

NKUNGA QUARTERLY REPORT – 1ST QUARTER

2006

The first quarter of the year was a busy one. Both parents and children were busy in different activities. This is the time when schools reopen after a long Christmas holiday. Unfortunately the year started with the information that Nkunga primary school had performed poorly in the Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE) examinations. Only one child managed to get the minimum marks required by FHI to receive a secondary school scholarship. This led us to start remedial activities to help children improve academically, which included the following:

Parents and stakeholders meeting

The FHI field staff, teachers and parents met at the beginning of the year to discuss how to improve the schools performance. It was agreed that all the children will be doing studies after the normal school hours and there will be some coaching on Saturdays, but parents will have to pay for some extra cost; FHI is assisting with some of these fees. The FHI field staff are doing follow up with individual children and we are certain that the pupils will perform much better this year. Some pupils who failed are repeating class 8, some have managed to get places in secondary schools and others are at home.

School feeding programme

Due to little rains in the last season, most residents in Nkunga harvested very little food while others did not harvest anything at all. This led to children coming to school when hungry and this affected their school performance. Hunger was cited as one of the major reasons for their poor performance last year. Children are sent home for lunch but they receive no food so find it hard to concentrate on their studies in the afternoon.

In response to this, Food for the Hungry, in partnership with the parents, provided maize and cooking pots and paid for cooks to provide a cooked meal for all the children in the

school. Parents contributed beans and the little potatoes they had harvested. This feeding has really helped children who otherwise would have gone hungry and performed poorly in school. It is a temporary arrangement until the families are able to harvest in June. FHI is investing in the agricultural capacity of the residents so that they become more self reliant.

Tuition fees

Teachers and parents agreed that each child must pay tuition fees of Ksh.500. FHI is supporting needy children from class 6-8 by paying 40% of this amount. This tuition time is for children to have enough time with teachers to study more and do revision during the holidays. This will make them improve in their understanding and performance.

Nursery school fees

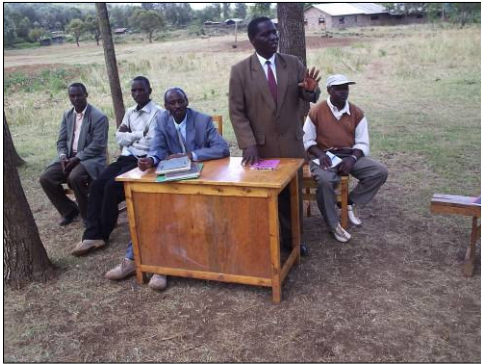
Since FHI started supporting the nursery school and primary school, the enrolment at both has increased. The nursery school is for young children who attend until 12.30pm. FHI has supported the nursery school with fees to pay for porridge which is served at 10.00am at school. This enables the children to concentrate more in class work and to continue learning up to lunch time.

Other activities of the quarter include:

Home visit

94 homes have been visited during the 1st quarter of the year. This has been possible with the help of the 6 volunteers who do home visits once per week together with FHI staff. Home visits give the beneficiaries the opportunity to share about their daily challenges, to pray together with the FHI staff or volunteer and to understand the ideas and values that FHI brings.

Prayer groups



A prayer group during a meeting

The prayer groups are doing very well. One of the groups which had started a merry-go-round last year has now been divided into two and each prayer group has its own members. There are two prayer groups as of now; Kanondone A and Kanondone B. These are the names given to the group. Kanondone A has been trained on Income Generating Activity and on how to obtain loans from the savings. As of now the group has a plan of opening a savings account to help save their money. The group which also has the football club is doing very well. Its members have not increased but the football club goes to play with the neighboring clubs and also invites them for a match. Some training on different topics will be done in the next quarter on different fields.

Bible study for children



Children listen attentively to a bible lesson

Due to the presence of FHI in the school, children from neighbouring schools are joining Nkunga primary school. This has led to the increase in the number of students attending the bible study in the school. All volunteers

and FHI staff participate in teaching children bible lessons every week. During this time, children read and share the word of God. They sing songs and recite bible verses and they learn the application of these verses in their daily lives. Most of the children who did not know how to pray can now pray for themselves. This is due to these bible study lessons.

Agriculture and water survey

During this quarter, specialists from the ministry of water and agriculture have done a survey to find out what could be the reason why agriculture productivity in Nkunga area is very low and how FHI could assist the community to solve their water problem. Water and food security have been identified as two of the key challenges for Nkunga residents and FHI has purposed to assist them in this area in order to have an impact on the community.

The agriculture assessment revealed that the farmers did not have enough knowledge on agriculture and that more training is needed. It also revealed that they have been trying to grow the typical staple crops of the Meru people (maize, beans and some potatoes) yet these crops do not do well in the Nkunga environment. The assessors stated that we should try to promote crops such as sorghum, sweet potatoes and green grams instead. They also suggested the promotion of dairy goats, setting up some demonstration farms and helping the farmers with tools. Unfortunately it will take a long time to change attitudes and behaviours, especially so far as food is concerned, but trainings will be held at different points in the year to promote these crops.

Another reason for the low harvest was because farmers had planted the wrong types of maize seed and used the wrong fertilisers. FHI assisted the 112 households with training from the Ministry of Agriculture, 1kg of improved maize seed each and some fertilizer and we are praying that they have a good harvest this season.

