

# Visiting East Africa from March 20th to April 17th 2009

## Travel Report



Visiting the projects supported by IHF serves many purposes, such as meeting the board of governors, the teachers and also the parents of the school and discussing financial and organizational subjects. It is also a time to get a sensory experience of the country and the project itself: the sights, the smells, a feel for how things really are. Apart from offering me the possibility to give accurate feedback on returning home, meeting and talking with the children and the teachers at the various schools and thus encountering African culture while living in the East African climate, has created strong bonds of friendship.

Wherever I went, I was given a warm wel-

come. I could visit all classes and take photos whenever I wanted. When I needed transport it was arranged and during the weekends I was taken sightseeing in the area. After having been in touch mainly by e-mail for many years, it was a delight to meet the people involved in the projects in person.

There were serious talks on what had been achieved with the sponsor money, what the future looked like and how the sponsored children were doing. New plans were made, new initiatives were given an impulse to get them moving and new vistas opened up to existing projects. My experiences and observations have filled me with enthusiasm and I

hope to recruit many more new sponsors to make the dreams of the people in the projects come true.

During my visit so much work was done and so many plans made that in the years to come there will be plenty of projects that need your support.

I visited the following schools and projects:

- The Rudolf Steiner School Mbagathi in Nairobi, Kenya
- The Nairobi Waldorf School in Kenya
- The East African Teachers' Development Training in Nairobi, Kenya
- The Masai sponsored children project in Kenya
- The Hekima Waldorf School in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
- The Proposed Hekima Waldorf School Project at Goba, Tanzania
- The BD-farm in Matenana, Tanzania
- The Waldorf kindergarten in Arusha, Tanzania.

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# De Rudolf Steiner School Mbagathi in Nairobi, Kenia



**“Would you like to go with us on the outing for the 5th and 6th grades? They are going to climb Longonot which is an extinct volcano, about 100 kms. west of Nairobi.”**

So only eight hours after my arrival in Nairobi and a very short night I was on my way to climb a mountain with 55 pupils and 5 teachers. I could not possibly have had a better introduction. Sweating and gasping for breath, offering encouragement to each other in the blistering heat and under a cloudless sky, we reached the top. Then we looked in amazement over the rim and into the crater stretching deep down below us. The sides were wholly overgrown with trees and other vegetation. Late in the evening when I was back in my little hut in the school compound I already felt that I had spent weeks in Africa already.

For a whole week I was able to live with the children, teachers and other members of staff. I went into all of the classes and was able to observe the Masai children who are sponsored via the IHF in the Netherlands. I was also able to talk to the leaders of the school, the members of the school board, the office staff, the farmer, gardeners and the carpenters. In this way I was able to build up a comprehensive image of the school. In the Rongai wijk is the Kivulini kindergarten that operates under the wings of the Mbagathi School and I was able to go there too.

I shared breakfast and the evening meal with the 75 boarders and lunch with all the school children now numbering 275. The food was simple but good. Vegetables and fruit come from the school garden, their own cows supply the milk and bread is baked fresh in the kitchen every day.

At the end of the week, the last day before the holidays began, there was a big school celebration where every class showed to each other and the parents what they had been learning in the period before. In addition to presentations related to main lesson there was traditional dancing music and acrobatic displays to enjoy.

After a week there I left with the impression that the Mbagathi School is a place where children can really feel happy and safe.



# The East-African Teachers' Development Training in Nairobi, Kenya



**During the second week of my stay in Kenya the school was on holiday so there were no children playing and it was suddenly very still. It did not last long however for teachers from Uganda, Tanzania and other schools in Kenya arrived for a two week long training. 50 teachers, men and women, occupied the school compound and dormitories.**

Two teachers came from South Africa: Peter van Alphen for the primary school and Ann Sharfman for the kindergarten teachers. A third teacher, Simon Shirley came from England as guest teacher for the primary school group.

This Waldorf teacher training is given to teachers who have already trained as teachers in their own land and now come to Nairobi three times a year for three years in the school vacations to be taught how to work in a Steiner school.

Meeting my Tanzanian colleagues again was a joyful occasion. In the previous year I had visited the Hekima school to mentor the kindergarten teachers and Maryanna, one of the teachers, stayed with me for 10 days in Holland before returning to Tanzania after attending a seminar for kindergarten teachers in Germany. We all had so much news to give to each other.

