

REACHING OUT

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KENYA – 2018



Linda, Mary & Anne

March was once again the time of the annual mission to Kakamega, Kenya, Mary Beckett, Anne Hargreaves, and Lynda Turner left on March 6 and arrived in Kakamega March 9.

Within the past year Kenya has outlawed the use of plastic bags. WHAT A DIFFERENCE! Instead of dirty plastic blowing in the wind, the County is really clean. Canada could do well to learn from Kenya on this.

We put together 40 layettes this year and this was far too few. There were about 20 mothers whose babies were experiencing problems. Each got the full layette.(Note: the only sign of this being a special ward was that everyone took off their shoes before entering – thus one had to step around the numerous shoes to enter). That left only 20 layettes. The regular ward was full – up to 50 new mothers. Each one wanted a layette. The layettes were broken up to try to give each mother something. This is very different from last year when we had layettes left over and took them to a second maternity clinic.

We had sent money early so the 88 uniforms for Amalemba Primary were ready when we arrived. The Head Teacher had changed since we last visited the school in 2017 so there was some confusion when we first arrived. That was soon dealt with. The lady who organizes the uniforms for us in Kenya measures the students and then puts the student's name on the finished clothes so it was a simple matter of calling the names, having the children change, and come out in their new duds. The children were very, very happy!

We'd been very successful raising money for uniforms in 2017 so were were able to pay for 40 more uniforms for Maraka Primary These will be delivered after the school break in May.

Later in the month we gathered all the necessities for the hygiene kits for Grades 7 & 8 girls at Amalemba. We were told that there were 154 girls so we made up 155 kits. The girls were overjoyed. They sang and danced after they'd received their kits and listened to a brief talk on how to care for their kits and how to say NO! A problem arose when we realized there were too many kits. The teachers had told us the wrong number. They wanted the extra kits to stay at the school and were upset when we took the kits to be used as needed at Maraka.

Our biggest project this year was the installation of a permaculture garden at Maraka Primary school. Salt Spring's Michael Nickels of *7 Ravens Farm* has been putting in these gardens in East Africa for many years. He put us in touch with his former student Josephat Barassa, aka JB, now head of the Permaculture Institute of Kenya. JB checked out our initial chosen school and reported that, based on his assessment, it was a poor choice as there was little interest by that school. We then pointed him to Maraka Primary which was very enthusiastic about the project. The Head Teacher got the Board of Management, the local church, and teachers involved. We arrived on a Friday. JB held meeting all weekend long with us, the school, and church. Work started Monday. There were community members, teams of students, some teachers, and five people from JB's Institute working on the project. We went to the school nearly every day until the finish and everyday there were major changes – a new garden area dug up, work done on the new cookhouse, a well being dug by hand becoming deeper, external & internal fencing etc. etc. It was wonderful! Every day all workers both adults and children, were fed a delicious Kenyan lunch: rice or maize, stewed beans, and cabbage. Many other schools came to see what was happening and to ask for our help at their schools. That wasn't possible but we visited many schools and JB explained to them what they could do at their schools at no cost except labour. The project was finished March 30 and turned over to the school on 31 March.

The twin problems of security and sustainability were dealt with. The high barbed wire fence and a night watchman were put into place to deal with security. Sustainability was dealt with by hiring a person from the Permaculture Institute as farm manager for six months. She is being paid out of funds raised on Salt Spring and is training a permanent farm manager. It's expected that the garden will be feeding the 380 students and 24 teachers by July. After that excess produce and the installed tree nursery will supply money needed for the garden and the farm manager's salary. Also different teachers were given different responsibilities in the garden as were different classes of students.

This was the busiest trip that we've had to Kenya. At the garden Mary was responsible for report writing, and Anne was the photographer. Lynda looked after the other projects. A lot was accomplished! Maraka is a show case permaculture garden. The County Education Department will bring other schools to see what can be done to feed their students. During the next school holiday in August, 30 teachers and community members will gather for two weeks at Maraka to learn about permaculture. This is being financed by Salt Spring.

