

Monthly News Reports 2008

December 2008

The Deaf and Blind Children

Nzuga Nzuki, aged 2, is deaf and blind. Following physiotherapy and epilepsy management treatment, he no longer suffers fits up to 6 times a day, and now only suffers minor seizures once a week. He is currently on home-based training and learning how to identify and play with objects and people. Abdalla and Veronica are just two of the children who have now been fitted with hearing aids through the generosity of the Lions Clubs Hearing Centre in Mombasa. Thanks to this kindness, these children can now communicate more easily with their family and friends.



Above: Nzuga and his mother

More fundraising in Europe

Money from Germany delivered by bicycle

Sybille and Walter Hartung heard about Kwale District Eye Centre during a holiday to Kenya, when talking to Luciana who runs a shop in the hotel at which they were staying.

Following a visit to the Eye Centre, they were so impressed – and touched by the many stories – that they vowed to raise money on their return to Germany.

The amount they achieved was almost equivalent to USD 13,000, which they decided to deliver, personally, in a most unusual way.

Walter is an avid traveller and frequently undertakes intrepid journeys on his bicycle with a friend.

This particular trip started at Mombasa Airport from whence they cycled to Kwale District Eye Centre to present the cheque to Dr Roberts.

The two photographs show the cyclists arriving at the Eye Centre and the presentation of the cheque to Dr Helen Roberts.



Rotary Clubs in UK continue to support the Eye Centre

We are very grateful to the numerous Rotary Clubs in UK who have supported the eye centre during 2008 with donations totalling around USD 9,500. Interestingly, many of these donations have come about following visits by

their members to KDEC whilst on holiday, or to our local Club, the Rotary Club of Diani.

Clubs in the UK who have made significant donations are included in the list of 'Our Supporters' shown on the 'Donations' page on this site.

November 2008

The KDEC Rehabilitation Programme

The Rehabilitation Programme for the irreversibly blind was established in 2003. Since then, annual rehabilitation training for both patients and their carers has raised awareness throughout Kwale District.

Barka is blind. She is a young, single mother who lives in a nearby village. Her young son could not attend school full-time, because he had to care for his mother. Now that Barka has been trained and helped by the Rehabilitation Programme, she feels far more independent, and her son can attend school all the time. She says: "I thank the programme for enabling me to have a more improved and independent life, and providing my son with time to go to school".



Above: Barka with her son

Fundraising in the UK

Donation from Eton College

The world famous and historic English college near Windsor Castle has played a part in supporting the eye centre. As the result of a collection at a Sunday Evening Service in the college chapel almost USD 500 was donated to help patients too poor to pay for treatment.

This generosity has enabled the Eye Centre to carry out cataract operations on 10 people.

Cataract remains the commonest cause of blindness in Kenya. People become blind and remain so because they cannot access affordable eye care. A 15 minute operation costing around USD 50, under local anaesthetic can restore their sight and quality of life.

Sophie Dodds does it again!

Some readers may remember reading about Sophie Dodds, younger daughter of Eyes for East Africa UK's trustee Abigail Dodds, who helped to raise around USD 450 in November 2006 at her 4th birthday party.

With her birthday approaching again, the family decided to host another special party to celebrate her 6th birthday. In preference to bringing a gift to the party, Sophie and her family asked for donations to be made to EFEA (UK).

18 friends from school and elsewhere came to the Birthday party and were entertained by Magician Russ and Dave the Wonder Dog. Everyone, parents included enjoyed the magic show, and raised around USD 250 at the party for the benefit of the eye centre.

In recognition of the fundraising success, Sophie was presented with another certificate from Dr Helen Roberts MBE, Medical Director KDEC.

The money raised has been channelled through the Eye Give project, described on our 'Shop' page, to fund one child and one adult who are blind through cataract to have operations to make them see again. It will also buy a goat so a blind person can earn money for themselves and their family. As Sophie told her Mum, "I hope that you feel proud like me that we have helped blind people at Dr Helen's clinic".



Above: Sophie receiving her certificate from magician Russ Stokes (www.magic4kids.co.uk)

October 2008

All months at KDEC are busy but October is particularly so as can be seen by the range of events contained in this month's report. Marathons appear to be a popular way of raising awareness and funds this month for KDEC fundraising supporters both in Kenya and UK, but first a few words about World Sight Day.

World Sight Day

This event takes place annually in October to increase awareness of the problem of blindness in the world.

In the developing world it is estimated that half of the 35 million people who are blind need not have become so.

We think one of best ways of getting any message across to the community is through the children.

In the photograph on the right we see staff from KDEC, whose aim is to bring affordable accessible eye care to the community, showing school children how it must feel to be blind.



