

Eyes for East Africa Monthly News 2006

January 2006

British High Commissioner to Kenya Visits Kwale District Eye Centre

Mr. Adam Wood, the recently appointed British High Commissioner to Kenya, has visited KDEC as one of his high priorities. During a previous tour of duty in Nairobi Mr. Wood had been briefed about the Eye Centre by Dr. Roberts and said he was delighted to have the opportunity to visit.

The British High Commission has contributed to KDEC four times over the years, the first donation in 1994 paid for the building of an operating theatre just one year after the centre began.

During the following twelve years, surgical and essential administrative equipment has also been donated. Dr. Roberts said that these donations were greatly appreciated and helped make the Eye Centre the success that it is today in the battle to reduce unnecessary blindness in Kwale District.

In response to a question from the Press, Mr. Wood said that the KDEC project was a good example of how the British government can work with a community based project to make an important improvement in the services available to the people of Kenya.



Above left: Dr. Roberts explains the inside of an eye to Mr. Wood.



Above right: Mr. Wood enjoys some tea from an EFEA mug!

February 2006

Salisbury Big Band raises Big Money for the Eye Centre

Mr. Roger Humphry, the honorary ophthalmic consultant to Eyes for East Africa UK (EFEA), is also an accomplished saxophone player in the Salisbury Big Band, based in Wiltshire. Thanks to Roger and the support of his fellow musicians they raised over £3000 for Kwale District Eye Centre at a recent Charity Big Band Evening. The evening was a joint enterprise between the Salisbury Big Band, the Julie Burrage jazz trio, and the trustees of EFEA UK.



Over 150 music enthusiasts and supporters of the Eye Centre packed the Concorde Club at Southampton, a well known jazz music venue. The club was made available at no cost thanks to Col Mathieson the owner. EFEA UK trustee Jane Dean said, "The whole evening was perfect thanks to the generosity and efforts of all involved. We hope this concert can become an annual event."

The "Eye Give" Scheme

The Unwrapped Gift at Christmas idea benefits Kwale District Eye Centre (KDEC). As with a number of other organisations, some donors kindly made charity donations to Eyes For East Africa UK last Christmas in lieu of making gifts to friends and family members.

We aim to launch a full "Eye Give" scheme in time for next December which will allow donors to make seasonal contributions which will help poor patients at KDEC who are unable to pay for treatment. Details will be announced later.

One patient who recently benefited from the Poor Patients Fund was Salim Mboga, aged four months. Salim had been blind since birth due to cataract. A cheerful chap, he enjoyed noises, especially the sound of his mother's soft laugh, but he could not see her or respond to her smile. Salim needed urgent surgery to enable him to see as soon as possible. If the eye does not receive a clear image at his young age, the optical nerve pathways simply do not develop.

Salim had cataract surgery in December, thanks to a generous donor, and now he can see. Surgery is only the first step in his care. He will need follow up for life, most crucially as he grows up and will need help to see clearly by regularly changing the power of his spectacles.



Salim Mboga aged four months, before his cataract surgery.

March 2006

Kenya Wildlife 'scene' in Rural N Ireland raises major donation for Eye Centre

Lizzie Charley and her family spent Christmas 2005 in Kenya with her lifelong friend, Dr Helen Roberts, her husband and family. During the visit Lizzie learnt a great deal about Kwale District Eye Centre in addition to experiencing Christmas in the bush where, rather surprisingly, Father Christmas visited all their children.

On return to Northern Ireland Lizzie organised a major fundraising event at her home attended by around 150 people of all ages and in all forms of dress. Artistic licence allowed 'gorillas', 'leopards' and a Zulu warrior to mingle with hunters, lion tamers and many others. The house and marquee was decorated with material in leopard, giraffe and zebra motifs, supplemented by African-style wall hangings made by children at Rockport School.

'African' cocktails, tempting food cooked by Robert Howlette, a South African chef, an auction by Daniel Clar of African stone sculptures crafted by Priscilla from Zimbabwe followed by a disco late into the night ensured that the event was a rip-roaring success, raising almost £3000 to benefit the patients at the Eye Centre.

We would like to thank all those generous people who attended and in the process learnt a little of the work of Kwale District Eye Centre.