All this could not have occurred with out the overwhelming support from the Parish, Outreach Committee and members of the Parish who supported fund raising events and made individual donations. This project will go on and on. Maraka was the poorest school Lynda had seen during her 18 visits to Kenya. The students there are now assured of a nutritious meal every school day – an important way to encourage children to stay in school and learn.

Thank you!

Kakamega Revisited - Trip #2 by Mary Beckett

Every trip has its own particular characteristics. In 2017 everything was new and unfamiliar; the people, the landscape, the culture, the projects, the traffic and the food. This year most everything had a familiar air, but it was nonetheless a very unique experience.

For me, the biggest difference with trip number two was that we spent the majority of our time working on a single project at Muraka Primary School. In its simplest terms, this project was the development of a garden in a schoolyard. But, that simple description doesn't come close to capturing the experience or the reality of what actually took place over those three short weeks.

To put things in perspective, I need to take a step back. After last year's trip we knew we wanted to implement a lunch program at a school. But, finding the path from good intention to concrete action is always the challenge. We all know, and give lip service to, the 'give a fish - teach to fish' adage. Nonetheless our North American minds went straight to the "most logical solution" namely; raise the money to buy the food to supply the program. Luckily for us, and for Muraka Primary, Lynda Turner had the brilliant idea that we should speak with Michael Nickels at Seven Ravens Farm on Salt Spring Island. That was how we first heard about "permaculture" and that took a short term lunch program to a whole new level.

Permaculture is the development and installation of an inclusive, effective, productive landscape. Water is the primary element in all designs. This includes appropriate use of grey water, surface runoff (channel it, capture it, never lose it) and clean water. Storage tanks are valuable, but the best place to store water is in the soil where it can be utilized in times of drought.

One purpose of the garden is the care of the people who will use the area. Maximize the use of idle space. Introduce gardens and food forests, use grazing animals to control grass in open areas and woodlots (a lawn without grazing animals is really only a green desert), introduce bees, develop productive boundaries by placing food producing climbing plants on fences and incorporating live fences. In addition to food, provide microclimates to regulate extreme climate impacts and introduce medicinal plants (e.g. plants that aid in repelling insects). Provide for teaching and learning areas within the garden. Implement a system for collection and control of waste to create a healthy, hygienic environment. Grow what the garden will support, even if that is more than is currently needed. Identify and put into operation activities that will use excess capacity to generate revenue which will support the future of the garden and reduce overall dependence on government and community. Finally, waste nothing, unless something is fully consumed, it has another use.

With this knowledge, the new goal became to fund a project that would use the principles of permaculture to transform the existing landscape at Muraka Primary creating an environment at the school that will provide an adequate water and food supply to meet the needs of the entire school population now and into the future

Even now that the project at Muraka Primary is operational, achieving these goals sounds like an impossible dream. And it would have been except for one critical element specifically, Josephat Barasa (JB) of the Practical Permaculture Institute of Kenya. JB got his technical permaculture training from Mike Nickels. But this is clearly much more than a job. This is a calling. His drive and passion for this work is instantly recognizable.



The beginning

We only had one job. Find the money. JB had a long list of “to dos” and his role started in late 2017, when he met with the school (staff and administration) and the community to see if he felt they had the desire and will to build and maintain this type of project. For the record, the first school we identified as a possible candidate for the program did not meet that benchmark. Muraka Primary did.

The hands-on work started with examining the space (about 3 acres), establishing the food, water and environmental needs of the population (currently just under 400 – students and teachers) and creating a plan.

Once the workers (JB and his team of 6 young permaculture workers, teachers, students, parents, community members and local tradesmen) were assembled there was nothing left to do but get to work! They only had 21 days to finish the job.

