

Monthly News Reports 2007

December 2007

Bob Miller's tribute in memory of his wife Diane

I lost my wife Diane to cancer a few months ago after a very short period of illness. We were both lovers of wildlife, mainly African, and would seek it out wherever we were.

We were very close and the sense of loss is still enormous, but even more important is the sense that at fifty-nine, some 'good' should come from her death.

At the funeral I said I wanted to create a legacy to her memory and for something to happen that would not have occurred, had Diane still been on this earth.

I spoke of Kwale District Eye Centre and the great work that is being done there, so in addition to the sum of money I pledged, others were similarly motivated and have also made contributions and are continuing to do so.



Above: Diane Miller

My target is to raise 1 Million Kenya Shillings (about USD 15,000). This I expect to be achieved in early 2008. I only wish it could be more. Kenya is a place whose culture, scenery, peoples and of course the wildlife we always enjoyed, and that 'good' should be something to help the Kenyan people, who have been so warm and friendly to us over the years.

Diane's greatest wish was to take our grandchildren to see the African wildlife. This we did not achieve, but a couple of months after her death I took my daughter, her husband and our three grandchildren to visit Kenya. On that trip we visited KDEC. Before visiting, one of my greatest fears had been that the eye centre was a charity that had evolved into a business where donations were just swallowed up into one huge pot.

My fears were completely unfounded, because I met a wonderful team dedicated to helping those people who would otherwise not receive eye care. This team was led by the very driven Dr. Helen, someone who just makes miracles happen.

A couple of months ago there was a programme on UK television that asked if money can make you happy. I would answer thus: not even the largest lottery win could bring back the happiness I lost, but for those whose eyesight can be restored by a cataract operation costing a mere £30 – money, if used wisely, can help!

Bob Miller, December 2007

Note: Readers may recall that Bob Miller featured in our October 2007 news report

More Self Help at the Eye Centre

The 800 metre road linking the eye centre to the main highway had become full of potholes and was in a very bad state of repair. During a quiet spell in December while a few staff were left to man the clinic, the rest old and young alike set-to to make repairs. After much hard work during which staff dealt with around two tons of road stone, the job was done and patients will once again be able to travel by tuktuk in comfort.

The two photographs below show the eye centre staff working hard filling-in potholes.



Fundraising in UK with help from schools in Kwale District

The 'Eye Give' distant giving scheme proved popular with our UK supporters and we can report that at the time of going to press over Kshs 41,000 (around USD 600) had been raised in the run up to Christmas.

As in previous years, donations of the cost of a cataract operation and goats to help a blind person maintain a living were among the most popular gifts. A big 'Thank you' to all those who contributed and to the volunteers who made it all happen.

Pupils at schools in Kwale District entered a painting competition to illustrate 'The Gift of Sight'. The winning picture by Juma Rama Heri of Mwadinda Primary School was used as a card to accompany the gifts and is shown on the right.



November 2007

This month we report on a medical safari which took place earlier this year in the remote Northern Province of Kenya and two fundraising events

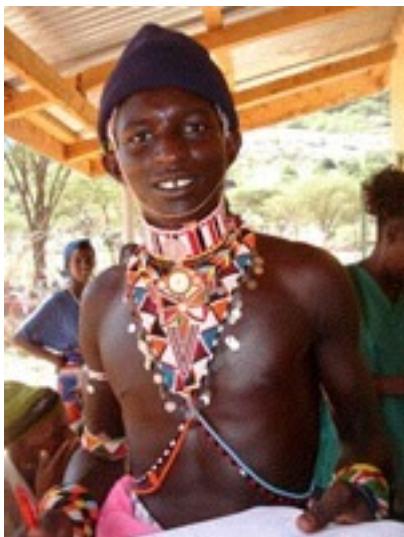
Medical Safari to the Ndoto Mountains

Earlier this year Dr Helen Roberts and her team from the eye centre conducted an eye camp at Ngurunit, a remote location on the Eastern side of the beautiful Ndoto Mountains.

The site, in the remote Northern Province is some 200 kms North of Mt Kenya and around 100km Southeast of Lake Turkana.

Those with access to Google Earth will get a clear idea of the remoteness of this rugged area.

The following photographs show some of the action on site where the team conducted 345 eye operations.



Above: Dr Helen and team assessing the patients with eye problems in the small clinic at Ngurunit.

Above: Daniel, one of the Milgris Trust Scouts who identified the patients for pre-ops with cataracts and looked after them following the operations.

Above: A convenient tree provides shade and acts as the post op ward where patients receive their eye drops and instructions



Above: "The doctor told me to keep my eye patch on".

Above: A lady from the Samburu tribe who was unable to see before surgery.

Above: This Samburu lady wanted to see through Dr Helen's glasses. They suit her don't you think?

Fundraising in Kenya - Eye Go Fishing

November is the time for the annual Eye Go Fishing competition to raise money for the eye centre. Fifteen boats took part based at Aquamarine, just north of Mombasa. The event raised around USD 6,200, including a generous donation from Liaison Insurance Brokers, for the benefit of the eye centre.

The Dave Parry Trophy was won by Brian Emmott fishing from Kusi, and the winning boat was Baloo fished by Miss Nulu and friends.

We would like to thank all those who generously sponsored and supported the event.

Picture below: Brian Emmott receiving the Dave Parry trophy from Dr Helen while Bob Brenneisen looks busy in the background.

Picture below: A happy Miss Nulu receives her prize from Dr Helen.



Fundraising in UK- Powick Primary School does it again!

The pupils of Powick Primary School, Worcester, England have raised money for the eye centre on more than one occasion in the past. This time, on their own initiative two girls Grace and Megan, (aged 8), wrote a play and raised money by asking class mates to attend the performance.

**They were presented with certificates from Dr Helen Roberts in recognition of their kindness of thinking of children in need of eye care in Kenya.
Well done Grace and Megan and all at Powick Primary School !**



October 2007 Donation from UK restores sight

Thanks to the generosity of a UK donor, Mwanapili Suleiman and Hadija Kahindi are happy girls who have undergone cataract surgery and can see again. The photograph shows the two girls, very happy after their operations.