Above left: The party in full swing.

Above right: Lizzie Charley (left) with Dr. Ann Parker, another lifelong friend of Dr. Helen Roberts.

April 2006

Eye Give!

Those of you who live in the UK will know of the growth in 'Alternative Giving' in the last year. This involves making a charitable donation at Christmas or birthday time instead of giving presents to people who already have so much in comparison to people in the developing world.

Last Christmas, Eyes For East Africa UK ran a pilot scheme now called 'Eye Give' whereby donors made a contribution to the charity for the benefit of patients at Kwale District Eye Centre, too poor to pay for treatment. The size of the donation determined the amount of treatment available. For example, a small donation would pay for a pair of reading glasses, a larger one for a cataract operation and so on. Once treatment had been given, the donor received a report from the Eye Centre and a photograph of the patient. In the following example, a donation made on behalf of a General Practitioner in the UK treated a traditional healer in Kwale District. Quite a coincidence!

Juma Kitwe (pictured) is well respected in his area, because he is the village medicine man. He has been treating many people who visit him but has been unable to help himself. He has been going blind, slowly but surely for many years. He was afraid. How was he going to do his medicines and work his magic when he could no longer see?



Kwale District Eye Centre ran a workshop for traditional healers and Juma eagerly attended. He learnt about the high incidence of blindness in the community and visited KDEC and even watched surgery. He did not really understand how the surgeon cured the patient's blindness but he followed the patient from the operating theatre and talked to him for ages. The patient said that he had felt no pain and Juma noted that the man could see well when the bandage was removed.

In due course, Juma had surgery in both eyes which, as the man had said, did not hurt at all! Now he can see and he continues practicing his trade to this day. If he meets someone with an eye problem he sends them to KDEC knowing that they will be well looked after and will be grateful to him for his guidance.

This group of people are very important to our work, as they are the mediators of the community. With the respect they command, they are able to sway the community to seek treatment at KDEC.

So, What happens to your donations to the Poor Patients Fund?

This month we feature two of the patients who have benefited from treatment funded by donations to the Poor Patient Fund. This fund exists to help those who are too poor to make a contribution to their treatment. If their sight can be restored, they become productive members of their community once again. This is an important factor in rural areas where everyone needs to lend a hand on the land, particularly in the planting season. In the case of children the chance of improved vision means that they benefit so much more from school lessons and have a better chance in life.

Bintinassoro Mwaliko – aged 68 years

This elderly lady had been blind in both eyes for over 10 years when her husband persuaded her to come with him to a field screening centre near her home deep in the countryside. There she met our community based worker who explained about cataracts and that she could have her sight restored but that she would require an operation in order to do so. Immediately she thought that her end had come. All the people she had ever heard of who had operations had died in the hospital, and even sometimes on the operating table. She hated being unable to see and having to rely on someone to do everything for her, even go to the bathroom with her, but her eye condition didn't hurt and, on balance, her condition was probably better than being dead. She would rather remain blind, thank you.



Her husband, Nassoro, had met someone who had had cataract surgery at KDEC. Far from being dead, this person had gained a new lease of life and his farm and goats were looking much healthier too! Maybe the same would happen to Binti?

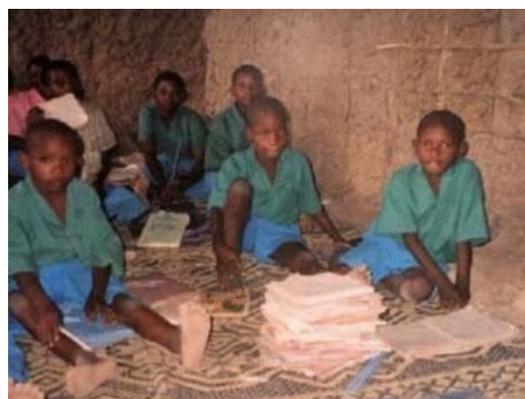
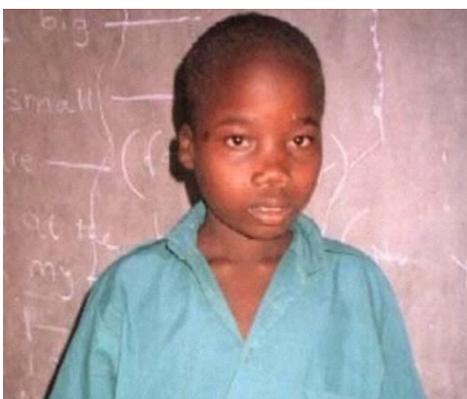
It took about an hour to persuade her to get into the hospital vehicle when the screening was over at the end of the day. Binti clung to Nassoro's arm for the entire journey. After a sleepless night she underwent cataract surgery on one eye. To her surprise her husband was right and she did not die! When the dressing was removed the next day she refused to go home until surgery had been done on her other eye!