Above: School children learning to appreciate what it must be like to be blind

Eyecare near the game parks

Thanks to the generosity of a UK sponsor and with support from Pollman's, a local tour company, funding was available to carry out seven cataract operations on patients living near Taita Hills Wildlife Sanctuary, some 160 kms Northwest of Mombasa.

In the photograph we see the fortunate patients who had their sight restored together with Pollman's driver.



Fundraising in Kenya - The Goat Derby

You may have heard of the famous horse race in UK called 'The Derby' which takes place at Epsom. Well, here on the Kenya coast south of Mombasa we have our equivalent called the 'Goat Derby'. It is an annual fundraising event organised by the East African Women's League.

All the ladies dressed in their very best; vying for the prize of best hat. There was a fancy dress competition for the kids, a classic car rally and a stall selling crab sandwiches and champagne.

The eye centre is one of the benefiting charities each year. This year KDEC were out in full force with banners, boards and brochures to illustrate our work.

We instigated a blind race (using children instead of goats) to demonstrate how people rendered temporarily blind (with a blind-fold) can be led safely around the course at an astonishing speed. We offered the public their chance to try their hand at microsurgery by skinning a tomato under the operating microscope 'staggeringly difficult' was one report.

We also offered eye tests, including a pressure check of the eye in exchange for a small donation to charity.

Meanwhile, despite the heat, the goats, with their trainers, ran the course while spectators placed their bets.

A good time was had by all.

(Editors's note: A spokesperson for the goats was not available for comment; one punter was heard regretting there were no goat eyeballs for sale after the event.)



Above: They're off !! Scene of frantic action at the Goat Derby

Fundraising in Kenya - The Nairobi Marathon

Not content to sit and wait while others raised funds to help babies blinded from cataract, four of our staff volunteers to go to Nairobi (600 km away) and take part in the Standard Chartered Bank marathon to raise awareness.

Here are the team exhausted after their 600 km bus ride, having just completed the marathon. The following day it was another 600km bus ride back to the centre, where they immediately returned to work screening patients in the field in the heat all day.

With staff like this no wonder we are beating preventable blindness in Kenya!



Above: The KDEC team wearing their Christoffel Blinden Mission tee shirts after the marathon in Nairobi

UK Fundraising - The London Parks Half Marathon

Long term supporter of KDEC, Tom Parkinson, decided to fundraise by taking part in the London Parks Marathon on 12th October. A brave decision, as he had not run since leaving school many years previously.

Thanks to his many friends and colleagues he easily surpassed his funding target by raising the equivalent of over 5,000 US dollars. A magnificent sum! Many thanks to Tom from Dr Helen, KDEC staff and all the patients who will benefit from his achievement.



Above: Tom Parkinson after the marathon, showing off his 'Eyes for East Africa' T-shirt

September 2008

This month we highlight the treatment of children with low vision and how they can be helped to lead more normal lives by Kwale District Eye Centre. Also featured is Dr Stefan Vogel, one of the many volunteers who play their part in making the eye centre such a successful enterprise.

Mwanasha's Story compiled by Mohamed Maulidi Almasi, Vision Therapist.

Mwanasha is looked after by her grandmother as her mother is dead and she never knew her father. Granny accepted that Mwanasha was not very bright, as she did so badly at school. When Mwanasha explained that she couldn't see the blackboard, her Grandmother blamed it on her neighbour who, she thought, had cast a spell on the two of them.

Nothing Mwanasha's teacher said would persuade Granny otherwise and she certainly wasn't going to waste money going to the eye centre. That wasn't how one lifted curses. She went from village to village consulting traditional healers for her granddaughter's sight problem.

The curse remained and Mwanasha dropped out of school aged thirteen because she was unable to learn.

But Kwale District Eye Centre doesn't wait for people to come to the clinic. One of the first lessons we learnt when we began nearly fifteen years ago was that people often need help to reach help.

Mwanasha has optic atrophy, finally diagnosed at a field screening at a local primary school. There is no treatment, but a telescope, paid for by a donor, enabled her to see the blackboard at last.

Armed with her telescope, Mwanasha returned to school. She is doing well, competing with girls her own age and she has lots of friends. She is much happier than she was stuck at home with only her granny for company. The teachers and Mwanasha's community are amazed; 'We thought she was stupid' they said 'but it was only because she couldn't see properly!' ' The photos below show some of the work of the Low Vision Unit.



Above: Low vision screening in a primary school using our new screening charts



Above: Child undergoing colour vision testing, a process of low vision screening



Above: Child under assessment in the Low Vision Unit at KDEC

Dr Stefan Vogel

Dr Stefan, as he is affectionately known, has been visiting Kwale District Eye Centre each September for nine years.