Because of the unavailability of water for irrigation purposes, fruit and vegetables

growing remains a challenge but we hope to help them start a bucket drip irrigation system and vegetables will be grown in demonstration plots.

The **water survey** showed that the only source of water in Nkunga (sacred lake) cannot be used for irrigation since the water level is reducing, the outlet serves other communities in Meru with water and this lake is part of a delicate eco-system. For these reasons, the policy is that the Lake should be protected. Sinking boreholes in Nkunga was also found not to be a solution because the water table is too low and even boreholes which have been sunk as deep as 240m are dry. The only options we have are to protect one of the natural springs close to Nkunga sacred lake, so that people could be fetching clean water without having to share it with wild animals in the forest as it is in the present situation. Staff from the ministry of Water assisted us to assess the potential site and draw some plans for the construction. We met with the community and leaders and they were very willing for FHI to help them with this. With community contributions we hope to start the construction after the rains.

The only other options for Nkunga are investment in **water harvesting** through helping with the construction of gutters and water tanks. However for this to take place the houses must have iron roofing sheets which few houses in Nkunga do have.

Alternatively, there are several community based water projects operating close to Nkunga and we can try to link Nkunga with them. Unfortunately most of them have stalled but one, the Ruiru Water Project, have told us that they could extend their area of coverage to include some water points in Nkunga. We are now negotiating with them on costs and trying to encourage the community to take the initiative and ownership themselves instead of through FHI.

First aid training

FHI staff and teachers were trained on first aid by the Kenya Red Cross though a two day training. The purpose was to enable them to administer first aid to the community people

they work with including children. Nkunga primary school has a first aid kit and it is very useful because children who get injured while playing in the fields have benefited from it. The teacher trained is now much more confident in using the items.

Clusters training every week

The clusters are doing well. They meet once every week on Thursday in turns for every group. During this quarter, the groups have been trained on improving school children's performance in school or parents responsibility in education, about water and water borne diseases. All the groups are taught one topic each month.

Tree nursery club



Parents listen attentively to a session during training

This is a club which is in school and it includes both children in school and adult learners. They have come together to start a nursery to promote tree planting in Nkunga around the school within the village. Some materials will be provided by FHI while labour and other materials will be provided by the club. This will also enable children to learn how to plant trees, to protect the environment and to become responsible citizens in future.

Educational Scholarships

Five children from Nkunga community have been supported in the payment of their fees for secondary school. Their guardians pay 30% of the total school fees and buy other materials needed in school like books and uniforms, while Food for the Hungry pays the remaining 70%. This support has really helped some of the children who would have otherwise

dropped out if the support was not offered. Children who have witnessed this help have been encouraged to work hard in their studies. Unfortunately only one child who completed class 8 last year has been able to go to secondary school with FHI support as he was the only one who attained the minimum grade. For some of those who have missed places at secondary school and/or have been out of school for a long time we are providing some scholarships for vocational training. Some will benefit from vocational scholarships to do courses such as tailoring, masonry and carpentry.

TRAININGS

Several trainings have been done during this quarter. They are as follows;

Leaders training

Community local leaders, church leaders and volunteers were brought together and trained for two days on issues related to good leadership, HIV/AIDS and how they can increasingly solve problems in their community (in line with FHI's Vision of a Community). This gave them more knowledge on leadership and their roles as leaders. It was also a good opportunity for leaders to meet and make an action plan concerning some issues which affect the community. Women, youth (girls and boys) and the men worked together in their own groups to discuss challenges in the community and how they can address them. The key challenges they raised were HIV/AIDS, alcohol/drug abuse, water and rape of women/girls as they go to fetch water and firewood. They also drew a map of the community in their groups showing areas where people are most likely to succumb to HIV/AIDS which helped us and them to see changes that need to take place and where extra care is needed.

Agriculture training

All the members of the four clusters were trained on agriculture during the quarter. This was after the agricultural survey which enabled FHI to realize the challenges faced by residents (farmers) in Nkunga. After the training, the members demonstrated the best methods that they had been taught for planting maize and the seeds for planting.

Income generating activities

Members from one of the prayer groups have been trained on income generating activities. This includes starting new small businesses; opening accounts and obtaining "soft" loans, ie, loans without interest from the group savings fund, to assist them start and operate new businesses. Members have already grouped themselves in groups of five to start these operations. This will enable them meet their needs if they start and operate these small businesses unlike before when they didn't have any idea. The other group will be trained in the next quarter.

Challenges faced during the last quarter

- Most of the families did not harvest and therefore have gone hungry
- The parents were not able to raise the amount of food agreed when the school feeding programme started
- We have been told that taking water from the sacred lake for irrigation is not allowed as it was hoped according to the survey. For domestic water use the charges we have been given for Nkunga to join the Ruiru Water Project are much, much higher than anticipated. Both of these were a discouragement

Prayers for next quarter

- Pray for more rains
- Pray for people who have been trained to put all that is taught into practice
- Pray for all our activities planned in the next quarter like the water project, agriculture project and health
- Pray for the community as members participate in this project. God to give more understanding and cooperation.