

Making education count

In Kenya, teachers and parents are working together to manage the crisis of overcrowded schools



AGA KHAN FOUNDATION
CANADA

Aga Khan Foundation Canada (AKFC) is working with Canadians to help break the cycle of poverty in East Africa. Education programs aim to improve access to schools and provide high-quality teaching and learning so that children are equipped with the skills, knowledge and values to contribute to the development of their communities.



PHOTO: JEAN-LUC RAY/AKF

The Kenya School Improvement Program, an initiative of AKFC, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the Government of Kenya, aims to manage the crisis of Kenya's overcrowded and underfunded schools.

MOMBASA, KENYA

At Maweni Primary School, on the outskirts of this coastal city, a group of teachers and parents sit at a makeshift table in the schoolyard discussing ways to organize seating in their classrooms. This isn't about U-shaped arrangements versus rows. In fact, some of the classrooms in this school don't have enough desks or textbooks to go around.

The question is how to manage classrooms overflowing with students who have flooded state-run primary schools since the elimination of school fees in 2003.

"There are so many kids here, and many of them have never gone to school so they have no foundation," says Prudence Madumadu, whose grandchild attends this school. "The teachers have to spend more time with them."

When Kenya abolished school fees in 2003, it was hailed as an example among developing countries for making a commitment to universal primary education. But the decision put an enormous strain on teachers and schools, which were ill-prepared for the deluge of

new students. National enrolment has risen from 5.9 million to 7.4 million.

With over 2,000 students, and only 27 teachers, Maweni has the highest enrolment figures in the district. At least half of the students come to school hungry. Dozens have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS. Children are under constant pressure to drop out of school to support their families, who work as vendors or day labourers in the city. Yet despite huge obstacles, the students here are performing relatively well.

Maweni is participating in a school improvement program that is helping teachers not only manage overcrowded classrooms, but also investing in their teaching skills while mobilizing parents and the community to support the school.

"This is one of the best organized schools," says Patrick Kanyoro, former principal and now a community mobilization officer with the Kenya School Improvement Program (KENSIP). "But some have nothing."

KENSIP, a program supported by Aga Khan Foundation Canada

and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), with the Government of Kenya, is helping to manage the crisis of overcrowded, underfunded schools.

Schools are organized into clusters so teachers and school managers can make the most of scarce resources. Mentors and trainers are assigned to help teachers in subjects like English and Math. In-service training helps teachers stay motivated and up-to-date on pedagogical methods.

"Teachers need to feel good about the work they do, they need to feel professional, and they need to improve the way they do things," says Atrash Mohamed Ali, project manager for KENSIP.

Across East Africa, school improvement programs like KENSIP are building on the experience of the Aga Khan Development Network, which has been investing in education in the region for over 50 years.

"This approach has come out of long experience of what worked and what didn't work," says John Durkin, of Aga Khan Foundation Tanzania.

While the prime target is improving the quality of teaching and learning, says Mr. Durkin, the whole school needs to be considered. "We look at the way the school is run and who supports the school, like the parents and the community," he says, "because long-term improvement is brought about by all of these people."

So far, KENSIP is reaching 137 schools in Mombasa and Kwale districts. Nearly 1,000 teachers have been trained along with 1,000 school committee members, made up mostly of parents. As a measure of its success, the Ministry of Education is working with KENSIP to scale up the model to create clusters throughout the country.

It is an example of the way Aga Khan Foundation Canada has been able to help strengthen local resources, tap local initiative and create momentum for policy changes that will ultimately benefit a much wider population.

For the teachers and parents at Maweni, there is hope their classrooms will – in time – become a place where children will learn and thrive.

Human spirit

Community rallies to support early childhood education

MOMBASA, KENYA

At Abuzaidan pre-school, 30 kilometres outside Mombasa, dozens of boys and girls dressed in blue uniforms are kicking up the dusty schoolyard as they belt out a verse of "Shake the Mango Tree."

"You're not shaking hard enough!" cries their teacher, Janet Chango, waving a homemade maraca.

Ms. Chango, 32, has been part of a transformation here. Ten years ago, as a young wife and mother, she and her husband were eking out a living as subsistence farmers in this drought-prone, tradition-bound district. With little prospect of an education, their children were destined for a similar future.

Now, Ms. Chango has a vocation. Her daughter, a graduate of this pre-school, is now in primary school and wants to be a nurse. Most of all, Ms. Chango has been part of sea change among parents in this area who now understand the value of education, particularly for girls.



PHOTO: ZAHRA RAYANI

Kenyan teacher Janet Chango (far right) is redefining her potential and that of the children in her community through early childhood education.

"They become bright," Ms. Chango says of her pupils. "They understand words, they smell, they taste, they sing and dance...they are all bright children and hungry to learn."

Change began when Abuzaidan elders agreed to participate in a community-based early childhood education program supported by

Aga Khan Foundation Canada, Aga Khan Foundation in East Africa and the Canadian International Development Agency.

The program is run by the Madrasa Resource Centre in Mombasa, which trained three local women in early childhood development and helped the community organize a school management

committee. Salaries are paid for by the community, which also provided the building – known among locals as a madrasa, or "a place of learning."

