

Visit of Doug & Jackie Wakeling to Nkunga, June 2007

We visited Nkunga on Tuesday 5th June 2007 and thought we would like to share some of our observations and introduce you to some of the key people involved.

We drove to Nkunga with **Violet Ruria**, the Manager of the Child Development Programme for FH throughout Kenya, which includes responsibility for this programme. We were met by **Rosemary**, the FH staff person responsible specifically for the work in the village. We were introduced to **Francis Maitethia**, the headmaster, who is also secretary to the stakeholders group and an enthusiastic advocate in the community. He told us how the school had grown, both in attainment and in numbers since the project began. There are only 7 teachers, including himself, with 8 grades plus nursery! The government are currently unable to fund more teachers. However, all teachers seem highly committed and capable. Primary education is now free in Kenya.

The adult literacy group achieved top grades in the district, with 8 students passing end-of-year exams. We were asked to present certificates. The group members are apparently ready for the next exams already!

An informal school has been established for students who are unable to attend secondary school – either because of failure to qualify or simply through inability to pay fees. However, families still struggle to find resources to pay for this.

Students who pass their year-8 exams are being sponsored to go to secondary schools in and around Meru, bringing valuable new ideas from outside the community. (I hadn't understood how isolated they are; imagine no TV, radio, newspapers or travel!)

Crops looked very meagre. The soil is good, though in parts it is too rocky to cultivate; the main limitation is water. Sorghum seems to be doing very well, but it is not yet widely grown.

The tree nursery has been very successful; they were able to sell some seedlings and buy other commodities. The leader of the project previously worked with the government in forestry and seemed very knowledgeable about appropriate hybrids, balancing community needs with conservation of natural species and environment.

The Togenburg Billy goat has been a great success. Apparently they are bred in Meru and there is an arrangement to periodically exchange goats to avoid in-breeding.

The rubbish dump is no longer regarded as a problem. It is securely fenced and seemed well-managed. Rubbish is burned so the smoke is a bit of a nuisance, but there are no flies.

I was impressed that quite a lot of rock had been used for dry-stone walls.

We visited the lake. The area we saw is frequented by animals, so people have to walk around an insecure path to the far side for clean water. The government are unsure whether to allow them to protect a spring because this would limit access by wildlife. But they are suggesting they might pump water to the village from Meru. Let's pray for this!

We met with the Stakeholders Group. The Chairman is the Methodist Minister, **Pastor Silas Kinoti**. The catechist from the Catholic Church was also there; we understand that this is the **only** community in the region where **all** the churches are united and working together to reach out to their community.

The community are really appreciative of the programme, especially the water tanks and the medical assistance. They are really looking forward to welcoming the team from Highfield Church in September.

In answer to a later question, Violet assured us that the men work as hard as the women. Indeed, during our visit to the lake, just one person came to collect water – a man!

Alcoholism and illegal brewing has been almost eradicated, which is marvellous news!

Other FH staff told us that people at Nkunga are really thinking differently from before. Our impression was of a happy and hopeful people, just starting to realise their creativity and potential. They are so appreciative. It was a wonderful day.