



KENYAN CHILDREN HELP

Report for 2015

2015 was a year which had its highlights but which also presented serious challenges.

On the plus side we were able to gain 30 new sponsorships; we are very happy and grateful for these. At the present time 162 of our 240 children are sponsored. The poverty of people in this region is completely unimaginable but their happiness and gratitude is a thing of wonder. Many people have only one meal per day and the meal is always the same. They walk for up to 20 km per day with cans on their heads just to fetch water. Many of them were never able to go to school at all but some of them had perhaps 1 or 2 years of schooling. It is all the more welcome that they really want to send their children to a school where they can obtain a good education. This is their only way of escaping from the poverty spiral.

The goal of the Kenyan Children Help Association which I and Hanna Zbinden founded in 2008 is to make it possible for even the poorest of the poor to receive a school education. The children's happiness, discipline and willingness to learn reward us for all the work which accompanies an association of this nature. But persistent inflation is making it increasingly difficult to finance the goal we are striving to achieve. The cost per unit of electricity has doubled; prices for school books were 60% higher; sugar, oil, maize flour for ugali and flour for baking bread all increased by about 30 %. Water costs CHF 2,000 per month but a solution is now at hand – pipes have already been laid to bring water to the region from the Mzima Springs ☺



Your donations help us to survive in spite of the steep inflation – we are more than grateful for them!

We had 240 children in our school in 2015. They are given nourishing food, stay overnight with us and are looked after round the clock with loving care by a team consisting of 14 teachers and 26 other staff, almost all of whom live with us in the compound and also eat here. Judged by European standards it is almost inconceivable that with about CHF 200,000 we have managed to pay all outgoings for salaries and social charges, bought replacement items, cleaning supplies, food, water which is delivered by tankers as well as pay for all the children's hospital visits, not to mention sports events etc.; even renovations are included in this sum. A fee for every child has to be paid for every set of test papers we receive every month. The headmaster of the school must regularly attend seminars which last several days for which a fee is charged, and on top

of which there is the cost of overnight accommodation in a hotel. Thus the average cost of a seminar is CHF 300.

But the New White House Academy is attracting an increasing amount of attention. It is not only on everyone's lips in Voi as we are also becoming known in other regions. Out of 67 schools it is again the best in the entire district in all classes. And on top of this our handball team made history in Kenya: it won all its qualifying rounds. Attention was really drawn to the New White House Academy in Voi during the national qualifying rounds in Kakamega.

Many people were asking the question "How is it that these relatively small children from an unknown school in Voi were able to beat the players of the famous clubs in Nairobi?" Our children were mentioned in newspaper reports and truly deserved it!



We are planning a sports sponsorship in 2016 with Swiss or German handball clubs. Luke, a trainer for the national team, visited us several times to teach our children new techniques. They really appealed to him – their competitiveness and discipline impressed him as well as the efforts of Roman, one of our teachers, who coaches the handball players every day. He was the class teacher of class 8 as well as their maths teacher. In the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (the primary school final examination) our school achieved the highest number of points in mathematics in the entire county...this is truly a success! This final examination is quite something; it lasts three days and the children are overseen by the police and other supervisors the whole time, even when they are waiting outside the classroom!



Our drama students also won a prize at national level and were featured in the newspaper. Philip Kidelo, who teaches drama, was awarded a diploma as the best producer and writer. These competitions took place in Nakuru. The children were therefore able to get to know the Rift Valley, the extinct volcano, Lake Nakuru with its pink flamingos and much more.

We were also able to celebrate a further highlight in January 2015. During the visit of Gaby Bentlage of Watoto wa Kenya, a charitable organisation in Hamburg, and Arno Köster of the Udo Lindenberg Foundation, we received the funds we still needed to purchase the land on which the school stands. Advance payments were made back in 2014 but the owner was then pressing for payment of the balance. This help therefore came at just the right time. We were over the moon at this, partly because the land now belongs to us and also because the monthly rent was extremely expensive. In addition the lease contained an increase of 4% every 4 years. But the social charges and income tax increased so much that this expenditure was very soon greater than the lease used to cost us.



