

Monthly News Reports 2004

December 2004

The misery of blindness

Article written by George Ohito, Cataract Surgeon, Kwale District Eye Centre.

Magongo Omar Teitei retired from the civil service five years ago. He was fifty-five. Still strong and healthy, he bought some cows and planted crops to feed his family. He enjoyed his work, putting to use the skills he had learnt with the Ministry of Agriculture.

All his six children were grown up. Magongo cherished the time he spent with his animals and grandchildren. However, a year ago, life changed as he slowly became completely blind. "Old age", he thought, no longer able to recognise familiar faces- even that of his wife of thirty-seven years nor the colours on the furs and skins of his beloved animals.

He became very depressed, dependent on his grandchildren for everything, even suffering the indignity of having to be taken to the bathroom. Magongo stopped eating and kept to himself indoors as much as he could. He was plagued by ugly thoughts, believing that everyone wanted to harm him and his property. He became frightened of every little noise around him.

He often wondered why he had been bewitched in this way. He begged his sons to take him to an eye hospital, but they flatly refused. However, his brother-in-law visited and instantly realized that Magongo was totally blind. He organised transport and took him to KDEC where our surgeon George Ohito asked why he had not come for help earlier.

"Oh, I can't explain. You know one day you are a healthy old man dishing out pearls of wisdom to those around you, the next they think you are an invalid with no mind of your own, only in need of their sympathy."



Above left - Magongo before his operation and right a transformed Magongo after his operation

He had cataracts; cloudiness of the lens, in both eyes. After surgery he was shown photos taken of him being blind and being led to the examination; he recognised his son and brother-in-law. He also saw a stranger in clothes similar to his own shirt and half coat. It was only after close scrutiny that he realised he was looking at his own picture. It was a different man from the one he last saw, who had weighed almost ninety kilos a year ago.

"What did you miss seeing most during the time you were blind", I teased him.

"My wives and grandchildren, they are my world".

Cataracts are treatable by surgery which takes fifteen minutes to perform. Magongo has vowed to search for all blind men and women in his village and personally bring them to Kwale District Eye Centre for treatment. No one should remain needlessly blind from cataract when there is treatment available.

November 2004

Fundraising reaches new heights

Africa's highest mountain, Mt Kilimanjaro (19,340 ft : 5895 m) in Tanzania and close to the border with Kenya presents a challenge to many climbers.

Amongst those who successfully reached the summit in 2004 was Rick Ashley as proved in the photograph. Rick (left) and his fellow climbers Matt and Gideon the guide arrived at the top in freezing conditions described by the local guides as the worst weather they could recall.

The reason for the climb was to raise money to allow the Kwale District Eye Centre to save sight. Rick later confessed to Dr Helen that he would not have found the will to complete the challenge had it not been for the thought of all the money that would have been lost.



His efforts were not in vain and sponsorship to date has raised around the equivalent of USD 15,000.

We would like to thank all donors for their generosity, and in particular to acknowledge those people who made donations without providing a contact address to which we could send a formal 'thank you'.

Rick Ashley replies:

"My thoughts at the top ? Complete exhaustion and complete elation; oh and a bit cold! It was a great feeling of achievement given the conditions, but frustrating and confusing that it seemed so difficult to put one foot in front of another to get from rim to Uhuru Peak. A real rush of energy, adrenalin etc on first reaching summit, jumping up and down and kicking the snow about, but quickly replaced by tiredness - as if the rush just used up the last bit of energy you had. And then we had to scramble all the way back down to base camp. That was exhaustion all the way until elation at realising you were back at camp and could lie down, at least for 30min or an hour before setting off again! Five hours more walking, and that night back at 3000m, you found out again how deeply you could sleep many years ago!"

Annual Kenya Offshore Fishing Competition - Eye Go Fishing

The annual Eye Go Fishing competition took place on 20th-21st November off the North Kenya Coast with 18 boats setting out to sea in the early hours of Sunday morning. They returned to the Mooring in the afternoon to weigh in their catch and celebrate raising Ksh188,700 (around USD 2,500) from the event. This sum will benefit the patients attending Kwale District Eye Centre. In the picture on the right we see the team of the winning boat, "Vuma" Margaret Morby, Bobbie Murphy, Johnno Beakbane and Robbie Taylor proudly displaying the Eye Go Fishing Trophy.



On behalf of those who will benefit by receiving eye treatment, Kwale District Eye Centre would like to thank not only all those who participated in the event but our many other supporters worldwide.

October 2004

World Sight Day event in Kenya nearly rained off!

World Sight Day was celebrated on 14th October at Kwale District Eye Centre. This a day which is set aside internationally to create awareness about the scale of worldwide blindness. Making people aware is the first step in addressing this problem.

The event was almost rained off. Driving rain went on for hours and the site which was set up with tents to protect people from the sun was useless. The event actually decamped to a disused fire station where undampened spirits were cheered by the blind band, a theatre group and songs from schools about blindness and how important it is not to exclude people who are blind from society.



