

Kok-Hou Chia's 2010 Summer Service Report

Project Title: The Faraja Children's Home Sustainability Project

Location: Ngong, Kenya

Duration of Service: 6 weeks (7/31 – 9/10)

Sponsors: Class of 1978 Foundation and Class of 1995 Summer Service Fund

The Faraja Children's Home unofficially began in 2006 in a one-room shack in Kibera, the largest slum in East Africa today. To make ends meet, Martha Moraa Bosire, a struggling 46-year old single mother, decided to start a tuition program for slum children in her home. Little did she know that her "tuition center" would eventually evolve into a children's home, as slum residents began to drop off their kids at her shack – permanently.

As word got around in the slum that a mother was taking in unwanted children, more and more parents would literally abandon their children at her doorstep. Although Moraa had three children of her own to support, she did not have the heart to turn them away. Today, the Faraja Children's Home, registered under the Ministry of Gender and Social Services, Kenya as a Charitable Children's Institution, provides a safe haven for 34 children, who range from 2 – 13 years of age.



Faraja Children's Home – Lunch time!

The children's stories are nothing short of tragic. One child's parents – who made a living as thieves in the slum – were lynched by a mob. Several others were sexually abused. One girl told Moraa how years ago, a man would “touch” her every time she went to fetch water from the river. This little girl, who is now 10 years old, is HIV positive and suffers from vaginal injuries (which cause her to urinate blood). Many others have been orphaned as a result of AIDS and are themselves HIV-positive.

Today, Faraja faces many financial challenges, such as paying the rent or even putting food on the table. This is because the orphanage does not have a consistent and reliable source of funding, as it is largely dependent on charity to fund its programs. During my time there, I worked with other volunteers on several “sustainability” initiatives with the goal of helping the orphanage become more financially viable.

One of these projects was the Faraja Chicken Farm Expansion Project. The goal of this project is to increase the number of chicks in the existing chicken coop by three hundred (there were only 98 chickens at the beginning). The chicks are expected to reach maturity and to start laying eggs in 4 months' time. The income from selling the eggs will be used to pay the monthly rent and to guarantee the orphanage some food security.



The Faraja Kuku Farm



Kevin,13, collects the eggs daily and delivers them to the customers

Omari (Moraa's oldest son) and I worked together to draft the proposal, while a previous volunteer helped raise funds for the project back at home in the US.¹ Over the next few weeks, we visited local shops and businesses to procure the project materials (1-day old chicks, charcoal, vaccinations, plywood for making brooders etc.). It was truly heartening to see the project slowly but surely take shape!



Disinfecting the chicken coop in preparation for the arrival of the new chicks



Omari transporting bags of wood chippings back to the orphanage

¹ For more details, please visit <http://farajaproject.blogspot.com/2010/08/kuku-farm.html>. A copy has also been attached for your perusal.

I was also involved in other sustainability projects such as building a rabbit hutch (the profits from selling the rabbits will eventually be used to defray school fees) and starting a vegetable garden (which will eventually supplement the children's meals with cabbage, kale, and spinach). Volunteers also tutored the children in the mornings and helped out with the general cleaning.



Building the Rabbit Hutch



The Vegetable Garden

Since I had limited funds to donate to the orphanage, I wanted to invest in something sustainable. When I first arrived, Faraja did not have piped water. The kids, some as young as five, had to shuttle back and forth daily to fetch around 250 liters of water from a well located several minutes uphill behind the orphanage. Needless to say, this was extremely time-consuming. Moreover, during the day, Moraa would have to carry out this tedious task on her own. With a little investigative work, however, I was surprised to find out that all it would cost to install water pipes was \$35! The pipes were laid a few days later. I personally still consider this to be the most worthwhile investment I made while I was there.



Piped Water!



From left to right, Obadiah, Kepha (the youngest at Faraja), and Kevin

Volunteering at Faraja was a deeply humbling experience. Moraa's humility, as well as her grace and compassion towards these kids, touched me deeply. The kids' kindness and diligence, their cheerfulness in face of adversity, and the way in which they loved and cared for one another and shared everything with each other, inspired me greatly. Today, I still keep in touch with the orphanage, and I am currently helping to create a website for them.

Finally, I would like to thank the Class of 1978 and the Class of 1995 for supporting my community service trip!