Nassoro and Binti's small farm is now doing well. But Binti has another job. She is busy telling anyone who will listen that not everyone dies on the operating table or in hospital and she laughs at herself for being so afraid.

Eliud Mwanjala – aged 12 years

Eliud is now in Class 2 at a local primary school. He is too old for this class but was enrolled late because of his sight problem. He was identified during an outreach clinic and brought to KDEC for cataract surgery at the end of last year. He had been blind since birth due to cataract, but his parents were too afraid to have their tiny baby operated on and preferred to believe that his sight might improve as he got older.

After surgery he can see, but not as well as he would have if he had surgery when he was younger. He now needs an enormous amount of input from the low vision specialist to stimulate his vision and teach him to see! Eliud is now enrolled in our Low Vision Programme. He is followed up regularly in school by our low vision therapist to ensure adequate learning is achieved without many problems. He requires spectacles which will need to be updated regularly as he grows up. He is lucky, he could have been blind for life, but had he reached us earlier he would not have had so much trouble adjusting or be so far behind in school.



Above right: Eliud. Above left: Eliud with his classmates.

And finally...

There has been much publicity in the international press recently about the drought conditions in parts of Kenya and elsewhere in East Africa, and the impact on human life as well as the terrible loss of cattle and crops. Here in our part of the south coast in the current rainy season we recently had 27 inches / 68.5 cms of rain over a period of 5 days... ah well, the farmers certainly need it, but it's not so good for the visitors.

June 2006

A Frenzy of Fundraising in the UK

The arrival of better weather has led to an increase in fundraising activities in the UK for the benefit of the patients at Kwale District Eye Centre. In England the Rotary Club of Fleet organised a collection at a motorway service station, and Pam & Angus Walker-Munro of Fleet held a fundraising ladies' evening. In Northern Ireland 13 year old Robert Simpson organised a collection amongst his schoolfriends. Reports follow for each of these activities.

Robert Simpson in Northern Ireland

The hard work earlier this year by the EFEA UK regional coordinator Lizzie Charley was reported in our March 2006 news report. There is an interesting footnote to the event involving the initiative of an enterprising 13 year old school boy called Robert Simpson.



Robert, a pupil at Campbell College Boys Grammar School in Northern Ireland and a friend of Lizzie's son, knew of the work of KDEC as he had attended the party organised by Lizzie earlier this year. He raised over £177 (USD 330) through organising a collection made up almost entirely of 20p pieces amongst his friends using 'Smartie' tubes.

The Rotary Club of Fleet in England

The Rotary Club of Fleet organised collections at the M3 Service Station in aid of our charity. EFEA UK supporters, together with friends and Rotarians from Fleet and other clubs collected on Friday 2nd and Sunday 4th June. Thanks to the generosity of the travelling public, over £1,024 (USD 1,900) was raised.

The president of the Rotary Club of Fleet, Mr John Paton, said, “We are glad to be able to continue to support this very worthwhile cause, which we have been doing since 1995 when one of our members visited the Eye Centre in Kenya. We know the funds will be well spent by Dr. Helen Roberts MBE and her team. Some of it will go to help those who are too poor to pay for their treatment.”

Pam & Angus Walker-Munro of Fleet in England

Pam held a ladies evening on 31st May, which raised almost £400 (USD 700) through a raffle, sale of goods and donations.

Angus is a keen deep sea fisherman and we’re trying to persuade him to be in Kenya at the time of the next Eye Go Fishing competition.