Chizi's Story, compiled by Community Services Manager Kai Kafahamu

Chizi Katambo is a 47-year old lady living in a remote village in Kwale District. She is a widow with three children. Her husband died before she lost her sight.

Said Chizi Katambo to our Rehabilitation Officer; "I am blind and unable to do anything for myself. Nobody at home wants to help me. I have been sitting in this hut for five years. I only go out when being taken to the toilet. See my swollen legs! Smell my dirty body and clothes. Why should I live?"

Chizi was brought to Kwale District Eye Centre in 2003 by a local priest. She was examined by our Ophthalmologist and confirmed to be irreversibly blind. Her blindness was caused by optic atrophy. With some reluctance on her part, Chizi was registered with our rehabilitation services. She learnt how to wash her clothes and utensils and how to prepare tea and cook. She also learned how to move around her home, village and the surrounding villages using a white cane.

Over a period of one year, Chizi became a hero! She fetched water and washed her clothes and those of her children. She could move around unaided. She cultivated her farm. She did everything for herself. In 2005, Chizi benefited from a grant to start an income generating project and 7 she-goats were bought for her. Having taken good care of them she now has a total of 25.

"Rehabilitation has really changed my life. My legs are no longer swollen because I am able to move around. I take a daily bath and wash my clothes. I am able to cook what I want to eat! I no longer stay in my hut all day. And I take care of my goats. Soon I will exchange some goats for a cow. I now have the will to live."

Chizi is a great help to the Eye Centre as she has offered to talk, on our behalf, to other irreversibly blind persons who are reluctant to take up the rehabilitation services we can provide.



Above: Chizi learning confidence with her white cane



Above: Chizi at work on the land

Keeping the Eye Centre clean and tidy

Like all hospitals, paintwork needs to be kept clean for the health of patients and staff. This is our first renovation since the eye centre extension was opened around five years ago being carried out by an enthusiastic team of painters. The photograph below shows the team that carried out the repainting at the eye centre.



Email extract from a UK donor and family visiting Kenya, to an Eyes for East Africa UK trustee also in Kenya.

" ..I was so assured to have it confirmed what a good choice I have made in our support for Dr. Helen & her crew in memory of my wife, Diane. Our visit to KDEC assured ourselves we got it right to support them..... you betcha! We were all so impressed.

Whilst it was good to meet you and the team at KDEC, what a motley bunch we must have appeared having just come off the overnight train from Nairobi to Mombasa, but boy, did we all sleep well that night.

Thank you for the drink and your time on the day of your departure back to UK, it was so rushed.

I will be in touch, when I have more funds to forward to KDEC. I am already checking Teletext for cheap holidays to Mombasa, so it may be I will be returning soon.

Our best wishes.
Bob

September 2007

Charity Golf Day and Dinner in London

On behalf of Dr Helen Roberts, Jim Crow, an EFEA UK trustee, recently attended a charity dinner in London organised by four golfers Mr Anant Shah, and his friends Dilip Mehta, Navin Shah and Shilan Shah. The event was held to raise funds for the eye centre and three other charities. Their most

generous donation of £ 10,000 to 'Eyes' will be used to fund a number of projects at KDEC including :

- **Training of eighteen Social Development Assistants to identify and rehabilitate children and adults with visual impairments.**
- **To provide twenty bicycles to improve effectiveness of trained women's groups. These groups play a key role identification and integration of both low vision and totally blind children into mainstream education.**
- **One hundred cataract operations for patients who cannot afford the cost of surgery.**
- **Teacher training of one totally, irreversibly blind, student who has completed O-level education whose ambition is to train as a Primary School teacher and whose parents are too poor to pay the fees.**
- **Income generating activities for another ten persons with irreversible blindness. This program has proved very successful in creating self-reliance since it started in 2004.**



Above: EFEA UK Trustee Jim Crow (left) with Mr Anant Shah

Ali Omar Bora, ambassador for The Eye Centre From a report by Kai Kafahamu.

Ali Omar Bora, aged 70, was identified as having eye problems by our Community Based Worker in 2004 during door to door visits.

He was asked to come to Kwale District Eye Centre for surgery but he declined because he believed there was no doctor who could restore his sight. His trust was in a local traditional healer who gave him lots of hope on regaining his sight, but, naturally, all in vain. After a further three years of deteriorating sight he eventually went blind.

During a routine eye screening near his village our ophthalmic nurse confirmed that Ali was blind due to cataracts. He had surgery at KDEC and now has good vision in both eyes.

He told our staff: “I thought the time when miracles happened was gone. I was hesitant to come here for surgery because I thought my time to become permanently blind had been reached. I will tell my neighbours who are blind to come to Kwale District Eye Centre to have their sight restored”.



Above: Ali Omar Bora at work

He now works in conjunction with the area Community Based Worker (CBW). The CBW visits him fortnightly to get a list of the patients Ali has identified as being in need of eyesight investigation as a result of talking to people in his community about blindness and the availability of eye care at KDEC. The CBW then arranges a vehicle to collect patients for treatment at KDEC. Through him, children with visual impairment have been identified for integration into mainstream education. Other patients with irreversible blindness have also been identified for rehabilitation services. Ali is a truly committed ambassador for Kwale District Eye Centre.

August 2007

This month we cover a brilliant, simple and no cost initiative by the Eye Centre to help albino children in Kenya, plus another story about eye care in the rural Community.

Sun lotion in motion!

Many of the community workers in the KDEC Low Vision programme are coming across albino children whose lack of pigment melanin in their eyes results in poor eyesight. So, the Eye Centre has recently started a campaign to gather leftover suntan lotion from tourists and visitors to distribute to albino children in Kenya.

Posters asking tourists to donate their unwanted lotions have been placed in several south coast hotels, including LTI Kaskazi, Diani Reef, Leisure Lodge, Pinewood and Nomads as well as in the main shopping centres. Everyone who's heard about the project has been enthusiastic; LTI Kaskazi's General Manager Mr. Thomas Rexwinkel and his staff have kindly asked their guests for help by translating the posters into French and German to guarantee maximum coverage!

