

BEADS Pays School Fees for Maasai Girl

by Debby Kooney, co-founder of BEADS

Florence was 12 years old when we first met in 1998. Her father was looking for a husband for her. Like so many young adolescent Maasai girls in Kenya, Florence had reached the age for marriage. Education is the best escape for these girls; under Maasai tradition, the only way a girl can avoid early marriage and circumcision is if she is in school. And so I promised to find a sponsor to pay Florence's yearly school fees. Her father was skeptical, but agreed.



Today, Florence is a senior at the best school in the Kajiado district (everyone must apply for high-school placement and is selected according to their national test results). She is an excellent athlete, a natural leader and maintains stellar marks that will qualify her for university. Florence is THINKING BIG!

Florence is the first girl in her family to attend secondary school, thanks to a sponsorship made available through BEADS for Education. She is one of 55 girls sponsored through BEADS. The sponsored girls are primarily from Maasai families in the Amboseli Wildlife Sponsorship Region and Isinya, which is 60 kilometers south of Nairobi.

Each girl is matched with a sponsor who receives school reports, letters and pictures at the end of each term. Every girl signs a contract to participate in community service projects such as town clean-up, tutoring and mentoring other students.

The girls' mothers participate in a women's business group and produce exquisite beaded hand-crafts. Their profits enable them to provide the minimal financial contribution for school fees required from each family. Products are available at the Smithsonian National Zoo, Smithsonian gift shops, and on the BEADS Web site.

A beautiful display can also be seen at the Kenyan Embassy in Washington, D.C.

In January 2003, I was thrilled to share the first face-to-face meeting between Florence and her sponsor, Pat Judy. Florence's father showed his pleasure by inviting the other elders in the area to join us, with his three wives and many of his children. As we ate, we discussed Florence's ambition to attend the university and pursue a career in medicine. Florence's father showed his appreciation for all that Pat had done for his daughter by offering her a gift—a goat.

Thirty dollars a month provides a girl with this opportunity. One hundred percent of the sponsor's donation is used for tuition and workshops for the sponsored girls. Operating expenses for BEADS are raised each year through separate donations.

Check out the BEADS website for more information: www.beadsforeducation.org. ♦

BEADS is a non-profit project of the IWDC, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization. BEADS works in conjunction with the African Wildlife Foundation and the African Conservation Center and has trained two Kenyan program assistants.

Habari kwa Kifupi

Kenya's 10,000 Somalia refugees set for U.S.
excerpted from an article by Mugo Njeru, 01/21/03

About 10,000 Somalia refugees in Kenya are to be resettled in the U.S. "Between 300 and 500 Somali Bantu refugees will be ferried every week until all are settled," the head of the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) Kenya sub-office, Mr Mohammed Abdiker, said.

His organisation, he said, had identified 50 U.S. states, each to accommodate about 200 refugees.

Mr Abdiker said the U.S. government had approved the programme and was finalising the immigration information.

Canada and Australia will also admit other refugees, including those of Sudanese and Ethiopian origins.

There were currently about 11,000 Somali Bantus in Kenyan refugee camps. Their resolve has been: "Going back to Somalia would be to plunge back into the flames. Going to America is a dream. It is the choice between the fire and paradise."

Members of this particular group of Somalis were highly discriminated against in Somalia where they are viewed as foreigners. ♦

Craving for Udongo, the magic stone

excerpted from an article by Gitonga Marete, Coast Express

Young women call it Fegt, while others call it Dawa, but whichever name you call it, Udongo is becoming popular among many coastal women.

Nearly a decade after it found its way into Kenya, Udongo is winning over a big number of consumers, mainly expectant women and girls. Expectant women lacking iron and calcium in their diet crave for Udongo as it is said to contain the minerals. But they say they eat it mainly to avoid vomiting.

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