Andre Heine of Booh Outfit arrived one day to visit the two children he sponsors and also made an extremely generous donation for the construction of the secondary school. He drove from Nairobi to Voi, visited his two girls and then had to go back. I was overwhelmed by so much warmth of spirit and such dedication!

There were, of course, also repeated strikes by teachers in Kenya in 2015. In the early months we were not affected by these but during the next wave of strikes two teachers left us as the government had promised higher wages; these teachers wanted to try their luck in the public schools. But they soon found the down-side! They first had to find their own accommodation and pay for electricity, water and food. They experienced crowded classrooms often containing more than 100 children, too few teaching materials, no paid classroom assistants etc. etc. And the higher pay which was promised never arrived! The result was a further wave of strikes, this time on a major scale and which lasted more than a month. The teachers only went back to work after a 60% increase in wages was conceded. Two further teachers also left us this time. This was actually a blessing in disguise as the two new teachers we very quickly recruited as replacements appreciate what they have with us and work with great commitment.

In July our headmaster Philip was awarded a bursary for a university in Vancouver where he is now receiving further training. We also very quickly found a replacement for him in the person of Moses.

We repeatedly had to submit to inspections – from the Ministry of Health and the Fire Department; after each visit alterations and modifications were specified which did not always make sense in our eyes but rules are rules and have to be more or less obeyed. The kitchen even had to be altered twice before the authorities were finally satisfied. Additional showers and lavatories were repeatedly demanded, as were alterations to the dormitories – all of which cost more than CHF 10,000! One could almost think this was harassment when one looks at how miserable other schools appear....



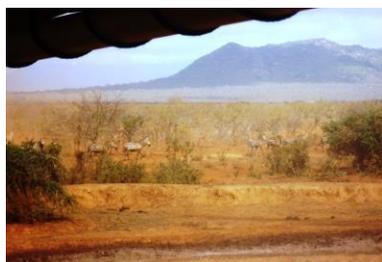
We were promised running water years ago, both by Tavevo Water and the Coast Water Project. The money for it has often been made available but, as is normal in Africa, it is simply used for something which the decision-makers consider to be more important – at the present time these include luxury trips, enormous villas, and cars and much more for government employees.

Unfortunately huge sums of so-called aid money are given to African governments although most of the donor countries are aware that this money never goes where it should but they expect and receive something in return. And this never seems to be enough for the government; taxes are continuously rising or are imposed on goods which were previously tax-free, licence fees for everything increase and people are worse off ... but they do not lose their spirit and vitality. These African survival artists are amazing and their unwavering belief in the future is almost incomprehensible but also very attractive. They are convinced that God never forgets them.

The children of Class 8 remained at the school for almost the whole of 2015. They preferred learning to going home and being forced to work. Therefore we arranged an educational visit with them each time at the end of the holidays. Happily these excursions cost us only very little; we only had to buy drinks and fruit to consume during the journey.



The first excursion took us to the Rukinga Sanctuary. The manager of the greenhouses gave us a tour through huge greenhouses and showed our children how they can cultivate vegetables and keep rabbits; he also showed us how the urine of these cute little animals, when mixed with water, is the best pesticide. We then continued through the Sanctuary in an old converted lorry. During this time we saw lots of elephants and also other wild animals; we also had a conducted tour of the Discovery Center by Rangers. It was extremely interesting and instructive. There are examples or pictures of animals, plants and trees as well as of snakes, scorpions and all imaginable insects. You could spend days there.



This is also possible as attractive bungalows are available where you can spend the night. At the end of the trip we gave the children a little test. They could tick the correct answers on the questionnaires we had prepared. It was a truly unforgettable experience!



The children also spent the holidays with us which were scheduled to take place before the final examinations. This time we were invited by Willy Mwadilo in the Taita Hills. This, too, was a highlight. He had prepared a conference room and presented some charts to show what people could achieve if they really want to.

He inspired our children with interesting stories and also showed them a lot about the First World War fought between England and Germany in the region. Some interesting finds and weapons are displayed in display cabinets in the Sarova Taita Hills Lodge for visitors who are interested. We were entertained like royalty and when travelling through the extraordinarily Taita Hills we again saw many wild animals. Tourists have so many safaris, spend time on the coast but very few children in Kenya ever have the possibility of seeing something like this in their life. This is a pity, as it is really their country.