"Without parent and community involvement, the school couldn't operate," says Masoud Ali, a program officer. "Each parent contributes something, even coming up with the teaching materials."

Through similar programs across East Africa, over 200 communities have established and are managing secular pre-schools. Over 6,000 local women have been trained as educators. More than 50,000 children have benefited from pre-school, over half of them girls.

In Abuzaidan, managing the school as a community has created a new momentum for change in other areas, such as health care. But the most noticeable and dramatic change has been among the women, who are now leaders and role models for a new generation of girls going to school for the first time.

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PHOTO: AKFC

Companies such as Scotiabank are among those that express global citizenship by supporting AKFC's World Partnership Walk.

When Deloitte Canada decided to support Aga Khan Foundation Canada in 2001, it did so with caution befitting one of Canada's leading professional services firms. References were checked; charitable status was reviewed; ethics criteria were rated. In the end, the firm was satisfied with the results and decided to back an employee-driven initiative to raise funds for the foundation through the World Partnership Walk. Since then, Deloitte Canada's support has grown steadily, with teams of employees now participating in the Walk across Canada

"We see this as a tremendous opportunity, from a social, moral and business perspective, to support the desire of our employees to give back," says Yezdi Pavri, managing partner of the firm's Toronto practice.

Deloitte's support for employee volunteerism reflects a trend among Canadian companies. According to the results of a nationwide survey released at the end of last year, 71 per cent of businesses operating in Canada either encourage or accommodate employee volunteer activity as a way of improving the work environment and increasing their profile in the community and among clients.

"Large companies in particular tend to be strategic," said Debra Basil, a professor of marketing at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta

and one of the authors of the study. "It's an expense for them because employees are taking time to volunteer," she said, "but they can justify it if they can argue the benefits for the company."

While companies naturally look for ways of increasing their profile, it is also important to make a sound investment, said Bryan Tannenbaum, managing partner at Mintz & Partners, a mid-sized accounting firm that supports the Walk. "The fact that 100 per cent of funds raised through the Walk are directed to programs in the developing world gives us an excellent opportunity to

reach outside our borders."

Funds raised by the Walk help AKFC support programs in health, education and livelihoods, as well as strengthening community-based organizations. Moreover, contributions to the Walk allow AKFC to provide seed money for innovative initiatives and to leverage additional support from larger donors so that programs have time to demonstrate long-term results.

"The more we learned about the foundation and the way they pioneered solutions that drew upon the initiative and resourcefulness of local people in Asia and Africa, the

more we were convinced that this was an organization that we wanted to support," said Robin D. Walker, Q.C., a partner at Gowlings and a long-time supporter of AKFC.

Volunteers who enlist senior management have had great success in expanding corporate support for the Walk. At Gowlings, Farida Merali, an associate at the law firm, has been a catalyst – engaging the firm's partners and creating a team of employees who help fundraise for the Walk.

"The Walk is a great example of volunteers working together to reach out to fellow Canadians with the message of global citizenship and the responsibility that corporate Canada has to the global population," said Ms. Merali. "Partnering with AKFC has been an eye opener for us," she adds. "Contributing to their projects and seeing the results is something we cannot explain in words."

Deloitte is taking corporate volunteerism to a new level as part of its strategy to attract new talent. The firm is supporting one of its employees on a nine-month secondment to AKFC-supported programs in East Africa and Central Asia. On his return, the employee will roll out a humanitarian development program that Mr. Pavri is confident will be a major draw for globally minded young professionals. "I expect a flood of applications," he said. ■



PHOTO: DELOITTE CANADA

Deloitte's employee volunteerism reflects a trend among Canadian companies. A recent, nationwide survey showed 71 per cent of businesses operating in Canada either encourage or accommodate employee volunteer activity.



PHOTO: AKFC

World Partnership Walk quick facts

- Takes place in nine cities across Canada
- Raised \$38.6 million since 1985, including \$4.8 million in 2006
- Directs 100% of funds to programs in poor communities
- Organized by thousands of volunteers
- Supported by more than 900 Canadian corporations

Sustainable development

Canadian volunteers lend a hand in East Africa

There is an old adage: "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." But that is only part of the solution to global poverty, says Naz Rayani, convenor of the World Partnership Walk in Victoria.

"Teaching a man to fish is not as easy as it sounds," he says. "It's a slow process, but that's the difference between sustainable development and a short-term fix."

Mr. Rayani was part of a group of volunteers who visited East Africa last month to see how funds raised in Canada through the Walk are benefiting impoverished communities.

A recipient of the Order of Canada for service to his community, Mr. Rayani says he was impressed with the incredible determination of the people to help themselves.

"As we volunteer here, they vol-

unteer at their end," he said. "They dig the well, they donate the land to build a school, then they build the school one stone at a time."

"That was the biggest eye opener for me," says Anny Nasser, convenor of World Partnership Golf in Toronto, who joined the trip. "Aga Khan Foundation Canada supports programs that help communities determine their own needs, and then helps them solve it," says Ms. Nasser.

Locally, they call it "sombeza" – "a hand up." In Canada, it might be called "community mobilization" – the process by which the members of a community determine who, what and how issues that affect their lives are decided.

"They don't want a hand out," Ms. Nasser adds. "With some guidance, they're able and willing to help themselves...I was so humbled by that." ■

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