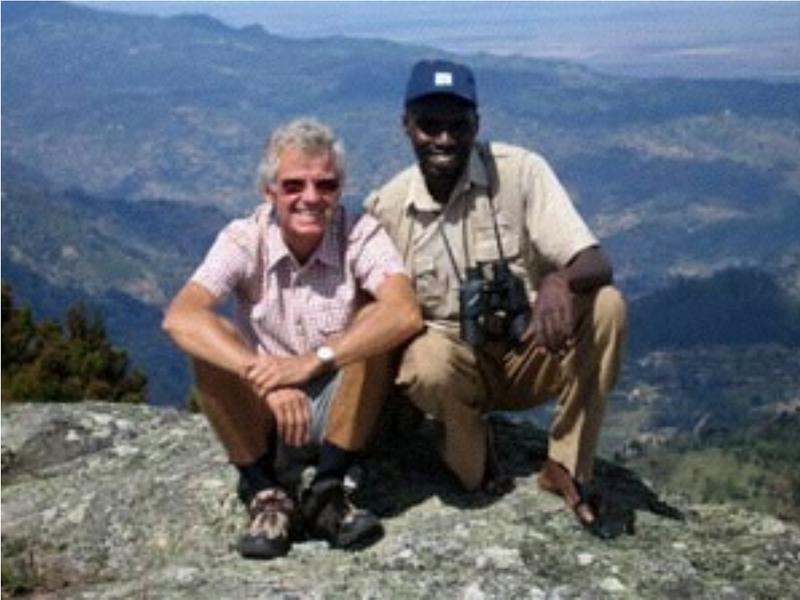
Dr Vogel taught post graduate students of ophthalmology at Nairobi University in the early 1990s. He and his family left, with reluctance, to return to Germany where he now runs a busy private practice.

To come to KDEC and help Dr Helen and her team, Dr Stefan is part sponsored by the German Prevention of Blindness Committee and pays many of the expenses himself.

He taught Dr Helen the technique of phacoemulsification and continues to be invaluable at sourcing and mending the more technical equipment. He has watched with pride as the clinic has grown from a small establishment performing 600 operations per year to one operating 1800.

Kwale District Eye Centre look forward very much to his visit each year and Dr Helen especially enjoys his excellent professional and moral support.

'All work and no play' is not good as the saying goes, and Dr Stefan is allowed a few days off to have some fun; usually white water rafting or climbing a mountain. The photo below shows Stefan enjoying the summit of 'Yale' near Taita with his guide, during a break from work at Kwale District Eye Centre.



Above: Dr Stefan enjoying a break from hard work.

August 2008

Website Update - Links to two videos

Firstly the chance to own a DVD entitled 'Helen Roberts- Visionary' is available through the Shop page. You can now own a professionally made 33 minute video from Journeyman Pictures about Dr Helen Roberts MBE and her work at Kwale District Eye Centre.



It tells the remarkable story of how the Eye Centre has grown over the years into an Eye Hospital thanks to the drive and commitment of Dr Helen as she is known to everyone. The commentary by Joanna Lumley, the actress, recounts the story of Dr Helen the ophthalmologist who has restored sight to around 1,500 people each year.

See our 'Shop' page for more details. A proportion of the sale price will go to help the Eye Centre.

Secondly, a four-minute Video about the Eye Centre.

There is a link on the About Us page to this video made in Kenya. It summarises the work of the eye centre and is available at no cost. It is a useful aid for fundraisers as well as an overview of the work of KDEC for

those visiting the page for the first time. Copies of this DVD are available through the contacts listed on the About Us page.

UK fundraising- Portsmouth University Business School raises more funds.

We would like to thank The Portsmouth University Business School featured in our February news page this year for raising a further sum, approximately USD 300, mostly through the sale of books, for the benefit of our Poor Patients Fund. This resource pays for surgery of those patients too poor to afford the cost of their treatment. The three photographs below show some of the patients who have had their sight restored thanks to this donation.





**Ndzumu
Omar
Mwanamani**

Donations in memory of the late Mrs Sandra Finch

Friends of the late Mrs Sandra Finch made donations in her memory of around USD 700 to the Eye Centre through Eyes for East Africa UK. Mrs Finch, who suffered from a major back disability, was a regular UK visitor to the Kenya Coast. She was particularly interested in dolphin watching from a dhow in spite of her disability and was a regular visitor to Watamu on the North Coast where a friend of the Eye Centre first met her.

Her first trip was such a success she went out four times in the first week and many times over the following years. She was very popular with the boat crew as her presence was almost always a guarantee that they would see dolphins.