By coincidence he has family members living near Malindi on the Kenyan north coast who attended the recent KDEC fundraising event Diani Rules, which took place a few days after the UK fundraiser.



Left: Pam Walker-Munro encourages ladies to ‘spend, spend, spend.’

July 2006

Last month we reported on recent fundraising efforts in the UK, this time we take the opportunity to remind readers that here in Kenya we also do our bit when it comes to fundraising for the Eye Centre.

Safaricom Diani Rules!

The annual Safaricom Diani Rules raised a record Ksh 1.3 million (USD 10,500) this year. The event involves 16 teams each of 8 people, 3 of whom must be ladies, playing mad sports all weekend on the glorious white sands of Diani Beach, south of Mombasa.

The major sponsor, the mobile phone company Safaricom, with links to the successful Vodafone Group, were delighted to enter a team again this year.



All money raised comes to KDEC to enable us to do cataract surgery and restore sight. This year the amount raised at Diani Rules will enable us to do 371 cataract operations from sources of income such as this. Dr. Roberts thanks all the supporters of the event for helping the Eye Centre to reduce needless blindness.

Kenya Travel News Magazine highlights Kwale District Eye Centre

The glossy monthly travel news and lifestyle magazine for East Africa, TN, recently published a special article by Jane Barsby about the work of KDEC since it was founded in 1993, in combating the problems caused by the high rate of blindness in Kenya. Much of the blindness is preventable and caused by poor diet and ignorance. The article goes on to explain that Kenya has only one

ophthalmologist to every million people compared to an average of one per 80,000 in Europe.

As a result of the article KDEC has received a number of donations from Kenya residents for which Dr. Helen Roberts and her team is most grateful. Copies of the article may be obtained by contacting tn@triad.co.ke and asking for a copy of the June 2016 edition.

August 2006

A Blind man becomes Village Leader thanks to Rehabilitation at KDEC

Jonas, aged 54, had been blind for many years and was confident that, like many of his neighbours, his sight would be restored when he came to Kwale District Eye Centre.

Sadly, at KDEC, we explained that he would not see again, but that we may be able to help in other ways. Jonas was not impressed. "Pah, how can a blind man do these things they are suggesting?" he muttered to his wife. Still sceptical, he underwent some rehabilitation training enabling him to walk

with a white cane, visit the toilet unaided and, in fact, go almost wherever he wanted.



Jonas at a rehabilitation meeting at KDEC. He is standing between the man in the yellow shirt and the lady.

He was to be seen out and about again in the village, feeding his poultry and cattle. This was not something he had done for many years. He could do most activities independently and enjoyed chatting to his neighbours. He became well known and admired and was soon elected as Village Chairman. He now represents his village in community development issues. He is much liked and respected by all those he works with.

Jonas confided in our rehabilitation officer, “I would be indoors, isolated and dependent were it not for you and all at Kwale District Eye Centre.”

September 2006

Launch of “Eye Give”

Eyes For East Africa is delighted to announce the introduction of Eye Give – the charity project that takes the hassle out of giving.

Eye Give is ideal for birthdays, Christmas, anniversaries and other special occasions. You can make a donation on behalf of others, to help those who need eye care in Kenya. The Eye Give Facility is quick and easy to use. You select a gift from the list shown on the Eye Give page of this website – prices range from £5 to £300. You can pay either securely online with your credit / debit card or by mailing your donation to us at Eyes For East Africa, 19 Dunmow Hill, Fleet, GU51 3AN, UK. And, if you send us your postal address, either by email to eyegive@eyesforeastafrica.org or with your remittance then we will send a card for you to give to the person in whose name you have made your donation.

October 2006

Fundraising for KDEC from supporters in the Netherlands.

To add to the list of fundraising stories from various countries, this month we bring you a story of support for the Eye Centre by fundraising in the Netherlands.

Dr. Anneka Van der Haar was a volunteer who spent 2 months assisting at Kwale District Eye Centre. In July this year her parents, Mr and Mrs Van der Hoeven of Doetinchem in the Netherlands, celebrated their diamond wedding

anniversary with their children, grand-children, great grand-children and also many friends.