I worked together with Ann and she handed over some of her lessons to me. I had not expected this to happen and was unprepared but I realized very quickly that after having worked for so many years in a kindergarten class it was not difficult to pick up the thread again. I thoroughly enjoyed myself. Ann herself was happy to have someone that she could discuss her lessons with.

I joined the eurythmy lessons given by Peter each morning and I also attended his lessons on Anthroposophy. It was particularly

useful to follow these in English. The best part of the day came at the end when the whole group came together to sing under the direction of Peter who is a professional conductor. Everyone participated and the most beautiful songs were sung in four parts. What moved me most were the Zulu songs from South Africa which never fail to touch me each time that I hear them.

It is clear that this teacher training supplies a much felt need. Many teachers have already completed the course and are the proud possessors of the Waldorf Certificate. In the near future it is hoped to begin with the training of mentors so that the students can be guided in the classroom in their own schools.



# The sponsorship program for Masai children in Kenya



**Masai children attending the Rudolf Steiner School Mbagathi are sponsored via the IHF. The sponsors, most of whom take responsibility for a particular child, pay for the child to attend school and live in the boarding house in term time. Annually the sponsors receive a report on the child's progress, a photo and a drawing or letter from the child itself.**

I was able to observe the children in the classroom who are being sponsored through the IHF for a week. At the end of the week there was an enormous party to mark the beginning of the school vacation. The next day I was able to accompany the Masai children, together with Judith Brown who is the School Leader and the class 8 teacher, in the school bus on their journey home.

It was a four hour journey, first over tarmac in the direction of Mombasa but halfway we turned off and made for Masailand. It was so dry. Red dust flew up everywhere colouring our clothes hair and skin.

When we arrived at the place where the children were to be met a big surprise awaited us. There were about 40 Masai men and women in their colourful clothes waiting for the bus to arrive and they all began to sing as we stepped out of the bus in our dusty clothes. Judith and I were hung about with colourful 'jewelry' by a number of the mothers and then we were allowed to wash and the feast could begin. The chief of the village held a speech which fortunately was translated into English and then I was invited to speak and that was translated into the Masai language. I was able to tell them a little about the Netherlands and the sponsorship program. I also explained the meaning of my name (Truus) which is 'she who can throw a spear to its mark' and that brought a round of applause.

Judith then told them about the school and the children after which any one who wanted to say something was free to do so. The first speaker was a mother who expressed her grati-

tude for the fact that the children are so well cared for at the school. She named three points in particular:

- 1 They all look so healthy
- 2 They are self confident and clear eyed.
- 3 Their English is so good.

All of the other speakers also expressed their thanks and made it clear that other parents would also like to have their children in this school.

The feast ended with a meal and a photograph session. The first was a photo of all the children together with their parents, then a request to make a photo of all of the children who are on the waiting list. When this was done we found a small girl hiding in a corner and crying. Her father was away with the cattle and her mother was sick so she wasn't allowed to be on a photo and couldn't go to school so of course she was also photographed,

Then we were hospitably invited to visit each family individually. We were taken into the huts and received even more jewelry and I think that I can send something unique to each of the sponsors.

Due to the extreme drought conditions there is nowhere in Masailand water or grass for the animals, they are dying of hunger and thirst. For the Masai is this a catastrophe. The animals are their only possessions so that if they die there is nothing left.

The next day we returned to school and I noticed that I was already used to the dust but there was something else going round in my head.

**How can I find sponsors for the 25 children I photographed and who are all on the waiting list???**



I hope that someone can help me with a good idea.

# De Hekima Waldorf School in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania



**Last year I spent four weeks in this school mentoring the kindergarten teachers and observing the 18 orphans who are sponsored via the IHF. (Refer to the news letter of Spring 2008) Those weeks flew past and I was not able to complete everything that I had wanted to do. Since I was now 'so close' I decided to fly from Nairobi to Dar es Salaam and hoped that I would be able to speak to everyone that I wanted to meet.**

Everything felt very familiar especially the humid heat. I knew the road to the school, the place where I was to stay and I had so many friends that it was almost like coming home. The school was on holiday for Easter but all of the teachers were at school each day and even a few pupils who came for extra help.

It was very quiet without the children but everyone had time so I was able to speak to all those I needed to speak to: the school leader, the school board, the accountant and the financial assistant. I also spoke to the person responsible for 'adoption' programme and the Chairman of the Waldorf Education Trust.

