

Tanzanian Children's Fund

Volume 1, Issue 15 Spring 2011

Mission Statement

The Tanzanian Children's
Fund was established to
aid the children of
Tanzania. Working in
partnership with registered
non-governmental,
non-profit organizations in
Tanzania, TCF provides
financial and intellectual
support to projects and
programs designed to
improve the lives of
children in need.

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A Letter from the Executive Director By India Howell

As I write this, it is hard to comprehend that we are almost 3 months into our 7th year. January, as always, was about getting more then 80 students packed (with everything down to toilet paper!), ready and delivered to boarding school.

I was very involved with our Form 1 students going off for the first time as they are not familiar with all the rules and requirements for each school. No surprise, the girls tried to pack everything *plus* the kitchen sink. The boys packed their soccer jerseys, cleats and ball and thought they were ready to go!

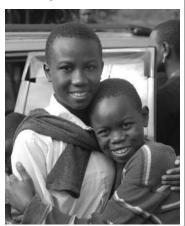
Early reports are that all of these kids are super stars at school. The headmaster of Edmund Rice, where Doctor, Juma, Abdul, Saidi and Benja started secondary school in January, told our social worker that he has never seen Form 1 students with such confidence, excellent English and ability to work together as a team. Am I bursting with pride for our

students? You bet!

January also saw the opening of Gyetighi Primary for the school year. With 5 new teachers and a long list of improvements we want to make this year Nick Beecher, our new Education Director, had his hands full. Through some form of magic he not only pulled it off, but has really made some important changes that the teachers are embracing and are grateful for!

In February we interviewed and selected our new 2011 English Confidence class students. This class targets Gyetighi graduates whose parents cannot afford secondary school. All agreed that adding short vocational/life skills training to this program would make the class more valuable for the students. Hence, in February all of the students learned basic carpentry skills when Carter Bacon came to visit and supervised the construction of bookcases for our library.

These skills are tremendously important to these young Tanza-



Jackie hugs big sister Lucy before she leaves for secondary school

nians who will one day be responsible for building their own houses. In coming months they will learn how to paint, sew and cook.

We have just completed our annual health screening for the student body of Gyetighi Primary School in partnership with the Tidlund Foundation.

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Tanzania and the Impact of Microfinance: Reflections on Kilimani Chini By Jessie Cronan, Volunteer

Kilimani Chini looks, at first glance, like the backdrop for a "Save the Children" infomercial. With a name literally meaning "the road down" in Swahili, Kilimani Chini is composed of five crumbling brick structures, the remnants of a camp for coffee pickers built in the 1950s. A few women poke their heads out of dark

doorways, casting cursory glances at the crowd of toddlers who play in the dust. There are no men in sight.

As a Princeton-in-Africa fellow with the Rift Valley Children's Village (RVCV) an Americanrun NGO, I spent 18 months living just down the road from Kilimani Chini. I taught the village children at the local primary school, I lobbied for community support for new educational initiatives, and I encouraged parents to invest in the future of their children. When, a few months into my stay, the organization launched a microfinance program, I tagged along with the microfinance director as

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A Letter from the Executive Director cont.

These screenings are incredibly valuable as we are able to identify children with serious congenital or debilitating conditions that have never been brought to our regular clinics. In all cases the lack of earlier treatment stems from the fact that the parent did not know that anything could be done!

The most exciting part of this screening came when I learned that more than 80% of the children were accompanied by a parent or caregiver! Even more amazing many of them were fathers! This is a huge step forward for the children of our community as parents are really beginning to take an active interest in their health, as well as their performance at school!

And so another year another year has been launched with early signs that our work is impacting our children and the village in a positive and meaningful way.

It's working!!





India with Benja, Saidi, Juma, Abdul, and Doctor. All five boys now attend secondary school at Edmund Rice.

We miss them every single day, but they are thriving on their own, which could not make us any happier!



Riziki, Lucy, Saidi, Doctor, Abdul, Juma, Benja, Agael and India traveled to Pangani on the Tanzanian coast as a graduation present.

Thank you Jim and Barbara Schubauer!