Once again, of course, we had a graduation ceremony for children moving from the kindergarten to the “big school”. Prizes were awarded to the best three children in each class and to those who demonstrated the most improvement.

We also have “counselling” before each holiday. During this we separate the boys and the girls and discuss their time with their relatives at home where they are often unsupervised. The subject of sex is taboo in African families but we of course teach it. Unfortunately we sometimes had to hear of assaults during the holidays. We therefore do our best to ensure that the children know how to behave responsibly at home and not to jeopardise their future. They can openly ask any question. There is, of course, no magazine such as “Bravo” here.

Happily the children trust Vici who is responsible for the girls, and also the young man who speaks to the boys. They are surprisingly open and receive answers to everything. Of course it took a bit of time before the relationship became what it is. The human body and the functions of the various organs including the sexual organs are also taught – with the result that what happens to many young women in Kenya who become pregnant and do not know why a baby is suddenly growing inside them does not happen to our girls.

This year we had many kind visitors again and were happy to see all of them. Contact with the western world enriches the children's experience and conversations with Europeans means more for them than we perhaps imagine.

We would run out of space to list the name of all our visitors but I think that the visit of the von Mühlennen family simply must be mentioned. They visited us in previous years and therefore knew what to expect; their 12 year-old daughter Annina was absolutely thrilled by our children and quickly made friends. When last year's visit was in the offing she developed a plan: she rehearsed a musical with her school class and asked permission from the school principal to stage the musical and request donations. This raised a considerable sum. Thus when they were with us in the summer holidays we went shopping with them full of anticipation. The purchase of Obelix the donkey was completely thrilling. It was a few days before we found a donkey and then the donkey still needed a cart for the collection of firewood which we use both for cooking and also for heating water so the children can shower. Annina also purchased a huge cooking pot for us as well as school books and many more things. Annina and the girls of the more senior classes were inseparable and have been continuously writing to each other ever since.



The Massaihilfverein Mengkofen also deserves our thanks. As well as the school fees they also covered other costs which are incurred for the 10 children in our primary and secondary school whom they sponsor. They also donate something every year for the construction of classrooms. This is certainly not easy for such a small association.

Gerd Hagmaier has also been very generous. He wanted to see for himself how people live here and not to be just a tourist. He decided to fly to Kenya and collected money before he left so he could buy things we urgently needed while he was here. He came not just to gain an impression of our project but also to help with the construction of the new secondary school, the New White House Secondary School, by his own efforts. To top it all, he did not just join in the work but also involved him in the life here, talking to people and as a result he “caught the Africa bug”. As a result while he was still in Kenya the thought took shape about what he should do to finance a classroom for the New White House Secondary School through appeals for donations – and he succeeded in exceeding his target! Thanks to his agreeable nature he now has a large fan club not just in the school but also in the neighbourhood. It was important for him to gain a picture of people's living conditions here.



Construction of the new secondary school started in late autumn and is now nearly finished. By the end of 2015 we had spent about CHF 50,000 for the school but then we did not have sufficient funds to build everything that would be necessary. But we are flexible and when construction is finished (probably at the end of January) at least we will have a temporary solution. There are still parts of Africa where classes are held under trees and the children and good teachers are certainly important. When we are selecting teachers we take good care that they will fully commit to the children and will work together as a team. The government specifies that there must be at least 45 children in a class in the secondary school. So we have to ask ourselves “in a class with so many children how can one teacher check that every individual child is keeping up?”

As we want to start classes on 11th January we looked for a solution with a very simple classroom which could later serve as a dining hall. We will manage to be ready and the introduction of the rather different teaching in a higher school needs time, as does the preparation for the new subjects. A simple shed is adequate for this and the building will be finished by the time everything else has been done.

Perhaps some people are wondering “What’s the purpose of a secondary school?” Is the challenge of the primary school not big enough already? My answer to this is that it is in fact big enough for us. But what would happen to the children after they had finished primary school? Back on the street or back into the bush? We think that they are still too young for this and want to give them an even better education to take with them on their way through life.