She was always busy helping other people, the local schools in Africa, orphanages and latterly the eye centre became a great favourite of hers. She would often visit us and bring out items for us from UK. Having no relatives other than her infirm father aged 100, her only wish when she died was that any donations to her memory should benefit to the eye centre.

Perhaps more of our supporters might remember us in their wills ?

July 2008

Field Trip Report

Bob Miller has previously contributed to our news reports in October and December 2007. Here he recounts his experiences of a recent field trip with the staff of Kwale District Eye Centre.

My many trips to Kenya usually consist of a period on safari followed by a few days on the coast to unwind; with the bits in between bumping around in the back of a bus. However, those bits in between are just as important to my appreciation and understanding of Kenya. On my previous visit to Kenya for my 'fix' of African Wildlife, I made a chance remark to Dr. Helen Roberts asking if I could accompany her on a field trip to a more remote part of Kenya next time I visited. Imagine my delight to be offered the chance of accompanying the staff of the Eye Centre who were about to conduct a field eye clinic.

With the very patient Kai Kafahamu, manager of the Community Based Programme, and his team taking me under their wing, the first stop was at a primary school not too far from Kwale town about a one hour drive from the eye centre. On arrival, there were about a hundred people who had been queuing patiently well before we got there for their eye tests, knowing it would not be completed for another few hours. It's remarkable to think that many of these patients walked a considerable distance just to get to the field clinic which indicates the effectiveness and all the hard work done earlier by the team to persuade the villagers to have their eyes tested.

To my amazement those requiring cataract surgery were taken straight from the screening to the Eye Centre, where they would spend the night before undergoing surgery the next day. Dr. Helen explained that the instant follow up was to avoid them going 'walkabout' and not ever getting to the Eye clinic. The following day they would be sent home with their eyesight restored. The next stop was to a lady in her 30's called Saumu, whose story was featured in the May 2005 newsletter. To recap; she had lost all her sight, but due to the training and rehabilitation given by the Eye Centre staff, she saved her marriage, and now is able to carry out many household activities including cooking, cleaning and tending to their vegetable garden. Despite the hardships and deprivation I was astounded by her politeness and was knocked out by her beaming smile.

The next visit was to a remote village. It was not an easy journey and we travelled in a 4 X 4 vehicle many miles down almost impassable tracks and through waterlogged crossings. We had come to see a two year old child, who, because of complications at birth, was virtually blind and deaf. With the help of the Eye Centre staff, physiotherapy and education for the mother, a gain in weight and an improvement in the quality of life of the child has been achieved. This is a life long commitment by the Eye Centre.



Above: Patients queuing for eye tests at the primary school



Above: Saumu, the rehabilitated blind lady



Above: The near deaf blind two year old

Our fourth and final visit was a routine check up on a gentleman who had previously undergone eye surgery. When we got there he was out: Were we disappointed ? Not a bit, he was helping out at a funeral in the village. Imagine the self esteem of someone who may have felt only a burden to the family and community, returning to play his useful and participating part.

THAT'S THE SHEER MAGIC OF THE EYE CENTRE

In a world of dubious heroes, to me, Dr. Helen Roberts and staff stand out as a beacon in this unequal world. It's also reassuring to know that your donations are put to such a good cause.

Bob Miller.

June 2008

This month we report on another successful fundraising Diani Rules and an eye camp run in Northeast Kenya at the request of the Ministry of Health.

The 2008 Record Breaking Diani Rules

The games were started in 1990 to try and persuade people that the Kenya coast is still fun, even in the rainy season.

Since 1993 friends of the Eye Centre have worked tirelessly to make it a bigger and better event, that not only raises much needed funding, but is also lots of fun for the hundreds of people involved.

This year, Diani Rules was an enormous success, raising around USD 28,000 for the Eye Centre.

Of this the main sponsor, Safaricom, donated one Million Kenya shillings, (about USD 17,000) for which we are very grateful.

A record twenty-four teams of at least eight fun-loving competitors, sponsored by local companies, battled amongst the waves with a frisbee or volley ball, played football on the beach with a rugby ball, fired darts or downed drinks, all for charity.

First thing in the morning, on Diani Beach two sets of four teams played tug of war with four ropes tied together.

One of the funniest games was the obstacle race, which included building a raft with empty water barrels, then taking all eight team members into the sea with it.

The raffle and auctions were a great success, thanks to the fantastic prizes that so many local businesses donated and, once again, the generosity of the competitors and local residents.

For information about prizes and winners, visit www.dianirules.com

If you want to see how the money is used please visit the news and reports pages on this site.



