

Africa Update  
May 2010



Dear All,

After a season of reorganisation, the children's project is on the move again. The rainy season has finished now which means that physical work on the land can progress more easily. The fish ponds have benefited greatly from the rains, the result being a good cover of grass over both their inner and outer walls (see photograph below). The grasses offer increased strength as well as protection from erosion.



The next phase of developing the farm is to construct a dam to hold water for both the ponds and the yet to be established vegetable gardens. I plan to have a new team come within the next month to begin this work. We have until the end of September to complete the dam at which time it's strength will be severely tested by the next rainy season.

Work on the babies' home continues with good progress being made. The building team is currently plastering the inside of the building. It's exciting to watch its development and I am hoping to see both the babies' home and the project farm operational by the end of this year.

This month, I write about a boy who came to my house looking for help. The following is his story.....

## John's Story

Eleven year old John is first cousin of one of my workers, David, and currently stays with David's family. David, on the other hand, looks after the security of the project property here and currently stays in one of the property buildings. In this way, the project equipment, building supplies and buildings are all protected from vandalism and theft, especially overnight.

Since I arrived back from Australia in March, I noticed John visiting his cousin here on the weekends and he seemed to enjoy being in the company of the workers here. He was also enjoying eating the food here provided for workers!

Two weeks ago, John contracted malaria and he came to my door for help. I was able to give him some anti-malaria medicine whilst he was still at the very beginning stages of the sickness and he recovered quickly. John told me that the new school term was due to start on the following Monday.

Seeing John visiting the project property on a school day during the following week, I asked him why he wasn't at school. I didn't want a school truant on the property during school days. John replied that school was resuming the following Monday, not the one just gone as I had initially understood.

That evening I asked David further about John's schooling. He said that John had indeed gone to school on Monday morning but that the school had "chased him away". His uniform was falling apart and he didn't have any exercise books. Even though the price to replace/ purchase these items was relatively cheap (for me), David's family had no money to buy them. I decided to pay the costs to put John back into school.

The following day, John arrived to go shopping with David and me. But he also had his little sister Maggy in tow. She was also out of school for the same reason and had, in fact, missed a whole year of school. They were hoping. A few hours later we had purchased everything required to put both of them back into school. The school uniforms, shoes, school bags, books and simple stationary for both came to just less than AUD \$100 and would keep them going for the next year.

Once shopping was finished, John piped up and said that they were hungry. I gave both children a bread-roll to keep them satisfied until they got home for dinner. David wanted to escort them home. It would be a chance for him to visit with his family and arrange for the children to be taken to school the next day.

David returned after dark and I asked how things went. He mentioned that his mother was going to take the children to school the next day. I asked him if he had eaten with the family and he said no. I probed a little further asking if the children had eaten and he said no. The reality was that the family had no food and had not eaten that day or the previous day. So when John had piped up earlier to say that they were hungry, I now knew what he had meant. It wasn't just a matter of missing out on afternoon tea.

Ironically, John had mentioned their hunger when we were all standing in my porch area where I keep stocks of food for my workers. Both children had been standing in view of all this food before starting off for another night without dinner.

It was 8.00 pm as I was hearing this from David. This day was supposed to have been a “feel good” day where two children were helped back into school. Now I wasn’t feeling very good at all. A destitute, hungry family of six were a few minutes drive away whilst I had abundant supplies of food stored in the porch area of my house.

David was finishing off some final jobs that needing doing whilst I was trying to read a book. By now I was quite disturbed thinking about this family’s’ plight. After reading the same sentence a number of times without comprehension, I asked David if he thought it would be a good idea if we took some food over at this late hour. He said yes and off we went.

The family came out to the car to receive the food and there was much excitement and appreciation. The food was to be prepared immediately and so we left the family to their cooking.

As I reflected upon the day’s happenings, one thing particularly struck me: Whilst we had been trawling through the markets earlier to find the school uniforms etc, the two children had not complained once.

Such is life here.

The following is an account of the last few years of John and Maggy’s lives:

- ◆ A few years ago, their mother died. Their father turned the care of his two young children over to his brother’s family (David’s father) whilst he kept working to provide money for their care.
- ◆ Eight months later, their father died leaving the two children to be what they call “double orphans” here. The children became a permanent part of David’s family.
- ◆ Last year, David’s father became very ill and had to cease employment. He is bed-ridden a good deal of the time now. David’s mother was also suffering from a chronic illness. They experienced financial hardship and were evicted from a good house that they were sharing with two other families. The electricity company also seized all of their furniture (including a refrigerator) in lieu of a large outstanding bill. Zesco has since sold this furniture to recoup some of the debt. Zambia does not offer unemployment benefits.
- ◆ The family is currently living in a very simple dwelling with no electricity or running water. They have no furniture.
- ◆ John has melancholic bouts when he is not able to go to school.



John and Maggy ready for school with David looking on.

- ◆ Maggy is very academically gifted and has just skipped two grades.
- ◆ David is currently using part of his salary to put his younger sister “Mildred” through Year 12. He is the only one in the family presently with an income. He is also saving part of his salary to go towards planting a maize crop during the next rainy season. He is looking to generate some money in order to break out of this poverty trap. On top of this, David periodically gives money to his parents towards the upkeep of the family.

That’s my news for now.  
I’ll be writing again in the next month or so.  
Until then, stay well,

*Mike*