Why Africa? By Peggy Bacon, Chair

If your friends haven't asked you, you surely have asked yourself: Why support orphaned children and families in Africa? Aren't there enough problems nearby? Does a community surrounded by coffee in northern Tanzania deserve our attention? Yes. Here's why.

The Village. Around the world in 24 hours; telephone calls from anywhere; hasn't the world become a village? How well we take care of the most vulnerable in our village is a sign of civilization. Shouldn't we help those living in the "back forty" as well as those outside our back door? The Rift Valley Children's Village is part of our world village.

Your Choice. For generations the USA has supported developing countries with grants to governments. People in Washington decide where the money goes. We may support our foreign policy goals, but investing in small NGO's allows us as individuals to choose our commitments. Sponsor a child; invest in micro-finance. Some support lunch programs, girls' education or medical clinics. A doctor gave a microscope for malaria; many have donated shoes, books, tools, medicine, a classroom, housing and of course unrestricted funds used to further the mission. Your choice.

Ripples. A high school education goes a long way in Tanzania. When the educated return to their villages, they help siblings go to school and so on until families are no longer at the poverty level. Ripples of hope. Each year, TCF sends more students to secondary school. Sylvester, 20, the 11th and youngest in his family is the first to attend secondary school. He is proud and eager to help. One less family to worry about. A ripple.

Gifts of Time. Many of us give our time in local communities. Similarly, volunteers at RVCV paint, teach, play, sing, plant, and help in the office or at medical clinics. Time: a unique gift from each individual.

The Ladder. Jeffrey Sachs in *The End of Poverty* says if only we could get everyone on the planet living on \$2 a day, a lot of problems would go away. In the communities TCF serves, most live on less than \$1 a day. Imagine. Why should we care? Poverty breeds disease, ignorance, discontent and eventually despair, anger and violence. TCF is making it possible for families "to reach the first rung on the ladder of economic development. Not a handout, these efforts are an investment in global economic growth that will add to the security of all nations." Through micro loans,

education and health care, discontent and despair are giving way to a foot on the ladder.

Hail to the Chief. Unlike many organizations, we have India Howell who lives at the Rift Valley Children's Village providing oversight, leadership and vision. We wouldn't have the ripples, the ladder up, or a grassroots organization we feel confident about without our Chief.

Big Bang. A dollar is different in Tanzania; it makes a big bang. \$25 for a desk or a uniform, a loan of \$50 to start a business, \$1,000 for education - all change lives, shape futures. Bang. Just like that.



Peggy reading with Yohani



Tanzania and the Impact of Microfinance cont.

he conducted market research, held initial meetings with community leaders, and eventually made the first round of loans. I sat in the back of our crowded Rec hall during financial literacy seminars and attended daylong programs on budgeting. And I waited, with bated breath, for the transformational change that I was certain was just around the corner.

In a community where everyone is essentially squatting on land owned by the coffee plantations, and most families get by on under a dollar a day, opportunity is in short supply. The vast majority of children drop out of school after "standard seven" (the equivalent of a seventh grade education) and join their parents picking coffee – when it's in season – and scrambling to find other ways to get by – when it isn't.

Microfinance felt like a silver bullet. Hardworking people would finally have the resources to succeed on their own – effort and initiative, rather than handouts, would be the tool to break the chains of generational poverty.

I left when the microfinance program was still in its infancy. In those early days, everything was exciting – the loan repayment rate was close to 100%, and the small businesses being launched ranged from women making bead necklaces to farmers leasing land and trying out new crops, and all the way to teachers making bricks in their spare time. It felt like we were watching the community change, virtually overnight.

After I left, the honeymoon period of the microfinance program slowly came to an end. As loans got bigger, so did the percentage of clients defaulting. The short rains came late, farmers crops failed, and several of the most reliable clients began making homemade alcohol rather than weaving baskets.