They had heard so much from Anneke about the very worthwhile work of KDEC in providing affordable, accessible eye care, and having both suffered from sight problems themselves, Mr and Mrs Van der Hoeven decided to raise money for KDEC. They did this by including an information leaflet about KDEC with the invitation to their guests to attend the celebrations of 60 years of their marriage with a request for a donation instead of a gift. On the day, Dr. Anneka gave a presentation about KDEC which included illustrations of her time there and their work at screenings in the field. As a result of Mr. And Mrs. Van der Hoeven's idea and the generosity of both themselves and their guests, a total of Euro 2,082 (around USD 2,700) was raised for the Eye Centre. Much of this will benefit children or other patients who are too poor to pay for treatment. In total, it will enable the centre to carry out 53 cataract operations and allow people to see again. If you would also like to help those less fortunate than yourself, why not visit our Eye Give page?



Above: Mr and Mrs Van der Hoeven surrounded by family and friends at their Diamond Wedding Anniversary celebrations.

November 2006

Our Tuk Tuk Vehicle Arrives

Patients visiting KDEC are happy and smiling these days despite their eye problems and the rain or dust depending on the time of year. This is because the Eye Centre has recently acquired a 'tuk-tuk' – a type of 3 wheeled vehicle commonly seen in Thailand and India and elsewhere.

Some patients used to have difficulty getting to the Eye Centre as it is situated 800 metres from the main highway along a dusty road. Many patients with eye disease are elderly and managing to walk to and fro was a considerable challenge and sometimes a barrier to receiving help. No thanks to the tuk-tuk service (named the Eye Pod), this problem has been overcome. Word has gone around that this service is available to help people reach eye care and people with eye problems are attending in increasing numbers. There are plans to build a shelter for patients waiting at the main road and to put drivers in uniform. The driver, of course, does not just pilot the Eye Pod, but also checks that the patients have their eye drops, understands how to use them and when to return for follow up.

The service has been running for 2 months. The Eye Pod has transported around 300 patients and helpers a month and covered almost 600km (370 miles) each month. Thank you very much to the UK donor who made it possible for KDEC to provide this service.



Above right: The tuk-tuk arrives at the Eye Centre and is quickly named the Eye Pod. Left: Patients are delighted to board the Eye Pod to take them to the main road.

The length of this month's report reflects the high level of activity surrounding Kwale District Eye Centre both in terms of creating awareness of the need for eye care and fundraising efforts both in Kenya and the UK. We start with a report on how World Sight Day was celebrated at the Kenya coast in October.

World Sight Day (WSD) on the Kenya Coast

Report written by Mwinyihamisi Mwachepha, Rehabilitation officer at KDEC. This year's WSD activity was celebrated at 3 different schools in our area. There were Waa Primary School in Kwale District, The Mombasa Academy and Braeburn Internation School, Mombasa.

The aim was to create awareness on avoidable blindness among the community members and publicise information on "Vision 2020" the Right to Sight programme. In all 1,000 students and staff attended the events.

During the day pupils participated by wearing blindfolds to make them experience what it is like to be blind and to understand the need to help those in the community less fortunate than themselves. They played games while blindfolded including throwing balls to one another, identifying objects or friends, playing chainess (hopscotch) and trying to write.

At Braeburn, the pupils, staff and parents had organised a collection and presented a donation of Kshs 18,953 (approx USD 300) to KDEC to enable poor patients to undergo treatment at the Eye Centre. The photographs show the games at the schools.



Here are some of the patients who benefited from Braeburn International School's donation:

Rashid is only 15 but he had been totally blind in his left eye for at least 3 months. Before that he could see but things were a bit fuzzy. He had a cataract, which occurs when the focusing lens in the eye become cloudy. He had surgery on his left eye on 12th October and he can now see out of that eye.



Mazera (right) is 80 years old. He had not seen with his right eye for many years. So long that he could not recall when he last saw out of it. He had a really thick cataract, which we removed, and now he can see beautifully.



Tima is also very elderly. She had been totally blind in both eyes for years. On the day after we did her surgery and took off her eye pad she could not stop giggling with delight. Here we see her with Mazera as they are about to go home after their treatment. She looks forward to seeing her 6 youngest grandchildren for the first time!



