

KITENGESA COMMUNITY LIBRARY

July 2006

Dear Friends of Kitengesa Community Library,

This letter is coming to you directly from Kitengesa. I am in the library and have spent the past hour talking to our librarians, Dan Ahimbisibwe and Lucy Namwanje, handing over a few books for cataloguing and showing them how to create a “look-up column” for our database. The library is quiet just now, but a couple of the teachers from Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School (on whose land the library is located) are here reading the newspapers, and so is the man who works as night watchman for the school. He was reading the newspaper, but he’s now watching me as I write. The other occupants of the library are a family of swallows who have taken up residence in here.

It is over a year since I sent out my last newsletter, so there is much to report. Last year, 2005, we received a special grant of \$1200 from the UN One Per Cent for Development Fund (in addition to the two previous grants that they gave us). The money was raised by Pat Duffy, who organized a book sale among UN employees, gave the money to the Fund, and suggested that it be given to us. We accordingly wrote a proposal for a further solar panel to enable us to run a printer and/or another computer, and our friends from Solar Energy for Africa came down to install the equipment at the end of June. Pat had a chance to visit us in July, so she was able to see the equipment in place.

Pat was not our only visitor. Shelley Jones, a graduate student from the University of British Columbia, came to Kitengesa in August 2004 and stayed till September 2005. During that time, she developed enduring relationships with a group of girls from the secondary school and contributed in multiple ways to the growth of the library. Then from the end of July to the middle of August 2005 our two librarian friends from Hunter College, Lauren Yannotta and Valeda Dent, returned to Kitengesa to continue their research and to help us further develop our database. The four of us were thus able to meet in the village to discuss our research plans—and then we all took off for Swaziland where we presented a panel on the library at the 4th Pan African Conference on Reading for All.

Shelley works for an NGO named YouLead (formerly Youth Millenium Project—see www.youlead.org), through which she has mobilized funds for a number of Kitengesa projects. First among these was the purchase of land on which to build a house for Dan; he is to live in it and use it as a base for hosting YouLead students who are expected to visit regularly. Second, Shelley worked with a Women’s Adult Literacy group while she was here and is now raising funds with YouLead for the group to develop income generation projects. Since Shelley left, Dan has been the convenor for the group and has organized for people to come and talk to it about different possibilities. Finally, this past week, the group has decided to embark on a pig-farming project; while those of them who are Muslims will work instead on baking and selling small cakes.

Another, less direct, result of the YouLead connection was the arrival of another visitor last January named Leigh Fox, who was at that time working for YouLead. He’s no longer doing so, but he returned to Kitengesa on his own resources in October. He has set up a tree nursery project on the school’s land and has arranged for students to look after it under a scheme modelled on the Library Scholarship one. All this is very exciting, and one of the teachers from the school has just been in to tell me how much people throughout the sub-county appreciate the development that is coming out of the library.

Out central work remains, however, the encouragement of reading. We now have 583 registered library members, most of whom are affiliated with Kitengesa Comprehensive Secondary School, but 100 of them are not. While some of these members are not active, a great many are, as is evidenced by the fact that between June 2005 and June 2006 over 8020 visits were paid to the library by more than 500 different people. Their reasons for coming vary: most come to read the books that we keep in the building, others to read newspapers, and others to borrow books to read elsewhere; people also come to attend meetings and special library events that we organize. In March 2006, for example, we held a Children’s Reading Tent: we extended our space by the erection of a tent, arranged our books in it and invited children from ten local primary schools to come to read the books and join in other related activities. Since then we have been holding monthly Children’s Days, which are similar, but smaller, occasions, and we also have a Games Night every week.

All this has been made possible by your generosity, and now we are asking you to contribute again so that we can keep the work going. To raise the funds that we need for books, newspapers, and Library Scholars’ fees, we are organizing a benefit at which Jan Heller Levi and Donna Masini, both teachers in Hunter College’s MFA in Creative Writing program, together with Kathleen Hill of Sarah Lawrence College, will read from their work. The occasion will be on TUESDAY, OCTOBER 3, at 7:30 P.M. and will take place in XXX, HUNTER COLLEGE, 68th Street and Lexington Avenue. The suggested donation is \$25, or \$100 if you wish to sponsor a Library Scholar. We do hope you can come, but if you can’t, please send a contribution. Checks should be made out to TEAA. TEAA (Teachers for East African Alumni), is a recognized not-for-profit that is looking after our funds so that your contributions will be tax deductible. Please send any check to me at the address below, and if you wish to sponsor a scholar include a note saying so.

Kate Parry