The poster boy for the campaign is Sammy, a 5 year old boy from a remote village where he lives with his family. Albinos in Africa suffer in many ways; many die in their early twenties from skin cancer because of a lack of education about their condition, but even armed with knowledge the high cost of suntan lotion puts protection beyond the reach of many Kenyans. Albinos can also have problems being accepted by their communities; in some cultures albinism is associated with bad spirits and albino children are sometimes abandoned by their mothers who believe they bring bad luck. Whilst improving education and integration is a complex undertaking, we can make a difference to the lives of albinos like Sammy by making the simple, life-saving option of suntan lotion available through campaigns like this one. In addition, the lotion collection baskets that have been placed in the hotels are being made by local people with restricted vision and purchased by the Eye Centre, turning this drive into a community affair!

With the help of generous visitors this drive is proving so successful that we've been able to distribute the suntan lotion as far afield as Nairobi, truly "lotions in motion"!



Above: Young albino Sammy

Below: the collection basket at LTI Kaskazi hotel



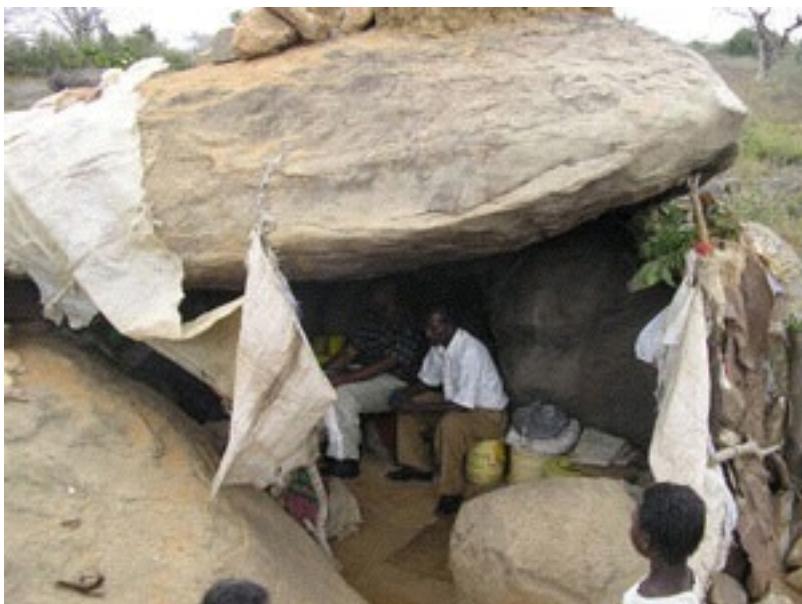
If you plan to visit the south coast of Kenya please support the campaign by leaving behind your surplus sun lotion.

Sight restored to poverty stricken blind cave dweller

From a report by Kai Kafahamu, Manager Community Based programme.
Nyamawi Chiwaya Bemavunda aged 65 years became blind five years ago. He lives in a remote village in Kwale district. He did not seek medical help because he is so very poor.

In June this year, Nyamawi was taken to an eye screening organized by Kwale District Eye Centre (KDEC) and was confirmed blind in both eyes due to cataracts. Later he underwent surgery at KDEC paid for by the Poor Patients Fund and he can now see.

Nyamawi was asked to come to the eye centre for a post-operative follow-up, but he failed to attend as he had no money for his bus fare. Neither did he have money to buy eye drops after he finished the ones provided by KDEC. The Community Based Programme Manager initially found him living in a cave during a routine visit to the village. “I have lived in this cave with my wife for the past six years as I cannot afford even a mud house. I cannot afford to buy my own meals and we rely on neighbours for our one light meal a day. If nobody brings us food we rely on fruits, vegetables and tubers from the bush.”



Above: A cave dweller at home

Nyamawi is only one case of the extreme poverty which exists in Kwale district and its environs. The level of income in the rural areas is very low. Many people cannot afford the already subsidized costs of eye care at KDEC. Often this means children cannot benefit from quality education services. This is why we always ask you to help us to help others.

July 2007

In this edition we feature another UK funding initiative and a report from a member of staff at Kwale District Eye Centre.

More donations in lieu of presents

The idea of donations for the eye centre in lieu of presents is catching on. David and Stella Ingram celebrated their Ruby Wedding in July 07. Their many friends have donated over £1,000 so far (USD 2,000). David Ingram knew Dr Helen Roberts from the time when he had been a consultant ophthalmologist at Sussex Eye Hospital and she was a member of his staff, undergoing training there.

The photograph on the right shows some of the 94 people who joined Davis and Stella in celebrating their Ruby Wedding anniversary; not shown are the Ingram's eight grandchildren, who we thought deserved a mention in this report!

Readers may recall that in October 2006, we highlighted a fundraising idea in the Netherlands when Mr and Mrs Van der Hoeven raised around USD 2,700 through donations in lieu of presents for their Diamond Wedding anniversary.



Above: David and Stella Ingram (marked with the two yellow squares) celebrating their Ruby Wedding anniversary with family and friends

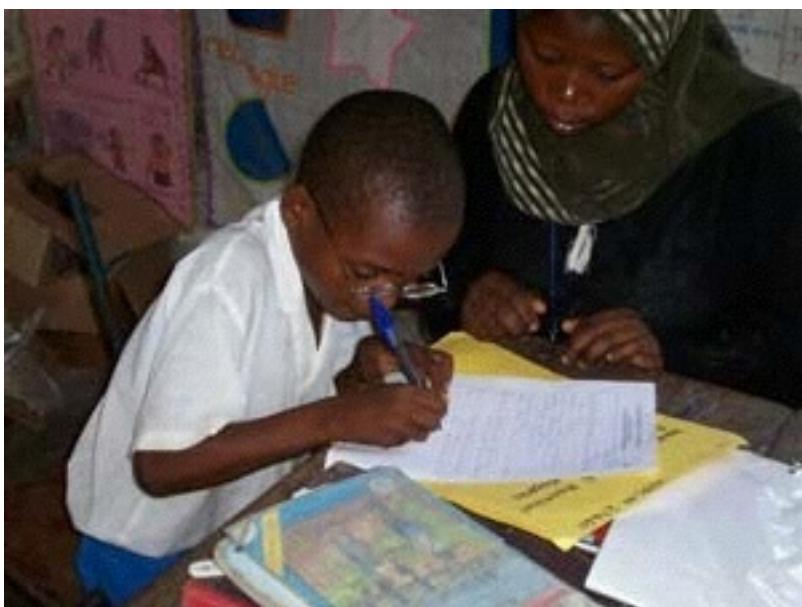
The story of Rai Tsuma

Rai Tsuma spent his first thirteen years not being able to see very well. Reading and writing took him so much longer than everybody else. He could understand well enough when he finally read what was written on the blackboard and immediately knew the answers, but, by the time he had worked out what was being asked of him, the class had moved onto the next question.

