

# Laikipia North Trip

## Education is Power in Masai Land

We had the chance to visit the beautiful region of Laikipia North in Kenya. It's a remote Masai region that lies in the foothills of Mount Kenya.

People in this area depend on livestock such as cows, goats and sheep for their livelihood. The average family has 6 children as children are viewed as wealth in Masai culture. Laikipia North has 40,000 people who live spread apart over a large area in remote villages without running water or electric-

ity. Of these 40,000 people, less than 50 people have a university degree and only four people have attained their Masters. EIP now has 3 high school graduates so there is a need to fundraise for University fees here. People over 45 generally have no education at all as it was only in 2003 that primary education became free in Kenya. Currently, there is not a local high school so students need to go to a boarding school for high school which can cost upwards of \$400

CDN per year. Throughout our time here, we volunteered at Chumvi Primary School and visited students at their high schools and homes. We discovered that growing up as a girl in this Masai community puts you at a real disadvantage. Girls are considered lesser in the family and they are more likely to invest in sending a boy to high school. Girls are sold as young as Grade 7 in exchange for cattle. We are hoping to support more female students in this area in the future to give both the students and their community a chance for a better future.



Saturday, January 25, 2014



Report written by David Cuddy and Robyn Penfold

### Still to Come:

- *Trip to Tanzania to initiate EIP with partners*
- *Sunday, February 9th Fundraiser in Kimende, Kenya*
- *Meeting between Laikipia North EIP Volunteers and Kimende (Kijabe) Volunteers*



**Photo (Top):** Mount Kenya, Laikipia North  
**Photo (Left):** Dave Cuddy visiting Chumvi Primary School  
**Photo (Right):** Robyn Penfold and Chumvi Primary School students on their 3km walk to school.



## Students Eager to get a Chance to go to High School

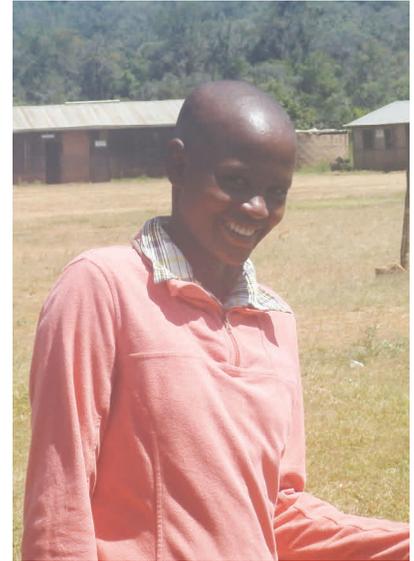
One of the most special things of visiting Laikipia North was getting a chance to personally meet so many motivated, hopeful and bright students who were determined to find a way to get the funds needed to attend high school.

One of these students was Nantana, whose father has tried to sell her for marriage twice this past year since she graduated primary school. She bravely refused and now thanks to EIP she will be sponsored this year by a school in Haliburton, Ontario. This school's admirable commitment to fundraise will surely better her life and the life of her community as she

hopes in the future to advocate for the rights of women and young children in her community.

Unfortunately, we met many more students that need help than we have the funds to help right now. Among them is Ruth whose parents have no jobs or livestock. Ruth has 7 other siblings and it is impossible for her to raise the \$430 needed for high school each year. She will likely be sold for marriage and have no chance to better her life without a chance at high school education.

**Photo to right:** Possible future EIP student, Nasdre Ruth Troni.



## Volunteering at Chumvi Primary School

We had the unique opportunity to volunteer at Chumvi Primary School during our two weeks in Laikipia North. Teachers and students were so welcoming and it was so heart-warming to see at what lengths students would go to, to be in school. We walked a measly 3km to school each morning with a pack of smiling students but some students as young as Grade One walked up to 11km each way! Students were like sponges, so eager to learn, listen and be at school. They were happy and curious to have visitors and enjoyed hearing stories about Canada and practicing their English.

