

# Poli, Poli, Slowly, Slowly, Making a Difference

*Submitted by Nia Z. Sberar, Avenues Neighborhood Resident*



“I don’t know how old I am,” Betty Nkoitoi, a Kenyan Maasai mama, giggles. “I was born in a manyata! It is the mud and cow dung home of my tribe.” She makes tea for Nancy and me over a fire. “One day I would like to go to teachers’ college so that I can be a teacher,” she says wistfully.

1 out of 2 people in our world live on less than \$2 a day; 1 out of 6 live on less than \$1 a day.

“I am a linguist,” the old Maasai man tells us as we bump along on the deeply, rutted road. Eleven of us are squeezed into a small Nissan station wagon. “I speak three languages - Maasai, Kswahili and English - even though I have never been to school and do not know how to read or write.” I told him I thought he was a cowboy, pointing to the cowboy hat on his head. We all laughed.

1 out of 6 people in our world cannot read a book or write their name.

“My friend Bosire is now 74 feet below the ground,” Isaac tells us as we peer

down into the hand-dug well hole, 30 inches in diameter. “He will dig until he reaches water at around 80 feet.” It takes Bosire 10 days to dig an 80 foot deep well hole. We try, but we cannot see him.

1 out of 6 people in our world have inadequate access to clean water.

“Are you happy to be getting a latrine?” I ask the crowd of villagers who gather around while Nancy and I observe the construction of their latrine that will serve 4 – 6 families. “Eyyyyyy!” they say in unison, nodding. “Eyyyyyy!” means, “yes indeed!”

1 out of 3 people in our world lack basic sanitation.

My childhood dream was to plant corn in Africa. I don’t know why. I was just born that way. A resident of Salt Lake City and the Avenues for the past 20 years, I founded the Opportunity Fund for Developing Countries (OFDC), a nonprofit organization, in 1999. We raise money here at home to fund projects in Kenya that improve the lives

of poor women and children. OFDC provides small income generating loans called “microcredit”, training for women, educational assistance to children and improved health care to all. OFDC’s Kenyan administrators work with villagers living with no electricity or running water and earning less than a dollar a day. Once a year, I go to Kenya and together we develop programs to empower their lives.

In less than four weeks, Nancy Ortiz (OFDC’s Chair) and I traveled by foot, donkey cart, boda boda (bicycle taxi), matatu (crowded vans with up to 26 passengers squeezed inside or hanging on the outside), three wheeled tut-tut, a big Acamba bus with broken seats, and a small Nissan taxi (up to 11 passengers squeezed inside – or 8 passengers with cabbages, corn or sheep filling the back).

We laughed with the children who found it funny when I ate raw cabbage (they only eat it cooked in Kenya). We laughed with them as they touched our hair and our white skin.



We saw many wild animals including baboon, zebra, giraffe, hippo, elephant and 9 lionesses going out for their evening hunt. We grieved with Morris when he learned that his cousin had been trampled to death by an elephant near his village.

We watched as the Maasai killed 2 cows for graduation celebration, drinking the blood, eating the raw kidneys raw, sucking the bone marrow and roasting the ribs. We celebrated with the women who wore long satin evening gowns out in the bush as they ladled out rice, potatoes, meat and peas and served over 400 Maasai guests.

We visited children who showed us their OFDC donated mosquito nets that they sleep under so they are protected from malaria carrying mosquitoes (every 30 seconds a child in Africa dies from malaria). We delivered basic medical supplies to OFDC's small clinic in Bikeke, Kenya.

We met chochos, or grandmothers, who are raising their grandchildren due to

parental deaths from AIDS – 15 million children have been orphaned by AIDS.

We met many of the children OFDC is sponsoring in school and were thanked by parents for the donated school desks. We met the villagers who now have clean water and latrines, built with their labor and materials supplied by OFDC. We met mamas who have been successful with their small businesses started with their OFDC microcredit loans – businesses such as raising goats and selling their offspring, selling milk from their

cow and selling vegetables harvested in their gardens. We saw mamas who were not so successful - mounds of red clay that were once bricks made by their hard labor recently destroyed by floods. These people are resilient. We saw hope. We see hope. I have been home now for 2 weeks and my mind keeps traveling back to Kenya...

*If you would like more information on this article and how you can help support OFDC or get involved, please contact Nia Z. Sherar, Founder/Executive Director at 487-9380 or visit <http://www.ofdc.org>.*