Above: Plank dancing in the rain



Above: the four-way tug of war



Above: People playing volleyball and generally enjoying themselves.

News of Eye Camp in North Kenya in response to Kenya Government request

The Kenya Ministry of Health asked the MEAK charity to help in a very poor area in the far north of Kenya where few people, mainly from the nomadic Gabra tribe, can access eye care and those unfortunate enough to develop cataract or suffer an eye injury, are very likely to lose their sight.

In early May, using a vehicle loaned by the local MP and working closely with the Health Department, charity and mission workers in the area, over 1,000 people were screened by Richard Guyo the ophthalmic clinical medical officer from Marsabit (1) in the two months before the team arrived. 460 of those with serious eye disease were directed to the Africa Inland Mission station at Kalacha (3° 09N, 37° 30E for those interested). A team of 5 plus from KDEC and two surgeons, one our honorary ophthalmologist, flew to this oasis in the middle of the Chalbe desert in Northern Kenya.

Working in the Mission station with much support from the mission and local councillor, they performed 117 sight-restoring cataract operations. The operating conditions were challenging. The electricity supply was solar and wind powered. The conditions were hot and dusty.

The most heart-warming story was of Arbe, a 13 year old girl who had been ejected from her household due to her blindness.

Richard found her begging for food, but after bilateral cataract surgery she wants to go to school! Undoubtedly her life has been changed.

(1) Described by Wikipedia as “an outpost of urban civilisation in the desert”.



Above: a blind patient being led to the clinic



Above: Operating conditions at Kalacha



Above: Arbe after her cataract operation

May 2008

More news of patients who have benefitted from the work of KDEC

Chadi Hinzano - Breeding Happiness through Sight Restoration, compiled by Mwachimako Hassan, Field Activity Supervisor

62 year old Chadi could not resist a smile as tears of joy were dripping off his wrinkled face when he commented, “My happiness can be compared to that of a barren woman having her first born at a time when she is expecting death to take its natural course.”

Chadi had worked as a seaman in Mombasa for many years until he retired to his small farm. He became totally blind about six years ago which he describes as “like living in a cave of darkness”.

He didn't know where to find a cure for his condition. He thought that it may have been inflicted by jealous neighbours and so, like many others, sought help from traditional healers who sacrificed goats, chicken even a duck but his vision remained lost.

He prayed that one day, someone, somewhere would “light a candle instead of cursing me with darkness!”

One evening, one of his grandsons told him about our Community Based Worker who had visited his school to give a talk. Chadi listened keenly. He had heard about people getting their vision back at KDEC, but it was 65 km away!

How could a blind man get there, let alone afford surgery? Besides, it might be true that the white lady doctor replaces the blind eye with that from a goat. Well even that would be better than his blindness!

The visit was followed by a screening at the school which grandfather and grandson attended and were delighted to learn that Chadi could have his sight restored. Scary stuff!

Chadi needed a lot of reassurance in order to get himself into the operating theatre where he underwent successful surgery.

Chadi is now one of our best ambassadors and to date has sent ten people to the eye centre. He considers that he has “embarked on breeding happiness” in others by overcoming their worries about coming to KDEC so that they can see again.



Above: Chadi Hinzano

Mwanajuma - a story of action taken just in time to retain sight, funded by a donor in UK

Mwanajuma who has both glaucoma and cataract was in danger of becoming totally blind irreversibly.

Fortunately she reached KDEC before this happened. She has cataract and has lost some of her peripheral vision to the glaucoma, but we should be in time to save her from facing a life of blindness.

We did what we call combined surgery where we first did cataract surgery and then a drainage operation to reduce the pressure in her eye. We did this first on her right eye. She was so delighted with the result that she asked us to do her second eye the following day!

A donation from one of our long time supporters in UK paid for this surgery. At the time of writing, she is due back next week to see us for her fourth post op visit. Hopefully she will bring her first degree relatives so that we can ensure that they do not have glaucoma.

She asked us to thank you and all our donors for helping her and others like her.



Above: a happy Mwanajuma

Footnote to the story about Mesaidi in our February 2008 news report.

We were sad to learn of the death of Mr Martin Kelly, the well-known London plastic surgeon, on 21st May at the age of 43.

He was Mesaidi's surgeon and performed all her procedures.

April 2008

Rotary Club of Fleet (UK) celebrates 12 years of supporting Kwale District Eye Centre

The Fleet clubs' involvement with the Eye Centre began in 1994 when a member visited the Rotary Club of Diani (Rotary District 9200) situated some 25 miles South of Mombasa on the Kenya coast.

The Diani club had contributed to the founding of the eye centre in late 1993 when it was set up by Dr Helen Roberts MBE. The visitor from Fleet was asked if he would like to see the fledgling eye centre and thus the link was established.