His parents had noticed that he had a problem when he was a toddler, but there was no eye doctor nearby and the general hospital told them that he was fine.

One day his teacher attended a training session at KDEC on visual impairment in children. She was amazed to learn about children like Rai who struggled with partial sight and she became our contact teacher in Rai's school. She persuaded his parents to bring him to KDEC where he was given spectacles.

Rai can see much better with his glasses but he still needs to sit very close to the blackboard in order to see. He still needs extra time to complete an exercise but when given that he does well.



Above: Rai working at school with a teacher looking on.

He has moved from 63rd position in the class to second! Now he looks forward to going to university.

Article written by Nzirani Mwakureah, Assistant Vision Therapist, KDEC

June 2007

This month we feature fund raising in UK and a report on an eye care awareness study at a school in Mombasa.

Sponsored bicycle ride

Firstly we have to thank Chris Hill for his magnificent effort in raising over £1000 (USD 2,000) by undertaking a sponsored cycle ride from one end of the UK to the other during the period 10th to 27th May. For those not familiar with UK geography this is from the most extreme tip of Cornwall in the South West, to John o' Groats at the top right hand corner of Scotland.

In a report submitted to the editor at the end of his trip, Chris wrote:
“I finally made it to John o' Groats at lunchtime after 17 days on the road, some foul weather and 1,061 miles. Fortunately I had not a single puncture nor any mechanical (or bodily – except from the effects of sitting in the saddle for so long) problems.

There were a few scary moments including crossing a major bridge in Cheshire in a gale with three lanes of traffic and lorries swishing past at 60mph.

Otherwise we had some glorious rides, especially through the highlands of Scotland where the terrain was flatter than in Cornwall, Devon and Somerset (definitely the worst stretch) and the weather improved after that and we occasionally had a following wind.

I picked up a few donations along the way and have collected about £500 so far. [Editor's note : this has now risen to over £ 1,000 and donations are still coming in]

I was able to talk to a lot of people about the work of the Eye Centre that I met en route. My cycling companion was cycling for another charity and some of his supporters generously gave me money. I had an ‘official’ photo taken at John o' Groats as shown below. NB the sign to Kwale District Eye Centre on the left of the pole.”



Above: Chris Hill ready for the start of the journey



Above: Chris at John O'Groats - the end of his journey

Eye care awareness program in Mombasa school

Braeburn International school in Mombasa recently conducted a school work module for year 5 pupils entitled " seeing the world".

In their studies they learnt about the different senses, microscopes, telescopes and problems with eyesight; colour blindness, short and long sightedness amongst other things.

The climax of this module was a visit to KDEC to see cataract surgery performed by Dr Helen Roberts (see photograph below).



May 2007

This month we start with some wonderful photographs taken during an eye safari held in the Masai Mara region adjacent to the well know game reserve. The work of Dr Helen and her team was done during the eight day event away from Kwale District Eye Centre.

This is followed by an item which illustrates that there is much more to the Eye Centre than just cataract surgery. It tells the story of a long term blind patients who is helped to become a useful member of the community.

KDEC takes to the Field- Eye Safari in the Masai Mara
Some facts from Dr Helen Roberts about the eye safari.

In April Kwale District Eye Centre carried out a surgical safari on the edge of the Masai Mara with Medical and Educational Aid to Kenya.

In eight days we performed 162 operations, of which 100 were cataract removal with intraocular lens implants, and 59 were rotations of the upper lid to prevent scarring and blindness from trachoma.

All the patients were Masai who live in manyattas (small villages where the huts are built with cattle dung and grass) . These people receive few medical services and were happy and grateful to have their sight saved.

One of the most important things in the long term which we did was to teach the resident nurse, Peter Langat, to perform lid surgeries to prevent blindness from trachoma. We left him with the surgical kit and sufficient supplies to perform 10 lid operations and treat 200 people with active trachoma. We have worked out a way in which he can obtain more sutures as soon as he needs them.



Above: This lady had surgery in both eyes to remove her cataracts. When she arrived before her surgery she was quiet and withdrawn. The day that the second eye pad was removed she was happily looking around enjoying the activities she could see at the clinic.

Two elderly Masai enjoying breakfast after having their sight restored.

Come on, hurry up and take the pad off, I want to see!

The 100th cataract patient at Sekenani.



Can you see as well as I?

Patiently waiting for eye drops after the pads had been removed.
Able to see again for the first time in years after the eye safari in the Masai Mara.



Field surgery in the Sekenani local health centre.
Restoration of sight after surgery at Sekenani makes a hard life a little easier.
After surgery .

Wakesho gives up begging for a living.

Compiled by: Kai Kafahamu, Community Projects Team Leader

Wakesho Fundi is a 25 year-old lady, who has lived all her life in a village in Kwale district. She became blind due to measles when she was aged 5 and remained hidden in her mother's hut until she was 15 years old when she was allowed out to go begging for income generation in a famous mosque near her home.

After 3 years of begging, she was taken to an eye screening site to have her eyes checked and if possible, have her sight restored. This was after a neighbour had successful cataract surgery at Kwale District Eye Centre. On examination by our Ophthalmic nurse, Wakesho was told her blindness was irreversible. She and her mother burst into tears! They did not believe what the nurse had told them.

"Why should God do this to my daughter?" They walked home filled with despair and she continued begging for another 5 years.

Wakesho was visited at her home by our Rehabilitation officers to try and persuade her and her relatives to accept our counselling and rehabilitation services for the blind. After 6 visits in one year, she and her parents eventually agreed to accept our help.