In the picture above right, we see one of the local primary schools performing a song and dance about a child who was born blind and was able to see after treatment. Then it becomes a celebration of her enjoyment of the sighted world.

Dr Stefan Vogel visits the Eye Centre

Dr. Helen Roberts writes: For five years Dr Stefan Vogel has been visiting us from Germany for 3 weeks. Dr Stefan worked in Nairobi training ophthalmologists on a programme between Munich and Nairobi University. Most Kenyan ophthalmologists now in practice refer to him as 'my teacher'. He has returned to Germany to live, but visits each year to help us at Kwale District Eye Centre for three weeks. His ticket is paid by the German Prevention of Blindness Committee.

This year the emphasis was on training using the phacoemulsification machine donated to us by CBM (Christoffel Blindenmission International).

The machine enables us to offer state of the art cataract surgery with a smaller entrance wound, ideally a lens implant which folds so that one can get in through the smaller incision and hence faster, resulting in better healing of the eye after surgery.

Our many thanks to Dr Vogel, we look forward to seeing him next year.

Dr.H.E. Roberts

MBE MBChB MRCOphth FRCOphth

Medical Director, Kwale District Eye Centre



Above - Dr Stefan Vogel at Kwale Eye Centre

UK - Sponsored spar by Islington Boys Boxing Club raises funds

A sponsored spar by Islington Boys Boxing Club of Woodford, Essex (UK) was initiated by Geraldine Wooton.

The lads sponsored each other for extended spars. It was a fun day for all and raised 200 pounds sterling (about 350 USDollars) for the Eye Centre. The picture below shows the boys who took part in the spar.



Above - Geraldine and Peter Wooton



September 2004

Alice's Party raises funds in the UK

At a recent Fancy Dress and Magical party held to celebrate her 4th birthday, Alice Dodds raised £300 (approx USD 550) for EFEA (UK). Alice has twice been on holiday to Kenya with her family, who have been regular supporters of Kwale District Eye Centre (KDEC) for many years, and she understands that not everyone in Kenya is as fortunate as herself.

Alice wanted to invite over 40 of her friends and pre-school classmates to the birthday party. With this in mind, her parents Simon and Abigail Dodds, suggested that a request be made on the invitation asking for a donation to

EFEA (UK) in preference to a gift. Alice thought this was a great idea as she knew she would receive lots of birthday presents from her family and close friends.



**Above: Alice and her friends at the cutting of the Birthday Cake
The day was a great success and everyone had a fun time. Many parents said that it was a good idea to make a charity donation instead of bringing a gift for the birthday child. Alice had the party with her friends, and at the same time, she was able to help some poor children in Kenya with eye problems. In recognition of the donation, she was presented with a certificate signed by Dr Helen Roberts MBE, Medical Director KDEC, thanking her for this novel fundraising event.**

August 2004

Rama's Story

Rama (right) has Down's syndrome and was born blind due to cataract. When he was five months old his mother brought him to our community based worker, who was visiting the village.

Rama had cataract surgery and could see for the first time in his life. He was able to recognise his mother's face at last and to smile back at her.

Eventually, after he was a year old, he was able to reach for small objects when our low vision therapist tested him.



Rama, his family and our low vision therapist have a lot of work still to do though. Despite being 18 months old, Rama cannot yet walk but he is crawling faster and faster as he chases after the things that he can see. Rama loves gazing at things and is very inquisitive. The community are no longer feeling sorry for Rama's mother because she has a blind child. Her child, despite his disadvantages, brings great joy and also the message that there is often hope and help to be found at hand.

July 2004

Felistas's Story



Felistas (left) had been unable to see for about 10 years. This was because she had cataract blinding in both eyes. She was not aware that she could have surgery to enable her to see again.

She was told that a community based worker from Kwale District Eye Centre would be visiting her village next week and she should get someone to take her along for screening.

She knew that it could not be true of course. She was blind because of what her husband had said to that rather powerful family in the next village. He told them that their maize crop would not grow where they had planted it. No one listened of course. Their maize crop failed and they went to the witch doctor who cast a spell on her. Gradually she became blind. Now she could not even go to the bathroom on her own. She hadn't seen any of her six grandchildren, had not not been able to look into their newborn faces when they were put into her arms.

The community based worker was very nice and so she humoured him and went to the eye hospital so that he would be pleased with her. Then someone made an injection around her eye and she had to lie flat for ever such a long time. She was blind afterwards of course, but she couldn't resist removing the pad over the eye....just in case those nice eye workers had been right. She saw shapes, colours...and then someone's face. They smiled at her and asked if she was OK. OK! She was more than OK. She could see! What a gift!

June 2004

More Fundraising in Kenya

The fourteenth 'Diani Rules' beach sports and fun event took place at the end of May. While donations are still coming in, a record of over £5,500 has been raised so far for eye care at KDEC.

16 teams of eight contestants took part in beach volley ball, football (played with a rugby ball), touch rugby and frisbee throwing. The event closed with an obstacle race along the beach which provided much hilarity for the many spectators.