The member returned to the Kenya coast on holiday in 1995 and found that the eye centre was struggling for funds and equipment. A few months later the Fleet club donated a portable autoclave for instrument sterilization which replaced the domestic pressure cooker which had served this purpose up to that point.

Since those early days the Fleet club has continued to support the eye centre both with equipment such as portable generators, nurses' salaries and donations to the Poor Patients Fund which exists to pay for treatment for those who are too poor to make a contribution to the costs involved. To date three members of the Fleet club and their wives have visited the eye centre and have become long term supporters of Dr Helen Roberts and her team.

On his retirement, one of the three decided that he wanted to make a sizeable donation through the 'Eye Give' scheme which would have an impact on the lives of the people who live in Kwale District.

After discussions with Dr Roberts it was agreed his donation should be used to fund the running of no less than three eye camps in the name of the Rotary Club of Fleet, and that these events would take place in March and April 2008. In three south coast villages 38 patients went to KDEC for operations to remove their cataracts as a result of the donation, 85 pairs of reading glasses were distributed so that people could see to read after many frustrating years of blurred bibles or Korans and eye drops were dispensed to many others. The Eye Centre staff who ran the camps reported that the events were well attended and people were very grateful to the Rotary Club of Fleet for sponsoring the eye camps.

Those who had surgery left the eye centre praising the work of the staff of Kwale District Eye Centre and its sponsors. Others, who only needed reading glasses, left the eye camps happy to be able to see their near world clearly again.

The three village leaders were very happy that their community members had been able to access eye care. The restoration of sight allows people to become useful members of their community once again and avoids poverty as they are able to make money or provide food by farming and fishing. As one man said who had undergone cataract surgery "I will now be able go back to my work as a bicycle repairer. Not only does it help the community but it also makes money so that I can take care of my children" In the case of the children who were treated at the eye camp, some of them who were born with cataracts, they will be able to lead a normal life thanks to donations such as this.

"If many eye camp sponsors could be found, no eye would be blind in Kwale District and its environs" one patient, a village headman, said.

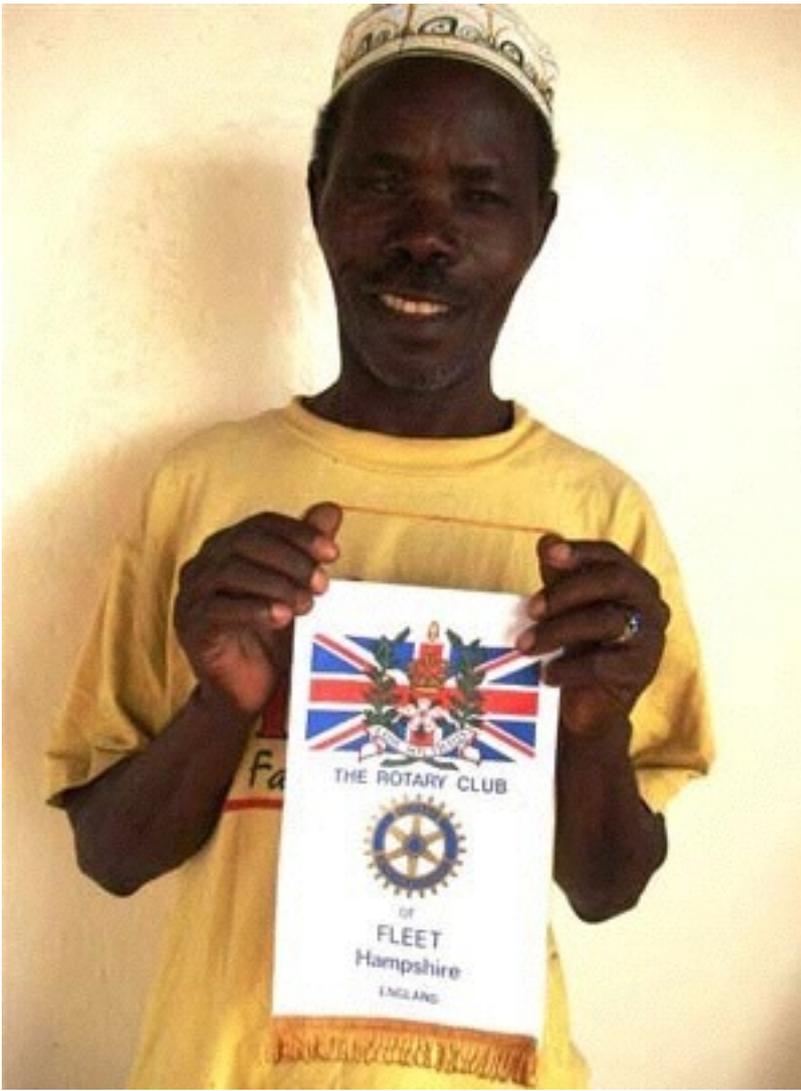
The Rotary Club of Fleet continues to support Kwale District Eye Centre annually. Fleet also maintains its links with Rotary Club of Diani which it would like to thank for providing the Rotary International wheel seen in the accompanying photographs.