Eye Go Fishing Competition, 20th November

This year a record 18 boats set out early on Sunday morning to fish along the north coast of Kenya. The event was won by Chris Barnes in Kusi. Chris was awarded the David Parry Memorial Trophy, which was presented to him by

David's widow Gil, a long time supporter of the Eye Centre, who came back to Kenya to support the event.

The competition raised a record Ksh 402,800 (almost USD 6,500) all of which went to Kwale Eye Centre to prevent needless blindness in Kenya.



Above: Chris Barnes being presented with the winner's trophy by Gil Parry.

Kwale District Eye Centre would like to thank all those who came and supported us and everyone who gave so generously. Special thanks go to Liaison Insurance who were the main sponsors for the event this year, donating 100,000 KSh (approx 1,500 USD).

All those people who will have their sight restored because of their hard work would like to thank the Mtwapa Fishing Competition Committee for a record breaking Eye Go Fishing. Hope to see you next year.

[Postscript to Diani Rules story reported in July](#)

Our July report included details of the fundraising 'Diani Rules 2006' beach games competition. What we were not able to report was that the first prize in the raffle was a fabulous safari to the Masai Mara game reserve, which was

won by Manju Mohamedbhai, a lady who has supported Kwale District Eye Centre since we began in 1993. Manju has kindly submitted the following report on how her trip had gone.

“Wow! I’ve just got back from a lovely break in the Mara courtesy of Lady Luck, who smiled on me for the first time in my life. The flight up from the coast with Air Kenya was spot on and smooth and landed at Wilson (Nairobi’s smaller airport) which was good and avoided all the traffic. The onward flight to the Mara was excellent too and we arrived in time for a huge lunch... I think I have put on a couple of kilos which I am now trying to fight off.



Left: Manju ready for 'lift-off' in a balloon basket

The game drives were excellent, Alex our guide/driver was a bird fundi (expert) and we recorded a total of 78 species. I saw all of the 'big five' including the black rhino and a leopard (the first I have seen.) As you can see from the photograph, I even treated myself to a balloon ride and a champagne breakfast on the open plains of the Mara. Let me know when you have the article in your newsletter, would love to read it. Thank you all.”

Manju Mohamedbhai
Head of Sales and Marketing
Imperial Bank Ltd, PO Box 16460, Nairobi

Readers will also be interested to note that Manju did a fundraising parachute jump for the Eye Centre some time ago, but is too modest to write about the experience.

The 'Eye Give' Project in the UK.

We're pleased to report that Eyes For East Africa (UK) Eye Give fundraising project we highlighted in September is gaining momentum and around USD 1,000 has been raised in recent weeks. This sum will all go to KDEC to help patients who are in need of funding to pay for their treatment. We're told that the organisers expect further donations in the run up to Christmas.

Sophie's 4th Birthday helps 'Eye Give.'

Sophie Dodds, younger daughter of Eyes For East Africa UK's new trustee Abigail Dodds, recently helped raise £230 (around USD 450.) Sophie has been on holiday to Kenya 3 times, and on her most recent holiday visited Kwale Eye Centre. Sophie knows that "Dr Helen's hospital" as she calls it relies entirely on charitable donations.

With this in mind, and her birthday approaching, the family decided to host a special party to celebrate her 4th birthday, as they had done for Sophie's sister Alice and as reported in the September 2004 newsletter. In preference to bringing a gift to the party, Sophie and her family asked for donations to be made to EFEA (UK).

35 friends came to the party, everyone had a good time, and Sophie had lots of fun being the centre of attention. Everyone felt very proud to have helped children in Kenya.



In recognition of the fundraising success, Sophie was presented with a certificate from Dr. Helen Roberts MBE, Medical Director of KDEC. The photo to the left shows Sophie receiving the certificate from childrens entertainer 'Jilly Jelly Beans'.

The money raised has been channelled through the Eye Give project to fund the restoration of 2 children's sight in both eyes with follow up and educational assistance. There are also enough funds to help 2 albino children avoid the sun by providing them with sunglasses, sunhats and long sleeved clothing.