"Let me try to see if the rehabilitation services will enable me lead an independent, productive and dignified life!" Wakesho said. "The examples quoted by the Rehabilitation officer during our discussion seem realistic. I know some of the people mentioned" said Wakesho's mother.

Wakesho was trained by our Rehabilitation officers in orientation and mobility skills, and independent living skills. The training took five days at the Eye Centre. She then put these skills into practice at her home and they changed her life. She is now able to fetch water and wash her clothes and those of her mother. She is able to prepare meals for the family of 6 people. Wakesho now lives an independent, productive and dignified life and helps her parents on their farm. She is a respected lady in the village and attends every ceremony. She told us, "I was just trying to see if rehabilitation services would change my life for the better. I have now proved that there is ability in blindness. I will never turn into a beggar again. It's idleness which turned me into a beggar. God bless Kwale District Eye Centre."



Above: Wakesho learning to sort beans by feel.

April 2007

The UK 'Eye Give' project

This month we feature some patients who have benefited from your donations made both in UK and here in Kenya.

Readers may remember the Eye Give project launched by Eyes for East Africa UK last September. Over the Christmas period this raised a considerable sum of money. Here are details of some of the patients, who have had their sight restored or lives improved as a result of this generosity. More stories will be included in future news editions.

Saidi

A 72-year old man with a family history of diabetes. He was diagnosed with glaucoma and advised to have an operation (a trabeculectomy), to minimise the damage caused by this condition. He was reluctant to have surgery at first. His vision started deteriorating and after further counselling together with advice another post-operative patient, he agreed to have his surgery done.

He is now happy that he opted for the surgery to prevent further loss of vision and pain in the eye. Thanks to Eye Give, his sight has been preserved.



Above: Saidi being interviewed at KDEC following his surgery

Nadzua Nyota

This 42-year old lady went blind in 2005 due to optic atrophy. She was deserted by her husband due to her disability. Now a single mother of two, she has to fend for her small children. She accepted our rehabilitation services, which included how to weed her vegetable plot, although blind, without any problems, as a means of helping her children.

After attended training organised by KDEC on Orientation & Mobility and Daily Living Skills, she showed interest in starting income generating activities as a means of earning a living for herself and her family. Thanks to Eye Give, this is becoming a reality to her as she received two goats.



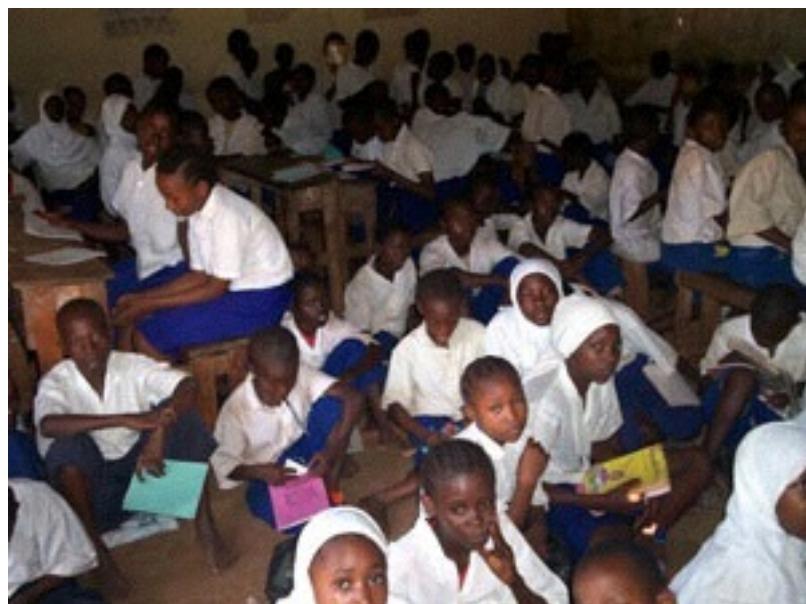
Above: Nadzua with one of the goats she received.



Above: Our rehab officer, Mwanasiti showing Nadzua how to weed

Jumanne, a 14 year old boy

Jumanne first attended KDEC 10 years ago with juvenile cataracts in both eyes, KDEC paid for his surgery. He successfully underwent surgery and was fitted with glasses at that time, which were paid for by KDEC. He is also mentally challenged and is currently in class 3 at the age of 14. Most of his classmates are aged 9 years. Eye Give paid for his latest glasses to enable him to cope well in class.



Above: Jumanne in his classroom

Biasha Mohamed

56-year old Biasha is a widow with a history of poor vision. She has no children.

She was referred to the clinic by one of our committee members.

Biasha complained of not being able to do normal household activities as she could not see clearly.

We provided her with a pair of reading glasses thanks to Eye Give funding, and she could not hide the joy of being able to cut her nails again while still in the clinic.

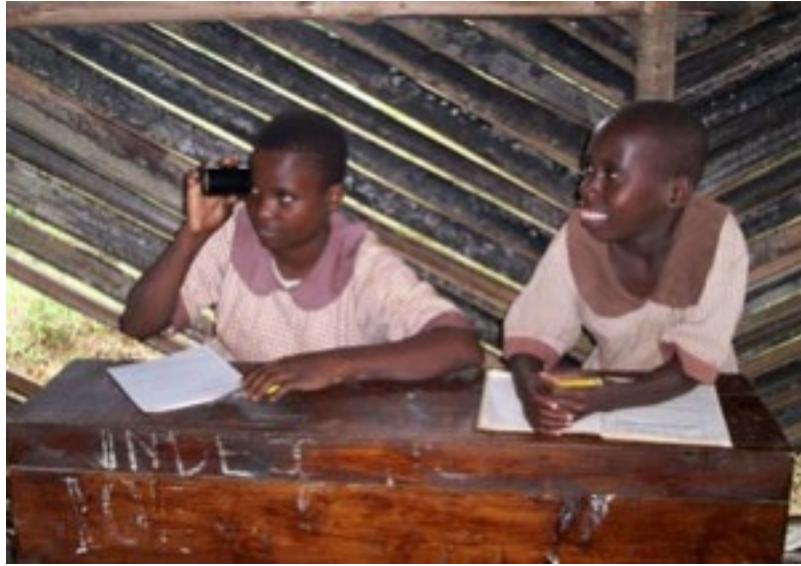


Above: Biasha Mohamed

Mueni, a 16year old girl

She is mentally challenged and goes to a special school. The distance between the school and home is about 6kms and she has to walk this distance daily.

