

GOT MATAR

Building a school Building a future



September 2007

At about this time last year, I wrote to you about the request that I had received from members of the Got Matar Community Development Group in western Kenya to help them raise €300,000 (about £200,000 or US\$400,000) to build a secondary school. During this year great progress has been made, and the school is already up and running.

My purpose in writing now is to thank all who have generously made donations or pledges, or shown interest, and to tell you what the community has achieved, using your contributions as well as funds raised locally. I will also outline their plans for the future and appeal again for your help.

Getting started

The goal set by the community was to construct a school over four years with a capacity for 600 pupils and an annual intake of 150 children each year. This would create opportunities for the many boys and girls who cannot otherwise continue their education after leaving the ten primary schools that serve the community: the costs of boarding at more distant schools are simply unaffordable for most families. Got Matar is a rural area, dominated by small-scale fishing and farming, where incomes are very low and the working age population has been decimated by AIDS. One third of all children are orphans, who usually live with the families of relatives of their dead parents.

I have known the Got Matar community for some years but visited it again at the end of September 2006 to review arrangements and agree on how to proceed. We decided then that sufficient funds could be mustered to enable the first phase of construction to begin as soon as detailed plans had been finalised.

John Rendel, Chief Executive of the UK-based charity **PEAS** (Promoting Equality in African Schools) was also able, together with his Uganda-based colleagues, to join us in Got Matar. This led to an agreement that **PEAS** would manage UK contributions and also provide technical and management guidance to the group, drawing on their sound experience in school construction and operation. I also met with my friend Professor Karega Mutahi, the Permanent Secretary for Education, who provided assurances of the Ministry's full support for the initiative. Later, Vanda Altarelli, who founded and runs the Italian charity, **SONIA**, agreed to assist with fund-raising and to manage gifts made in Euros. All donations go to the school, as I meet all administrative, fund-raising and supervision costs.



August 2007: Preparing to lay foundations for the second classroom block and library.



August 2007: Pupils, parents and teachers at the closing ceremony for the second term. First classroom block in background.

Up and running in record time

As a result of a combination of competent and dedicated work by community leaders and of generosity on the part of friends and relations, much more has been achieved during the past year than I ever believed was possible. In the four months following my visit, the community, with help from the Ministries of Education and of Public Works, as well as from **PEAS**, finalised building plans, selected a contractor through local tendering, completed the construction of essential facilities, recruited staff and enrolled pupils.

The new buildings consisted of: a first block of four classrooms, divided by folding partitions so that it can also serve as an assembly hall; washrooms, a kitchen and a perimeter fence to keep out stray animals. One of the classrooms was set aside for a school office during the first year.

The school hired an experienced head master, a bursar and six trained teachers as well as support staff. It also set up a parent-teachers' association. **Got Matar Secondary School opened for classes, with 112 pupils, on 5th February 2007 at the beginning of Kenya's academic year. Pupil numbers have since built up to 142 boys and girls, of whom 56 are orphans.**

Total costs incurred to arrive at this point amounted to about €50,000 (£33,500, US\$67,500).

The fees are set at a deliberately low level but one that, if all children were to pay, would cover all normal operating costs. About one third of the pupils, however, cannot afford the fees and require bursaries. A Bursaries Committee has been set up to define the terms and conditions and to approve qualified applications. The community intends to create income-generating enterprises (e.g. poultry, brick-making) to place the funding of bursaries on a sustainable basis. In the short term, however, sponsors are being sought to cover bursary costs (see last page of letter for details).

What comes next?

The immediate need is for another three classrooms for the next batch of 150 pupils, due to arrive in early 2008. A school library, partly funded by a grant from the FAO 1% for Development Fund, will be built as part of the same block. Since enough funds are available for all of this, construction has been started in August 2007.

The school has prepared a Strategic Plan for the next five years, in which it sets out its priorities for buildings and equipment. In each of the next two years there will be a need for an additional block of general purpose classrooms. Other proposed buildings include specialised teaching facilities (science laboratory, home sciences training centre, practical skills training workshop, computer training centre), teachers' housing, dormitory blocks for boys and girls, and a school office. For each building, appropriate equipment will have to be bought, and there will be a growing need for text book purchases. There will also be a progressive increase in rainwater storage capacity and in photovoltaic electricity generation in line with needs.