There were still superstars, individuals for whom a loan catapulted them into a different economic reality. One of these extraordinary clients was a round, bossy woman named Mama Charles. Long before RVCV landed in her backyard, Mama Charles was running a tiny storefront outside of her house – selling her neighbors everything from single cigarettes, to hard candies, to plastic packets of bargain-rate gin. When American volunteers began arriving in droves, she started stocking Red Bull in addition to the dusty glass bottles of Fanta

and Coke that lined her shelves. Mama Charles used her first loan to expand her shop, and spent her early profits to buy a solar-powered flashlight, so her children could study at night.

Four years later, the Charles family has four small shops in the region, and Mama Charles is considering buying a plot of farmland just outside the nearby city of Karatu. Mama Charles's husband, who works alongside her in the shop and is a wholehearted supporter of his wife's entrepreneurial efforts, brags to anyone who will listen that his oldest daughter, Anna, got the second-highest score in her school on the national exam. Mama Charles grew up picking coffee, and Anna is well on her way to achieving her dream of becoming a doctor.

Mama Charles is a microfinance program's dream come true – a hardworking, entrepreneurial client, whose success is clearly translated into increased opportunities for herself and her children. It is tempting, hearing stories about women like Mama Charles, to assume that microfinance will lift whole communities out of poverty at a rapid pace. The thing about exceptional people, however, is that they are – by definition – the exception to the norm.

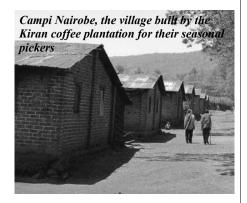
Most clients didn't meet with Mama Charles' extreme success, nor did they direct virtually all of their profits to expanding opportunities for their children and their communities. Most clients were more like Jonathan, a teacher who makes a modest income on the side making bricks with the hand-held mold he purchased with his loan. The first thing Jonathan bought with his profits was a new, fancy cell phone (despite the fact that he lives in a house without electricity). He regularly treats his coworkers to a beer when profits are good. But he is also paying the primary-school fees for his six nieces and nephews who live in a neighboring community. Or like Neema, who bought a sewing machine and who hands over most of her modest profits to her husband – who promptly drinks them away. But Neema manages to hang onto enough to make sure that her daughter doesn't have to miss class to pick coffee, and she is steadily building a tiny nest egg so she can one day start her own sewing school.

More than three years have passed since the first round of loans were distributed. And,

on the surface at least, life in Kilimani Chini, and the villages around it, appears remarkably unchanged. But, as in so many cases, appearances can be deceiving. From the outside Neema's house looks like it is crumbling, but inside the walls are covered in bright wrapping paper and the cement floors are so clean they shine. In her spotless home, there is a corner set aside for her daughter to study. A picture of Jonathan's nephew, in a brand-new school uniform, sits proudly on Jonathan's desk. And Mama Charles has just sent her third child to a toptier secondary boarding school.

It is tempting to expect transformational change to occur instantaneously; however, in the case of Kilimani Chini, transformational change is occurring incrementally. Because of Jonathan's loan, his six nieces and nephews are getting an education. Because of Neema's loan, her daughter has a place to study, rather than pick coffee. And because of Mama Charles' loan, an entire community is able to see what is possible when hard work and entrepreneurial spirit combine.

When RVCV launched the microfinance program, those of us on the outside were hoping for a silver bullet. What we got was less dramatic, but ultimately not less transformational, than we had hoped. As is so often the case, meaningful change doesn't happen over night – it takes time and effort, and an allowance for human error, to begin to see sustainable changes occur.



Jessie Cronan is currently a second-year Masters in Public Policy Candidate at the Harvard Kennedy School. From 2007 – 2008, Jessie worked as a Princeton-in-Africa fellow with the Rift Valley Children's Fund in rural Tanzania. Her work focused on improving educational outcomes in the region.

Student Spotlight: India and Christina By India Howell

Like most parents, I often wonder if "anything is sinking in" with my kids. Do they understand the importance of the lessons we are trying to teach here at the Village? Are they even aware of the daily work that goes on around them to improve their school and their community?

A recent class assignment in Nick Beecher's English class, "What I want to be when I am 25," tells me that they ARE listening! More importantly, the lessons of giving and compassion are "sinking in" in a very real way!