However, there are some real issues with the quality of education at this school. The school has over 800 students and only 19 teachers. That is a ratio of about one teacher for every 45 students. The packed, dirt floor classrooms are in disrepair with holes in the walls as they were originally built as temporary buildings. Students get wet in the rains, cold in the wind and it is impossible to hang up any learning visuals as they get

*“Students were like sponges, so eager to learn, listen and be at school”*



blown down. The only teaching resources in the classroom are one old, small blackboard at the front of the classroom and textbooks shared between 4-6 students.

Despite all this impoverishment, students arrive to school early, ready, happy and eager to learn. Teachers

**Photo:** Dave Cuddy with Grade 5 class at Chumvi Primary School

and community members had some very good ideas on how the quality of education could be improved.

Ideas included:

1. A boarding school for Grades 7 and 8 students so that they have more time to study (especially female students who will be given many chores at home or forced into early marriages).
2. Developing an additional “feeder school” for Nursery to Grade 5 in an area further from Chumvi would relieve young students from walking long distances and would diminish the number of students at Chumvi.
3. Replacing temporary classrooms that are in disrepair into permanent classrooms that would be better learning environments.
4. Providing teachers opportunities to upgrade to become more effective in English, Swahili, Math, and Early Childhood Education.

A further report on Chumvi Primary School will be produced soon. Thank you to all the teachers and students who made us feel so welcome at your school!

## Thank you, Thank you, Thank you!

Thank you to Alex, Kip, Lillian and Dickson (English names of our Masai friends). These individuals from Laikipia North helped connect us to students, got us safely to various remote high schools and patiently waited when we did impromptu student meetings on the side of the road or stopped to be in awe of a herd of elephants.

They are committed to helping to improve the quality of education in their area and will volunteer to help EIP. In an area where communication is complicated by poor cell phone reception, hours of driving on rough roads between schools and a non-existent internet connection, their work is a real testament to their commitment to improve the quality of life in their communities. Thank you!



**Photo:** Robyn and Dave's host family including Kip, Alex and Lillian.

## Return Visit to Lokusero Primary

During Dave's visits in both 2009 and 2013 he spent time volunteering at Lokusero Primary School. The school currently has 212 students in Grades 1 to 8 and 9 teachers. We visited again this year and learned more about how they have been improving the quality of education at their school. Their marks from the National Primary Exit Exam continue to climb up placing them as one of the top performing schools in their district.

Their exemplary performance can be accredited to a number of school improvements. Firstly, a boarding school for students from Grades 6 to 8 was created which allowed students more time to study without the added pressures of walking long distances and doing chores at home. The "feeder school", Seiku Primary (Grades 1 to 5) which is 8 km away, has relieved students from the long walk and reduced class sizes. Furthermore, with the help of EIP, they have more committed and specifically trained teachers for the students' needs. In the past, students have traditionally

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had difficulty with Swahili. This is because Masai speak a native tongue very different to Swahili and Lokusero is very geographically isolated which makes learning a second language even more difficult. EIP in the past supported Mr. Mathenge who is now paid by the government as a teacher. His contribution to the teaching team at Lokusero was integral and his motivation and commitment to teaching students outside of school hours improved the success of the students. When Mr. Mathenge became supported by the government, he helped EIP select another very qualified teacher to support named Samuel Gitonga. Samuel's proficiency in Swahili and willingness to live in Lokusero is an asset to the school. Without this careful selection process teachers who have

no desire to teach in Lokusero may be sent by the government to and may not be a right fit for the community.

It was a successful visit and it was exciting to visit a school where people's support and commitment in Canada has led to real changes to the quality of education.

Lokusero's hope for the future is that they will someday have an additional teacher. Currently when the Head Teacher travels to meetings, they have no one to teach his upper level Math classes.



**Photo:** Robyn at Lokusero Primary