came to help give guidance to the family, and together they trawled a net over the pond several times to gather up the fish. The fish were smaller than they had hoped, and so the feeding programme will be reviewed to try to encourage more growth next time. Joyce and her family then invited us to join them all in a huge feast of local produce – ugali, cow peas, chicken, maize chapatis, and the freshly caught fish from their pond! It was a great honour to join the family for the feast and celebrate their new fish farming initiative.