We are also grateful to the other rotary clubs who have supported, or continue to support us, as listed on 'Our Supporters' page

Photographs:

1. Patient Omari with RC of Fleet banner
- 2 Lukore School Tree Poster . How the villagers know there is to be an eye camp
- 3 Patients waiting room . Who needs comfortable chairs ?
- 4 Eye testing in the field. No smart consulting rooms here.
- 5 Eye drops for this child
- 6 Overjoyed patient
- 7.Elderly patients Fatima and Rashid with a Fleet Rotary banner
8. (below) Cataract patients post op with sunglasses and Rotary International Wheel.











March 2008

Do you remember Rashid ??
Report compiled by: Kai Kafahamu
Manager Community Support Team



Many of our long term supporters may remember the story of Rashid. We first met him in 1998 when he was a blind but healthy 2 year old boy who had not been vaccinated as his mother did not know the reason for vaccination and as a result he caught measles when six months old and almost died. Although he survived, his body had used up all its supply of vitamin A.

We could not save his sight but we tried to get him to school when he was a few years older. His parents refused. They were worried that he would injure

himself on his way to and from school each day. Besides how could a blind child possible read! It was unheard of in Rashid's tiny village!

After four years of hard work our community based worker managed to convince them to send him to school, a great achievement! Teachers at his primary school were given a one day course on how to integrate a blind child into mainstream primary education.

Children in his primary school were also prepared for his arrival so that they would understand some of Rashid's challenges and would accept him more readily when he joined the school. A community workshop was organized for local leaders at in his village on our range of comprehensive eye services. Rashid learnt orientation and mobility skills and other how to cope with other daily tasks so that he could walk confidently to school, how to wash his own uniform, take a shower and brush his teeth without help.

We sourced a Braille machine and papers for when he started school. A contact teacher from the school was also trained in basic Braille skills so that he could help him. Braille text books to allow him to join in class activities were also found.

As you can see in the photos, there are no desks or chairs in the classroom, and the Braille machine has to be used on the sandy floor.

Rashid, now 12, actively participates in class and has lots of friends. The community all know him. He wants to become a lawyer when he grows up. Rashid's parents are amazed. "Miracles still happen" they say. "Blind children can go to school and learn."



Above: Rashid with his Braille machine



Above: Rashid with his class mates

The late Susan Blasetti, a great supporter of the Eye Centre

We were very shocked to hear of Susan's recent death.

We featured her in our April 2007 news item after she gave us a donation having been Captain of the Lady's Section of Windsor Golf Hotel and Country Club, Nairobi at the end of her year as Lady Captain in 2006.

We used it to enable a total of eleven people to see by doing their cataract surgery.

The first three patients who benefited are shown in the April 2007 news item.

The other eight are shown in the three photographs to the right and below.

Eleven happy people are very grateful for her sponsorship of surgery so that they could see again.





KDEC signposts undergo a face lift

On our outpatient record cards we specifically ask how people came to know about the eye centre. Many come because of our community based workers or through other voluntary community groups, but a surprising number say “signpost”.

The centre itself is not visible from the main road and very few people have telephone directories, so the signpost may be the only way people can judge what sort of institution we run.

It is vital that these look smart and have all up to date information hence we have given our signposts a face lift before the rainy season arrives!



Above: The signpost on the main road after its face lift

February 2008

Website contact brings hope to young girl

Much space this month is being given to the remarkable story of Mesaidi a young girl with a severe facial deformity; Dr Helen Roberts takes up the story: "I first met Mesaidi as a tiny baby several years ago. It was difficult not to gasp when her mother drew back the cloth covering her baby's face. Mesaidi's face was severely deformed and she had already lost the sight in one eye. As I recovered from my shock I wondered what sort of future this little girl faced. We got in touch with a charitable trust and a neurosurgeon in Nairobi. Mesaidi went for surgery, but she returned looking only slightly better.

Mesaidi's mother is an interesting lady. She was convinced that something more could be done for her daughter. She continued to visit the eye centre, but I knew that we did not have the expertise to improve her facial deformity in Kenya and I did not know how to help.