The gardener was very busy in the vegetable garden and the school bus driver proudly showed me the new school bus. The old bus could not be used any more after it had fallen through a bridge and so the transporting of the children had been arranged through a hire service until the school could raise the money for a new bus. Now the children can be collected and returned home in their own bus. I must thank everyone who has helped to make this possible. 'Asante Sana!'

I went with Stephen Chambo .the school leader, up to Goba the place where the new school building will come to stand. (see the building project of the Hekima Waldorf School at Goba). I also went with him to Matenana to

visit a Bio Dynamic farm (see: The BD farm in Matenana)

I spent Easter with Tanzanian friends, went to church and swam in the Indian Ocean. I had cookery lessons and was fed fantastic meals wherever I went. The hospitality was unbelievable and I almost felt tempted to stay but there was one more visit on my programme and that was to the new Waldor Kindergarten in Arusha.



# New buildings for the Hekima School in Goba



All of the people connected to the Hekima school have already been planning to build a school on land that belongs to the school. At the moment the school is still occupying a building that was originally intended to be a small factory and which does not belong to the school. In order to be registered the school has to own its buildings and the land on which they are built. In Goba, a middle-class suburb to the north of Dar es Salaam they have found land on which they may build. There are already a number of children from the Goba area attending the school and they like most of the other children are picked up each day by the school bus or they are brought by their parents. There are already some parents who have applied to have the children in the school as soon as it moves and I was told that one family has also moved to Goba to be near the school.

The school also wants to begin with the upper school and if they succeed it will be the first Waldorf upper school in East Africa. There is a lot of interest from Kenya and Uganda in this development. There will be boarding possibilities for both the lower and upper school pupils who come from further away and for the orphan children. I went to Goba with Stephen Chambo who was then the School Leader to the place where the school is to be built. It is a very beautiful location and very green. There are a lot of coconut trees on the plot and alas many of them will have to be removed for a ripe coconut falling on someone's head could cause irreparable damage, and it does happen more often than would think.

The land has been bought with a loan from the German organization 'Friends of the education system of Rudolf Steiner' with whom we work quite closely. There is a fence around the plot and the first bricks were pressed during an official gathering. There is water, a container is there with some building materials and a small

vegetable garden has already been started. In short everyone is anxious to begin building as soon as possible.

In Europe 'The Friends' have already begun to collect money for the building and as soon as this has been transferred to Tanzania the building of the first phase will begin.

The first building must be completed quickly or the school will face great difficulties. The owner of the present school building doubled the rent at the beginning of 2009 when the lease ran out. This sum is beyond the means of the school which receives no subsidies at all. Moreover there is a second problem looming, if the school is not registered by the end of this year they will have to close down.

I hope that as you read this building will have already begun.



# The Bio-Dynamic farm at Matenana, Tanzania



**Ewout van Alphen has a bio-dynamic farm at Matenana not far from Mafinga in the Iringa Region. Everyday on his farm he feeds and cares for 100 orphans from 2-7 years old who live in the surrounding villages. I went to the farm of Ewout van Alphen together with Stephen Chambo, teacher and school leader of the Hekima Waldorf School in Dar es Salaam. We wanted to be in contact with Ewout and to find out what the school and the farm could mean to each other. Perhaps it would be possible for children from class 7 to hold a work week there.**

We left a hot dry Dar es Salaam behind and after a day in the bus we arrived at Mafinga in a tropical rain storm which left us soaked and shivering within seconds. It was cold there. The heating in the car that came to meet us went on but 25 kms further up the road to the farm I was still shivering. Luckily we were met on arrival by a large, crackling fire that not only warmed us up but was used for cooking our supper as well. Here, close to the fire we heard Ewout's story:

Ewout is Dutch by birth and had for many years a bio-dynamic farm in Sweden. While journeying through Tanzania in 2004 he eventually arrived in a small village around 650 kms

to the south west of Dar es Salaam. One of the elders asked him a question. 'What can we do with all our orphans? The parents of so many of our children have died as a result of the HIV/AIDS infection. And that isn't all many of the aunts and uncles have also died together with other family members.'

Ewout took the question back with him to Sweden and told the story to everyone that would listen. People wanted to help and a foundation was set up. Money began to come in but the most important development was that this farmer in heart and soul decided to go and live in Africa and care for orphans on his farm.