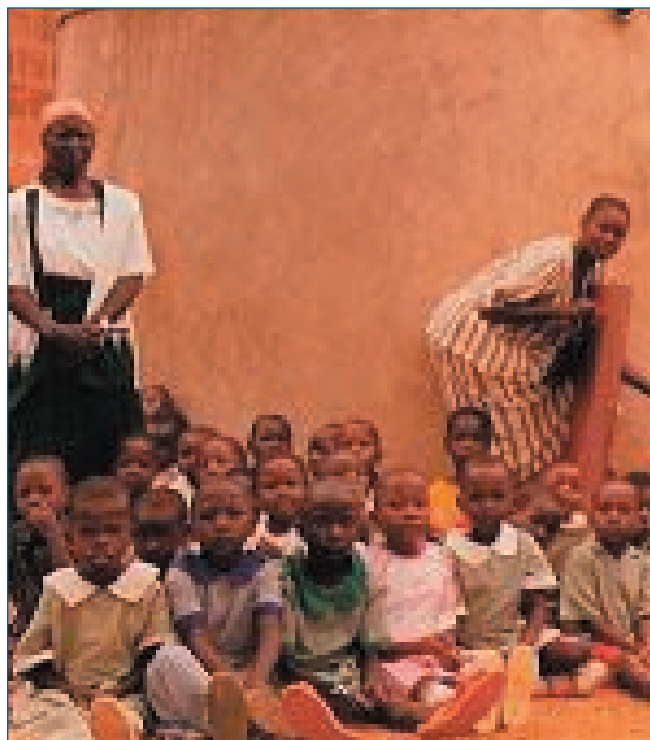
The other main call on funds will be for the financing of bursaries, especially for orphans. It is expected that some 200 of the 600 pupils for which the school is designed will be selected for bursaries.

Finance

The rate at which the programme is implemented will depend mainly on the availability of funds.

By the end of July 2007, total paid-in contributions to the international appeal amounted to €85,000 (about £57,000, US\$115,000). A further €35,000 had been pledged. Nationally raised funds included €2,000 from a harambee, in addition to contributions from the Constituency Development Fund and from the Ministry of Education (for scientific equipment). **In August, the Ministry provided the school with a Certificate of Registration, opening the way for the government to begin to pay teachers' salaries and to contribute to capital costs.**

It would be really great if we could raise an additional €100,000 (£67,000, US\$125,000) between now and next September. This would be enough to finance the next general purpose classroom block (€30,000), one of the specialised training facilities (€30,000) and bursaries for 100 orphans for four years (€40,000).



Future pupils for Got Matar Secondary School: children in one of ten pre-primary schools.

Should you feel able to contribute towards this goal and if you have not already completed a banker's order, you may wish to use one of the enclosed donation forms and submit it to **PEAS** (in UK) or **SONIA** (in EURO zone) with a cheque or instructions to your bank. If you want to sponsor bursaries, please make sure you tick the appropriate boxes on the form.

Seeing how your Gifts are used

The school has issued an open invitation to donors, so that you can see for yourselves how your donations have been used and meet children benefiting from sponsored bursaries. The school will also arrange for sponsors to correspond with bursary awardees and to receive their end-of term reports. For those who cannot get to Kenya, we are trying to provide an up-to-date account of progress, including photos, on the website (www.gotmatar.org).

Should you want any further information, I can be contacted

- by phone at **00390564507930**
- by e-mail at **andrew.macmillan@alice.it**
- by post at **CP 29, Scansano, 58054, GR, Italy**

I believe that the record of achievement over the pass year suggests that any further contributions that you are able to make will be well invested and will really make a huge difference to the lives of large numbers of children.



August 2007: Top performers in Form One during the ceremony at the end of the school's second term.

Sponsoring Bursaries

The Community has established a Bursary Committee to define terms of grants, establish criteria for eligibility, assess applicants and engage in fund-raising.

Total costs to the school of providing tuition, one meal per day and a uniform are estimated at about €150 (about £100) per year. In order to avoid creating undue dependencies, however, the Committee has set the bursary award level at about €100. (£67, US\$135) which should cover tuition fees for a year. A separate Bursary Fund bank account has been opened.

Each applicant has been interviewed by the Committee, which has awarded 15 initial bursaries for 2007, funding these from economies in building costs. The need now is to finance the other 41 approved bursaries for this year, and to enable all 56 bursaries to run for four years per pupil. Each year another 50 to 60 qualified applicants for bursaries are expected to join the school.

While the Committee very much welcomes donations to meet the costs of bursaries, it considers that this is not a viable long-term solution. It has, therefore, begun to plan the creation of Income-Generating Activities, including dairy farming, poultry rearing and brick-making, with the goal of meeting a growing proportion of bursary costs from within the community. These enterprises, however, will take time to grow and generate income.

The AIDS epidemic has been particularly fierce in Western Kenya. Over one out of every three children in the Got Matar area is an orphan. Orphans are looked after by families of relatives but many of these are

overwhelmed because of a combination of a sudden increase in family size and the early death of many bread-winners. As a result, many orphans are unable to attend school.

How you can help

The best way to help is to pay €100 (£67, US\$135) per year for four years – or a total of €400 – to support a Bursary which will guarantee schooling for a boy or girl for the full secondary school course. Payments can be made on an annual or more frequent basis or as a lump sum to cover the full four years. Smaller commitments to the Bursary Fund are also, of course, most welcome. The Committee will provide you with the name of the individual awardee and you would have the option of receiving end-of-term reports and of entering into one-to-one correspondence.

Donors are strongly discouraged from making any direct payments to “their” awardee or his/her family. Similarly, awardees are obliged not to write “begging” letters to their sponsors, at the risk of losing their bursary. This is essential to avoid inducing dependencies and creating jealousies within the community and school.

Payments may be made via either of the two NGOs supporting Got Matar – **SONIA** in Italy and **PEAS** in UK – using the enclosed forms, also down-loadable from the website. Please tick appropriate box and add note as needed to indicate if all or part of your gift is towards bursaries.