On New Year’s Eve I had an interesting conversation on this subject with Mr K Machora, the Head of the Education Department. Our Principal, Audrey, a young woman from the Kisumu region and the Head Mistress of the Secondary School was also present. During the meal he explained to Audrey that she, like all the headmasters and headmistresses of secondary schools, had to travel to Mombasa on 21st January. In Mombasa the lists would be distributed showing the school to which each student had been allocated. In response to my questioning look it was explained to me that the students were “state property” and that the state would issue directions about them as it wished. Shortly before this he had told me that the secondary school students should come back to school on the same day as the primary school students, in other words on 4th January 2016. What’s the point of this if they are going to different schools anyway? His answer: “Your children are sponsored and I hope for the sake of the children that these sponsorships will continue when they go to the secondary school. They may indeed be allocated to different secondary schools but if no-one can pay for them it would mean the end of their education at school”.



The school fees for secondary schools have become incredibly expensive. You could almost have the impression that education is only something for the rich. This is naturally a means of controlling people. Starting recently, students also have to pay something in addition for each glass of water and for food. All teachers must have a university degree and a diploma in one or two subjects which they are then allowed to teach. There are 14 obligatory subjects; a chemistry and biology laboratory, a computer room, a well-stocked library and some other things are also required.

The school fees we request are very low. In the meantime a sponsorship for a child in the primary school unfortunately no longer covers the costs for a child. As everywhere in the world, it is people with modest incomes rather than the super-rich who are prepared to help. For the children in the secondary school we should receive a sponsorship of 100 Swiss francs or Euros. For 4 of these children we need a full sponsorship and for four others we need sums to complete their sponsorship. Why not share a sponsorship? “Shared happiness is double happiness”, so the saying goes.



The sign board for the New White House Secondary School is very easy to see if you are passing on the Nairobi-Mombasa “highway”. We hope and believe that the Secondary School will be as successful as the Primary School. But to go back to the subject of the road for a moment, it is in a very poor state, full of potholes and quite often travellers are stuck for several hours in traffic jams. It is the main artery from the harbour in Mombasa to Nairobi and the neighbouring countries which are without a harbour of their own. The Lorries travel day and night; the traffic is simply too much for this narrow road.

We are also very happy and grateful that we have received further valuable help. For example, the Women’s Circle in a small community of 1600 souls has decided to support our school, as has the small organisation “Education against Poverty” or an equally small Community Association. There were also school classes which collected money for us: “Children helping children” was their motto. Every donation counts – for a better future for the children in Kenya.

Our thanks must also go to some church organisations which support us, whether through a donation or collections, or who organise a donation campaign at Christmas or make their premises available to us free of charge.... They all remained faithfully at our side and enabled the school to develop further.

The many sponsorships and the regular donations which are given and leave us to decide how the money should be used help us to survive. Every sponsorship directly benefits a child and enables us to pay the most important costs for their education. Sadly, for some time now the basic cost of a sponsorship is no longer sufficient to cover all costs. As I mentioned earlier, inflation in Kenya is enormous. Therefore we are grateful for every voluntary increase (where possible).

And we still have many children from the poorest backgrounds who have been accepted for the New White House Academy in spite of their lack of sponsorship – children for whom there is no-one who can pay for them and who are waiting and hoping that someone will support them, too!

In our website www.kenyanchildrenhelp.ch we show children for whom we are urgently seeking sponsorships. I hope that 2016 again will see kind people come forward and undertake to sponsor one of these children.

All the board members of Kenyan Children Help are unpaid and also pay their own out-of-pocket expenses. We are very grateful for their untiring efforts which become more onerous and expensive for them every year – but their readiness to help the poor remains steadfast.

I sincerely hope that you, too, will remain faithful to us and are willing to continue to help us with the means at your disposal and which you are willing to give for our children. What we have achieved in a relatively short time is immense and, with your help, it will continue. No-one can choose where they are born in the world; children are innocent and deserve our help.

I thank you all from the bottom of my heart and wish you peace, happiness, health and all the best in 2016.

And I look forward to your visits!

A. Biberstein

Annedore Biberstein
KENYAN CHILDREN HELP