Mesaidi meanwhile grew up - her face half covered with a cloth. She went to school, where she had a miserable time. Gradually she overcame the other childrens' horror and rejection and made friends.

Meanwhile by 2002 the Eye Centre's website had been set up. In 2004 we were contacted by a UK based charity called [Facing the World](#) ; they wanted to know if there was anyone whose cosmetic appearance was such that facing their world was made difficult by this. Immediately I thought of Mesaidi.

After many administrative difficulties over visas, where she would stay in London and so on, Mesaidi accompanied by her mother flew to UK for treatment in early 2007.”

Sarah Driver-Jowitt the executive Coordinator at Facing the World takes up the story in November 2007.

“Mesaidi stayed with us for nine months and had numerous procedures during her time in the UK.

Although she will need to receive her 'final' nose when she finishes growing, we felt it was important that after nine months in the UK she went home before she turned into a little English girl, which would have made her return home harder.

**She has grown so much in confidence while she has been with us that she is a totally different child. She even used to hang out at the deli downstairs from their flat taking orders and chatting away to customers!
She has stolen all of our hearts and we will all miss her desperately and are keen to support Mesaidi on return to Kenya especially with her education. She is a remarkable girl who is now much better equipped to face the world. “
The photographs on the right show Mesaidi before and after the surgery.**





In summing up, Dr Helen said:

“It’s three years since we first started to try and help Mesaidi and now she is back after 9 months in UK and having undergone much medical and surgical care. She is astonishingly clever; speaking fluent English with no sign of her previous reticence and shyness. She continues to wear a headscarf, as her religion dictates, but instead of a hideous deformity when she pulls back the scarf, there are healing scars and a symmetrical face.

She wants to be a doctor. If she has half her mother’s persistence she will be. As Sarah commented, "Mesaidi is a remarkable girl who is now much better equipped to face the world."

UK Fundraising

University of Portsmouth Business School

Thanks to the ongoing support of the University of Portsmouth Business School over USD\$ 850 has been raised for the Eye Centre through the sale of books and the raffling of a football signed by members of local Premier League team Portsmouth United Football Club.

The photo on the right shows the Dean of the Faculty, Ann Ridley (left), presenting the football to Alison Shaw, who is a keen supporter of the team. The events were organised by Jane Dean a trustees of Eyes For East Africa UK, who do so much to support us here at Kwale.



January 2008

We start the New Year with the sad news of violence and unrest in parts of Kenya, a country so many of our supporters have visited and love. We are grateful that the troubles at the coast have been minimal and mostly confined to Mombasa city. Our work has not been affected, the KDEC team continue to go about their many duties and patients are coming to us for treatment. This month's report includes items patients who have benefited from donations made both in UK and in Australia. We would also like to recognise the wonderful support we have received from the British Asian community throughout 2007 and others in UK who have supported the EFEA UK Eye Give project.

Patients who received treatment by donations from UK. Many poor patients benefit from UK donations made to our Poor Patients Fund and from time we highlight some of these recipients. The photo on the right shows two of them.

Mganda (seated on the left) who was totally blind in both eyes because of cataracts when we met him and said that he had been like this for years but did not know that we could help.

A donation from UK paid for him to have both eyes operated on. He now sees well.

Hamisi (seated on the right) was able to see with his left eye but had very poor vision on his right. We did his cataract and he now sees much better with that eye.



Patients funded from an Australian donation made online through Paypal.

Donations from Australia are not common and this one was made on line and we believe, in response to the EFEA UK 'Eye Give' campaign. The campaign runs throughout the year but was highlighted in the run up to Christmas 07. The three lucky patients (seated left to right in the photograph were John, Majaliwa and Mohamed) who had cataract surgery thanks to this donation are very happy to be able to see again and have asked for their thanks to be made public.



Details of the Eye Give project, which we featured in last month's news report, are included on the Shop page of our website.

Bahati's story

Bahati lives in Kwale District, she became blind from glaucoma at age 50. She was discovered by one of our community workers, in 2004. She has eight daughters, six of them are still at home and of these, three are still at school. The other two girls are married.

In 2005 after training in how to cope with blindness she was given seven goats as part of income generating project. This has proved to be a successful enterprise as she now has twelve goats. It would have been thirteen, but one was sold to purchase medicine for some of the others which were sick.

The photograph on the right was taken by our team on a routine visit when Bahati was cleaning her harvested maize, ably assisted by some hopeful chickens.



The British Asian Community.

We could not let the most generous support from the British Asian community during 2007, both personal and corporate, pass without public recognition in spite of their reluctance to seek personal recognition. Their contribution has been of immense benefit to patients, the working condition of the staff and the efficient working of Kwale District Eye Centre.