Among the many sideshows was the event shown in the picture below; blindfolded contestants lined up to aim a tennis ball through the hole cut in the shape of the KDEC logo in a board on the beach.



'We were not allowed to practice before the event on penalty of disqualification' said Dr Helen Roberts; 'It was very difficult to even hit the board! Imagine what it is like to be blind. At least this event is helping us to raise money to do something about that!'

Our thanks go to our many supporters and participants in the event. We would especially like to thank Safaricom, a leading mobile phone service provider in Kenya who were the overall sponsors of the event this year.

May 2004

Fundraising action in the UK

Under the sponsorship of the Rotary Club of Fleet, sixteen supporters of Eyes for East Africa (UK) recently carried out a fund raising collection at the M3 motorway Service Station located near Fleet in Hampshire. A considerable sum was raised for the benefit of the Kwale District Eye Centre. One volunteer collected over 270 pounds in an hour, illustrating the generosity of the many motorists calling at the service station.



Collecting at the entrance

Collectors on Saturday May 1st included:



Barbara Bloxham, David Moss, Jane Dean (Trustee), Jim Crow (Trustee), Lynette Moss, Dick Roberts, Yvette Asscher.

Commenting on this new fundraising venture, Dr Helen Roberts thanked the volunteers on behalf of all the patients who would benefit from their efforts.

April 2004

The Friendship Quilt helps fundraising in Kenya

The Friendship Quilt (shown below) started life in 2002 as blocks of a traditional pattern known as 'Grandmother's Fan'. People pay a donation,

sign their names on a block and the signature is then embroidered. The blocks were given to a women's group on the south coast of Kenya to collect signatures and donations; rather like using raffle books. This proved logistically difficult and the blocks were gathered together in 2003 and assembled into a complete quilt; the centre blue panel was added showing the KDEC logo. The quilt was then exhibited at a number of Craft Fairs in Kenya where 250 signatures were collected. It was also exhibited at the Kenya Quilt Guild Exhibition, in March 2004. Consequently, the Guild made a generous donation to KDEC.



The Quilt was designed and sewn by Angela Morris; the names/signatures were embroidered by Mary Drugan; both Angela and Mary live on the north coast of Kenya. The Quilt measures 258cm x 258cm and is made mainly from Laura Ashley glazed cottons. It was attacked recently by a hungry mouse and the damaged caused has been covered by a sprinkling of embroidered flowers!

The Quilt has gathered approximately 300 signatures to date making around USD 800 for the Eye Centre. Another round of the Craft Fairs at Christmas 2004 should fill the remaining empty sections of the fans. Anyone wishing to have their name added to the Quilt by making a donation either online through the website, or by post to Eyes For East Africa (UK) please follow the directions on our [donations page](#).

March 2004

Fundraising events in Kenya

Kwale District Eye Centre has recently received around USD 1500 from the proceeds of a Craft Fair Trust Christmas Market held annually in Nairobi.



The KDEC exhibition stand, shown in the photograph above, explained the work carried out in Kwale District. Thanks to the support of a well known local needlewoman, part of their income came from donations made by supporters who had their names embroidered onto a 'Kwale' quilt.

February 2004

New records at KDEC

Figures just released show that Dr Helen Roberts and her team set a new record by carrying out over 1,500 cataract operations at KDEC in 2003. Asked to comment she said; "This work will enable more families and individuals in Kwale District to lead more useful lives in the community".

Low Vision Project

The latest addition to the facilities at KDEC is the newly opened Low Vision Department, which deals primarily with children.

US VIP Visits Eye Centre

The US Ambassador to Kenya, His Excellency William M Bellamy, made a fact finding visit to the Kwale District Eye Centre on Tuesday 10th February.



Above: The US Ambassador presenting plaque to Dr. Roberts to commemorate the donation of an operating microscope by the US Embassy, as Ms Onyango, the Project Manager, looks on.

January 2004

New Year Message

1st January 2004 - Eyes for East Africa wish all their friends and supporters an enjoyable and successful 2004.

A good start to the year

We would like to thank those anonymous donors who have given us such a good start to the New Year through their generous financial contributions either directly to KDEC or through the web site. Regrettably there are some donors who have asked for a receipt or acknowledgement but have omitted to quote a name or address. Please accept this message as an expression of our thanks.

A full report of KDEC activities in 2003 will be available shortly, but meantime readers might be astounded to learn that KDEC dispensed over 2,000 pairs of reading glasses in 2003.

Turkana Eye Screening Project

The Eye Centre conducted an outreach eye care programme to Kakuma, in the North Western part of Kenya. This area is inhabited by refugees from the war torn countries of Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, the DR Congo and Uganda.

The local inhabitants, the nomadic Turkana, have no access to any form of eye care. The nearest hospital with eye care facilities is found more than 500 kms away, in Eldoret.

The Turkana people lead a hard life in the arid semi desert region surrounding Lake Turkana. Communications of all sorts are difficult and the small town of Lodwar, the centre of the area, is far from the main centre of population and government services.



The pictures above show some of the people waiting for treatment.