Christina John wrote: "When I am 25 and have finished college I want to work. I want a job helping other people and taking care of the poor. I would like to be a lawyer so I can help the poor people in the village to be better off than before."

India Msee wrote: "When I am 25 years old I want to be a lawyer. I want to help other people know the rules. I will be working in Dar-es-Salaam. I want to take care of or-



India and Christina (front) with members of the Girls' Club at Gyetighi Primary School, which focuses on empowering young women though education.

phans like RVCF and help poor people that don't have any money. I will teach my children and husband table manners until they know them."

As an "old school" mother, I especially like the line from India about table manners!!

Bravo, India and Cristina!



Lucy giving Christina and India a big squeeze!



Family News 2011: Welcome Nick and Sheyanga!

In early December, Nick and Sheyanga Beecher joined our team in Tanzania as our Director of Education and first fully credentialed nurse.

Sheyanga, a pediatric nurse practitioner



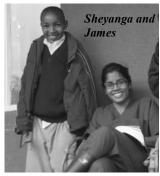
with a master's degree in Public Health, is a graduate of Carleton College and Johns Hopkins.

Nick, a graduate of the University of Chicago, is studying for a master's degree in International Development from Johns Hopkins.

The Beechers' excellent Kiswahili allows Sheyanga to converse with patients and teach health classes and Nick to talk with teachers at school and translate for students when needed



We are lucky to have found such wonderful additions to our Rift Valley Children's Village family!



Asante Sana!

Our volunteers are vital in the success of our mission at the Rift Valley Children's Village. They spend their days playing soccer, solving math problems, painting, reading stories, building block castles and bookcases, planting and forming life-long friendships. But most of all, they make our children feel special and part of a loving family. Just as our children become part of a family as soon as they arrive at the Children's Village, so do our volunteers. Karibu (welcome) to all of our new and returning volunteers. We truly appreciate all that you do!

Asante sana (thank you) Charlotte Minogue, Australia; Jeff DeMezza, Canada; Julia Schlette, NJ; Anna Quintero, Venezuela; Jody Drake, VA; Bridget McNamara, PA; Jessie McKenna, MA; Courtney Bryan, MA; Ashley Main, ME; Maggie Rogan, ID; Michael and Katie Kurgansky and Maureen Kenny, MA; Barbara and Jim Schubauer, NY; Eleanor and Anne Doar, IL; Marijean Witcher, IL; Lisa Teague, NH; Jessie Cronan, MA; Dara Solotoff, PA; Carolyn Wong, PA; Daria Harlamova, PA; Storey Wanglee, PA; Bianca Newton, PA; Laetitia and Caroline Oppenheim, England; Christina Gattone, IN; and David, Heidi, Ali and Holly Perkins, ME.

We also want to thank those of you who hosted events and gatherings that allowed us to share our story with their friends and family and reconnect with those who share our love for the Rift Valley Children's Village. *Thank you* to Barbara Speigel, Torrington Rotary Club; Don Dana, Mill Valley, CA; Peggy Bacon, Cambridge, MA; Burch Ford, The Chilton Club, Boston, MA; Donna Storer, Sherborn, MA; Pooh Gephart, Newtown, PA.

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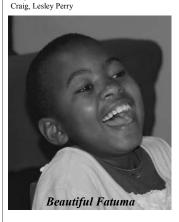








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If we have left out or misspelled a name, and especially your name, please let us know! And, please accept our apology.

Genovese Pat

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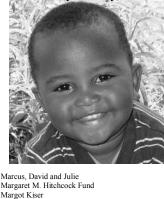
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We Have Moved!

As many of you may already know, we moved our office from Portland, Maine to Cambridge, Massachusetts in January of 2011. Bob Swain of Trap Rock, Ltd. generously donated office space to the Tanzanian Children's Fund. Asante sana, Bob! Our new contact information is listed below:

Mailing Address: P.O. Box 382006, Cambridge, MA 02238

Physical Address: 4 Brattle Street, Suite 303, Cambridge, MA 02138

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India Howell with our KLR students who attend Tumaini School



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