Mueni has two other siblings and because of her problems, the mother (a single parent) does not care much about her. Mueni used to miss school because of its distance from home.



Above: Mueni with new telescope in class.

The teacher was very much concerned about this because she was a bright girl in class despite her reading problems.

The teacher decided to intervene, and summoned a meeting between the school inspectors, the mother, the KDEC Low Vision Therapist and the area community worker. There had been attempts in the past to get the mother to bring Mueni to KDEC for assessment but to no avail. The meeting agreed that Mueni would get the relevant reading aid and the mother would make further attempts to get her to school on a daily basis.

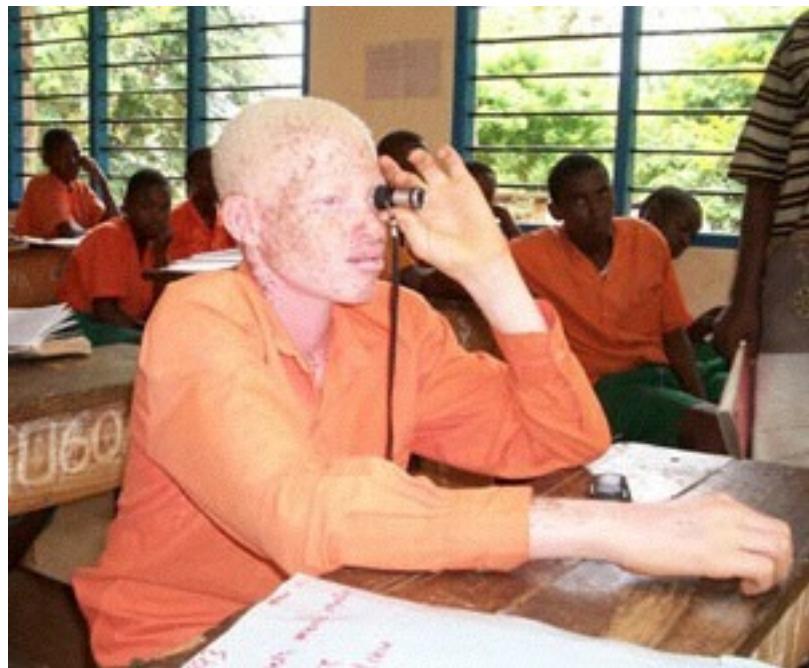
She is now doing well in class, and thanks to the telescope funded by Eye Give is able to read and write clearly.

Mwatela

He is an albino orphan who stays with his aunt. Like most albinos he has problems with light and, because of poor sight, bumps into things while walking. His schooling was delayed and suffered because of these sight problems.

He was identified as being in need of help by our area community worker (CBW) during a Low Vision awareness meeting after members of the public who knew Mwatela directed the CBW to his aunt's home.

The CBW persuaded the aunt and Mwatela to go to KDEC for assessment and this was agreed.



Above: Mwatela using the telescope in class.

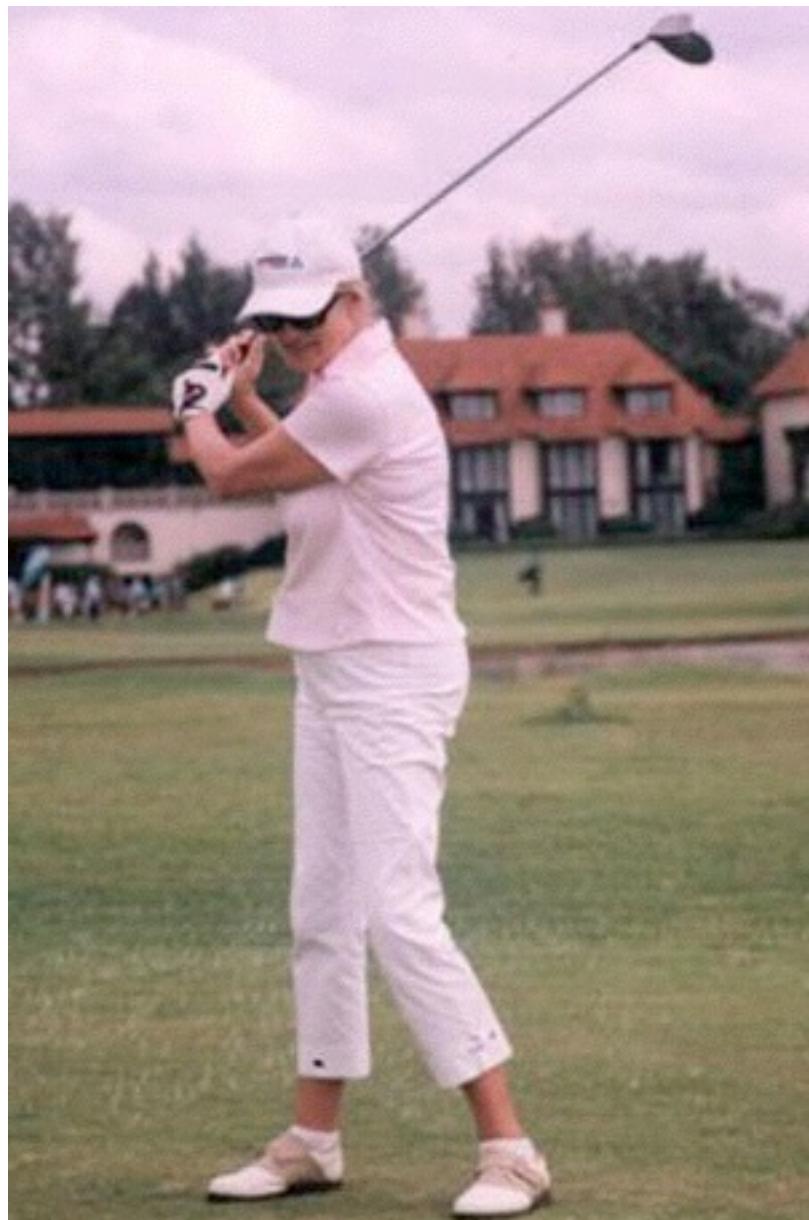
Thanks to Eye Give funding we were able to provide him with a telescope for reading. We recently visited him in school and is doing well in class. The community members are very happy to have played their part in ensuring that Mwatela reached help.