Together with his Tanzanian wife, Salome, Ewout now has a Bio-Dynamic farm on which not only crops such as maize, wheat, bananas, onions, tomatoes, paprikas and potatoes etc. flourish, but where 100 orphans from 2-7 years old are cared for during the day. At three different places on the farm around 33 children have a place to come together. They receive clothing, love, care and of course food.

The grain crops and the vegetables that are grown on the farm are sufficient to feed 100 children and 30 adults every day. Breakfast



is maize porridge, the warm meal is mostly rice or a thick maize porridge like polenta, eaten with white cabbage cooked with onions and tomatoes and brown beans. Everything is eaten to the last drop of gravy. At the end of the afternoon the children return to the village where they live with family members if they still exist. 50% of the population is infected with HIV/AIDS and many people die from it.

The next day we were able to see everything for ourselves: the maize, onions, wheat, bananas and all of the other crops. We spoke to the women working on the land, the children playing and helping around the settlement, the Swedish volunteers who work with the children and we saw how bricks were being made and then burnt from the ground around the farm.

We admired the house that is being built to house the orphans, the well and the huge pans on the fire in which the food for all the children and workers is prepared. In short we saw a lively business running as it should and happy hard working people.

When we talked to Ewout and Salome about the care of the children it quickly became apparent that what they really wanted was to start a play group and a kindergarten for the orphan children. Putting up a building isn't a problem. The bricks can be made from the thick red clay of the farm and when baked they are of a beautiful colour. Stephen offered to have two of the future kindergarten teachers in the kindergarten at Hekima for work experience and training while I offered to see whether it is financially possible to allow the teachers to follow the training in Nairobi. We must be able to find a solution to the furnishing and equipping of the classrooms!

The next day we were already in the bus

on the way back to Dar es Salaam. We were full of stories and ideas for this farm and all of the people who live there and the orphans.

And oh yes, the workweek for the class 7 children will take place in the near future.



# The kindergarten school in Arusha Tanzania



**Last year when I visited Dar es Salaam for the first time Sarah Meliara asked me to go with her to see a new Waldorf kindergarten in Arusha. Sarah had taught for 10 years at the Hekima school and two years earlier she had started a kindergarten in her home village close to Arusha in a house.**

When I arrived after a day in the bus in Arusha Sarah rushed up to me singing and threw her arms around me. We drove in an old Landrover to Bangata, the village where Sarah lives. It is so green there. Everywhere were plantations of maize, bananas, coffee, fruit trees and flowers. Sarah took me to the home of a recently married member of the family. There I was to stay for the next few days.

That night there was a heavy thunder storm lasting most of an hour. There was really heavy rainfall and I was grateful to be under a strong roof.

Early the next morning I walked to the school and saw that whole stretches of the road had been washed away. The sand road of the previous day was now an almost impassable mud path full of holes filled with water.

On my arrival there was an official reception. I was welcomed with flowers and a speech and the local photographer took a picture. The reafter began the meeting! Sarah, Njiku –the probable new teacher for class 1 – and myself. The most important subject was the desire to begin a primary school.

In the course of the discussion we were able to reduce the 26 points for consideration into four categories which suddenly made everything a lot clearer. Then Sarah told me what their plans for me were for the next four days. There were to be meetings with parents and teachers, observation of lessons, the local secretary for education was to come, we

were to meet the architect and one or another important local official. She had also planned a number of tourist attractions and there were a lot of family members who wanted to meet me. Unfortunately I only had two days to soare and had to be back in Nairobi for the journey back to Holland. We did manage to do quite a lot.

- The meeting with the parents who really want a 'Waldorf' primary school for their children
- The observation of lessons in the kindergarten where the children showed how happy and contented they are by the concentrated way they followed the stories and other activities.
- the talk with four teachers who so much want a job in that new school and want to follow the course in Nairobi.
- The making of a plan for the first four years without too great financial consequences.
- A talk with the gardener about a vegetable garden to supply the meals of the children.

The desire of the parents, the teachers and Sarah to begin with a class 1 was unintentionally underlined by a group of children in blue uniforms. Last year they were in the kindergarten and now they come back every day to see the school and there old teacher.

This was the last project that I was able to visit. Early the next morning I left for Nairobi and the following day I flew back to the Netherlands, full of stories, impressions and experiences.