This is a project which started from scratch. The very first task was to purchase and assemble the tools (hoes, shovels, rakes and wheelbarrows). I didn’t expect to see someone using a panga (machete) to peel the bark off a tree limb to create the tool handles. The students were taught how to do this as well, so when handles eventually break, they will know what to do. This teaching approach was taken throughout the project. Never just do things for people. Show them how to do those tasks so they can use that knowledge in their everyday lives.

Garden creation was a six stage process.

First, scrape all the green matter (grass, weeds and roots) off the garden space and ensure all of that organic material is reused (as top dressing in eroded areas) or put into recycle.

Second, break up the soil (very hard work, this land has not been cultivated since the school was founded in 1948).

Third, level the space, building swales and berms to capture and control the flow of water in and through the garden site.

Fourth, cultivate and enrich the soil, add manure (donated by the community, no chemical fertilizers).

Fifth, control access by building fences around, and pathways through, the garden.

Sixth, plant seeds and seedlings.

Time from initial scraping to completed planting in a given garden plot – about three days.

In addition to the ground cover crops (beans, cow peas, maize) and food crops (tomatoes, onions, aloe, lemon grass, etc.) 2000 papayas, 1200 passion fruit, 100 bananas and 100 grafted fruit trees as well as other woodlot trees were planted.

And, there was much more than garden preparation and planting going on during those three weeks, including:

- Install new eaves troughs and down spouts to capture the roof water;
- Fix the existing cement water tank, and add two new plastic ones (10,000 and 2,000 litres), put barriers around the plastic tanks so they don’t get damaged and build berms and swales to handle the overflow water in rainy season;
- Demolish and reconstruct the kitchen (using the bricks from the demolition as well as the ones donated by the community), build into that kitchen area a low smoke energy efficient wood stove constructed from local materials as well as plus a secure food storage area;
- Build enclosures for the new cow, three sheep, 24 chickens, rabbits and 2 guard dogs purchased for the school and carve the chicken feeders from the donated bamboo;
- Install Life Straw water purifiers so there is clean drinking water, and build stands and covers for those jugs so they are easy to use and the water doesn’t get too hot;
- Place tippy-taps (basically a gallon jug, hanging from a wooden frame, tipped by stepping on a stick) outside all the pit latrines so the students and teachers have a place to wash their hands;
- Top dress the eroded areas under trees and fill the pot holes in the roads adding sawdust to all of the walking paths so they will not get so muddy and will not hurt the students feet (as few of them have shoes)

- Build a multi-strand barbed wire fence around the whole school yard inserting bamboo droppers about every 8 inches between the fence posts (which were mostly to discourage animal and stranger access to the property (chain link fencing would have cost \$1,000 USD so that was too expensive to do);
- Hand dig a 62 foot borehole to provide a water supply next to the school kitchen
- Build a secure tool shed, repair and repaint the entrance gate, guardhouse, and administration building to show that Muraka is the home of a permaculture demonstration site;
- Introduce a waste management system to ensure recyclables are recycled and waste is properly disposed of;
- Engage a farm manager to oversee the operation of the garden once the installation program is complete.



After

And, apart from all that, meet with community officials, department of education officials, government officials and other schools in the area to ensure all are onside with what is transpiring at Muraka.

The last word goes to JB, in an email on April 19, 2018. “The project at Muraka is unbelievable, looking super good with the entire field having turned completely green. A feeding program to begin next term.”

OUTREACH COMMITTEE

Financial Report

- Kenya - \$1000 for two rain water catchment systems
- Salt Spring Island - \$100 to lunch outreach “Stone Soup”
- International - Christian Blind Mission - \$1000

Proposal

It has been suggested that we should investigate possibilities for affordable housing on the Island in conjunction with other Island churches (the Ministerial). Peter Grove supports this proposal but suggests that a suitable piece of land with water should be identified first. Peter will be invited to our next Outreach Committee meeting in September.