Fundraising in Kenya -Golfing for Sight in Nairobi

Susan Blanetti was Lady Captain of Windsor Golf Hotel and Country Club in Nairobi during 2006.

At the end of her time in office, she made a donation to Kwale District Eye Centre after reading the article about Kwale District Eye Centre published in a Kenya Travel News magazine.

Her donation was enough to pay for three people to have their sight restored. The three patients who benefited from this donation had cataract surgery in February 2007 are shown here. They asked us to thank Susan for helping them.



Above: Susan Blansetti putting her sight-saving skills into practice



Above: Sidi Rai



Above: Aline Mwambegu



Above: Mbethi Samuel

March 2007

The Kwale District Eye Centre Charity Shop

This month we feature the progress of our Charity Shop and Awareness Centre.

In March 2005 we reported on the opening of the Charity Shop in the Shopping Centre at Diani, an area 20 kms South of the eye centre and one

which acts as a focus for visitors and holiday makers from the many nearby beach hotels.

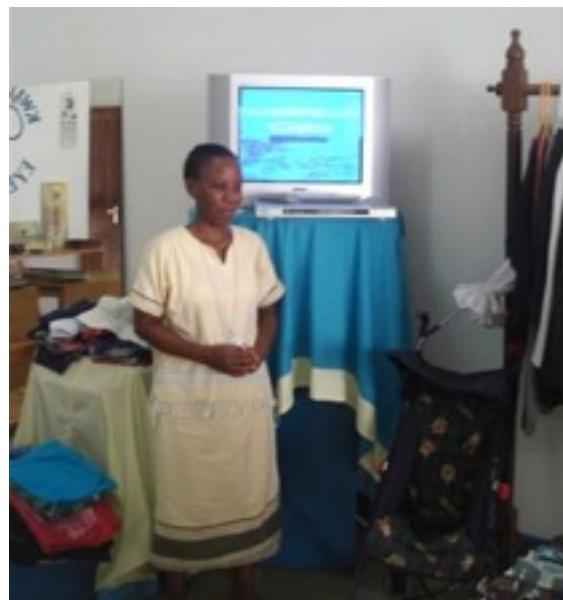
To recap, one of our long time committee members, Jan King, who runs the popular 'Globe Café' in the shopping centre, had the wonderful idea of opening a charity shop. Together with Luciana Parazzi, another committee member who runs a series of shops in a hotel, they opened the ' Kwale District Eye Centre Charity Shop' - better known locally as the 'eyeball shop'. In Kenya the concept of a charity shop is unfamiliar. It took a while for the local Kenyans to realise that the prices were so reasonable that they, as well as the tourists, were able to buy things in our shop.

There is a huge range of items for sale, from second hand clothes, kitchen utensils, crockery, books and toys to souvenir items sold on commission, such as delightful wooden birds, table mats and key rings.

The shop functions strongly as an awareness centre for the eye hospital. Many tourists visit Kenya and, when they see the poverty and the basic challenges which the average rural Kenyan faces, would like to give something back. The awareness centre offers them a chance to do that. A short DVD plays throughout the day in the shop, enabling people to learn about the Centre and how they can contribute. Many tourists and visitors take time out of their holiday to visit the Centre itself and then go home and raise funds on our behalf.

Victoria, the charity shop manager told us: "If you are coming to Diani and would like to help, please drop-in items which we can sell. You might, for example, want to leave some lightweight clothes, rather than take them back to colder climates."

Thank you all for your support.



Above: Charity shop manager Victoria in the shop



Above: Committee Member Jan King at the shop

February 2007

More sight restored thanks to the Poor Patients fund

Mebakari, now a beautiful, independent eighteen year old girl, first came to Kwale District Eye Centre (KDEC) with her father when she was eight. Her sight had gradually been getting worse, and had reached the point where she could hardly see.

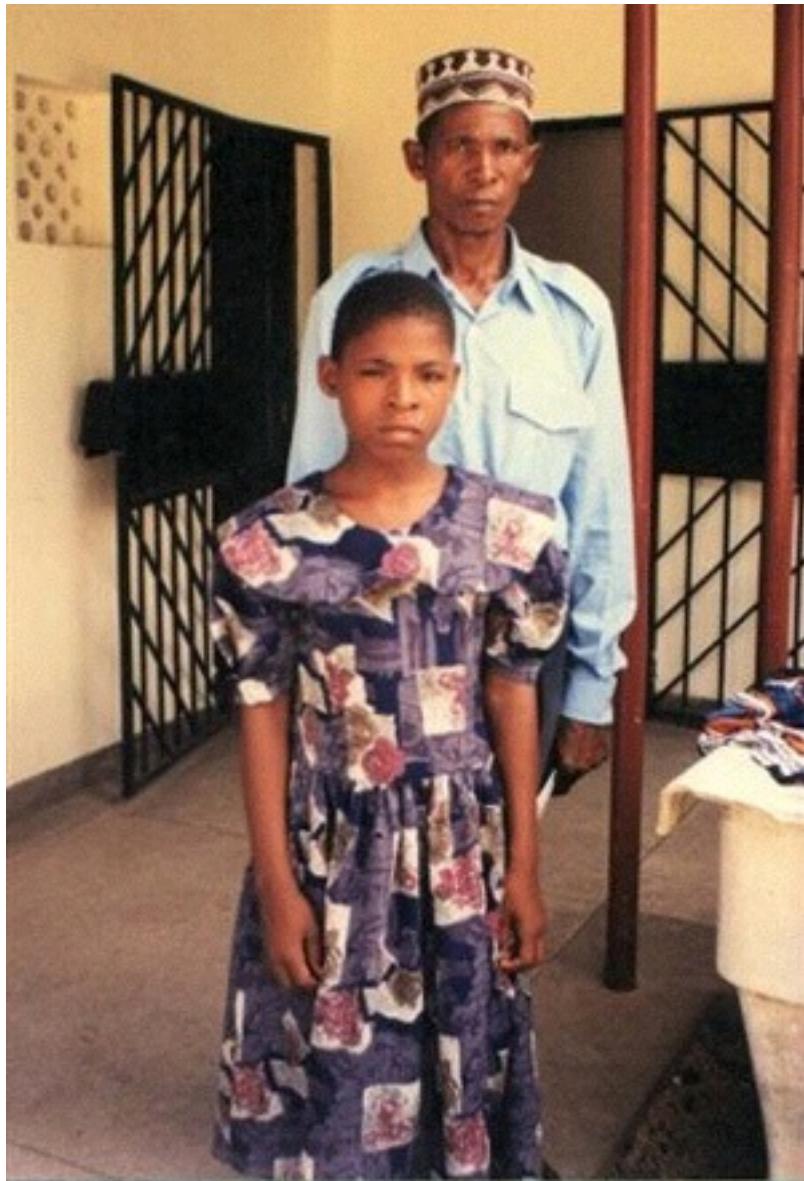
Her mother, fearing the curse of more blind children, left the marriage. Mebakari had cataracts. These were becoming more dense with time, so much so that she was almost blind when we met her at the Eye Centre. Our Poor Patients' Fund paid for her cataract surgery. After many visits to ensure that his daughter could see adequately after the surgery, her father humbly took his daughter to meet her mother and show her that the curse had been lifted.

She was delighted and returned to her matrimonial home at once. Mebakari went to school for the first time and did well there. Nearly ten years later Mebakari's father was slightly injured with a stick in his left eye. He came to the eye centre where, fortunately, it was realised that little damage was done.

He recognised Dr Helen and thanked her for restoring Mebakari's sight and his marriage. They agreed that Mebakari would come herself to visit the Doctor.

The next week, sure enough, there she was with a shy smile. She had just sat her final school exams, having been given access to an education which she could not have attempted had she remained blind.

**She told the entranced staff, “I would like to be an eye doctor and work for Kwale District Eye Centre so that I can give children back their sight”
Well, maybe, one day she will.**



Above: Mebakari and father at the Eye Centre in 1999



Above: Mebakari in 2007

The Salisbury Big Band in UK does it again

Some readers will remember the news item a year ago, which described how around £3,000 was raised for the Eye Centre at a Charity Big Band Evening, thanks to the efforts of the Salisbury Big Band and its supporters.

Following this success they agreed to repeat the event in conjunction with Eyes for East Africa UK. In January, big band enthusiasts and supporters of the Eye Centre filled the Concorde Club, a well known jazz music venue, near Southampton. Again a worthwhile sum was raised to help Kwale District Eye Centre treat patients in need of eye care.

Jane Dean, one of the EFEA UK trustees said last year that she hoped the enterprise would become an annual event – it looks as if her hope has come

true. We'd like to express our thanks to all those who made the evening such a success.



Above: some of the members of the band preparing for a big blow!

January 2007

Eye Give! makes a hit

Its amazing!

We had no idea how successful the project would be when it was launched in UK in September.

The initial response from our UK based supporters has been outstanding. We would like to thank all of you who kindly made donations approaching USD 2000 in the run up to Christmas 2006.

Amongst the patients who will benefit from your kind donations are children and adults who can now have a total of 16 cataract operations between them. Others who will benefit include seven children with low vision plus a number of albino children.

We must not forget to mention the goats which will help rehabilitation of former patients. We understand from a major UK charity that donating a goat was the most popular gift for distance giving to Africa at Christmas 2006. Rumour tells us of one small child in UK who wondered how Christmas wrapping paper would be put round the goat when it was sent in the post to Kenya . Unfortunately we don't know the parental reply to this fundamental question!

Eyes for East Africa (UK) have told us that they know of further donations expected to be made in the next few weeks, pointing out that Eye Give ! is

ideal for Birthdays, Anniversaries and special occasions and not just for Christmas .

In the next few weeks we shall be providing information to individual donors about those who have benefited from their kindness. We believe this is a unique feature of the Eye Give ! scheme.

In the meantime here are details of two patients who have already benefited from Eye Give !

Asha

Asha was born with congenital cataracts.

She needed urgent surgery to remove her cataracts so that she could see for the first time in her life.

Thanks to Eye Give ! Asha was able to undergo surgery.

Asha's mother would like to thank our generous donor who enabled her baby girl to see rather than face a life of blindness

The photograph on the below shows Asha.



Abdalla

Abdalla was born blind because of cataract.

Fortunately for Abdalla, the mother had a friend who was at Kwale District Eye Centre when we were reviewing a child similar to Abdalla who had had surgery and been cured.

Abdalla's mother listened as her friend passionately told the story of the mother's delight when her child saw for the first time after surgery. The very next day she took all her savings and made her way to KDEC, 53 kilometres (a four mile walk to the bus stop and then two bus rides) from her home.

She was told at KDEC that her son's sight could be restored but that it would cost ksh 5,000 (around USD 75). All her hopes were dashed; how was she going to be able to afford that much?

She broke down in tears and explained that it would take her many years to find that much money. And the operation was urgent. The doctor had said that if Abdalla doesn't see soon he will never learn to see.

But the staff at KDEC reassured her; 'Don't worry, we will find help for you. There are people many miles away in another country who want to help Abdalla see'.

The mother couldn't really understand why people whom she had never met wanted to help her child but she was so happy that someone cared.

Abdalla had his surgery and was entered onto our low vision programme, so that he may be followed up as his eyes grow. He will need spectacles which will change every six months or so.

He will need to learn very fast in order to catch up with his ability to see and our vision therapist will teach his mother how to do this. Then he will need help at school and bifocal glasses!

Abdalla's mother would like to thank the person who gave Abdalla his sight back through the Eye Give programme. She knows that he now faces a sighted life instead of a blind one.

The photo on the below shows Abdalla.

Once again, many thanks to you all for supporting the Eye Give! project and helping others to see.

