

LIFE STARTS WITH WATER

By Linda Hooper



Bernard Christopher

Bernard Christopher is a 14 year old, handsome boy in the 7th grade. He is tall and has the chiseled features of a Samburu warrior. As is customary in Sere Olipi in Samburu County, Bernard used to wake up “at the crack of dawn,” to walk great distances to look for water. He would carry a yellow “jerry” can through a beautiful wilderness, home to the lions, leopards and elephants that Samburu is known for. It was a perilous journey, that sometimes resulted in attacks that could leave you maimed or worse. Bernard collected whatever brown liquid he could find and brought it back home to share with his family.

Many families in Samburu have lost children to water borne diseases. That was Pauline Kangai Emmaculate’s story. Pauline is 15 years old and looking forward to her graduation from Standard 8. She made a regular 20 kilometers walk in search for water, was often chased by hyenas, and lost her brother

to a water borne disease. Despite the best efforts of the local doctor, he died by drinking contaminated water.

Bernard and Pauline’s stories are typical of life in Samburu before The Samburu Project.

A Simple Solution to That Extraordinary Problem

In 2011, the Sere Olipi Primary School was the beneficiary of a well provided by The Samburu Project and donors from Pittsburgh, PA. It was a welcome relief to the students and the community at large, the day the clean water came out of the ground. The well is located a mile

from the school and was pumping night and day by the students and community members alike.

After two years of the students' daily ritual to fetch water 3 times a day, Headmaster, Ambrose Lekotip had the vision to expand upon the bounty of this well. In 2014, he initiated a piping project that brought the water directly onto the school campus as well as two additional access points - one that provides water to a health clinic and one to a community kiosk.

Having direct access to clean water has been a game changer for the school that now boasts almost 500 students, 187 of whom are girls. The children proudly enjoy clean showers and latrines. Their dormitories shine and so do the students in clean school uniforms. The compound has several hand-washing stations that teach the importance of personal hygiene.

The Jewel in Their Crown is the Garden

Shortly after the piping project, an Environmental Club was spearheaded by David Kiptoech. The club now includes 40 members. Together they cheerfully tend the garden daily, watering the plants that provide food for the student



body and faculty. They grow fresh vegetables - corn and kale, beans and tomatoes. Recently, a small secondary herb garden has been started from the run off from a hand washing station. They even have a small flower bed that decorates their flag pole. Flowers, in one of the most dry and arid climates in Kenya are a treat for the eyes.

The students at Sere Olipi Primary school know that it is because of water that they are lucky. They are healthy, well fed and as a result, are able to concentrate on their studies in a clean and hygienic environment.

Beyond Water

Last year, the students of Sere Olipi Primary School collaborated with The Samburu Project to tell their stories and spread the word about the importance of water.

Fifty senior students were chosen to write essays in English offering a glimpse into what it is like to be water challenged in Samburu. Their personal stories of growing up without access to water are powerful. Waterborne diseases, fearsome interactions with wild animals and the humiliation and shame of being dirty were recurring themes.

These essays were shared with students at the 49ers Academy in East Palo Alto, CA last November. The California students were so

moved by the Kenyan stories that they held their own walk for water in solidarity with the Sere Olipi students. Video messages from the 49ers Academy students to the Sere Olipi students can be found on The Samburu Project's Facebook page.

Connecting Communities Through Water

The Samburu Project is committed to supporting Samburu communities with water and more. As part of this mission, TSP will hold a book drive in Los Angeles later this year. Books collected at The Center for Early Education, the Marlborough School for Girls and Beverly Hills High School will be shipped to Kenya where they will form the beginning of a school library.

This library, along with the garden, the increase in education for girls, the dramatic decrease in water borne diseases all began at Sere Olipi Primary School with access to clean water. Water is the cornerstone of these students' dignity and hope for a bright future. It started with a well.

The Samburu Project recently drilled its 100th well in Samburu. Please check their website for more Samburu Stories and see how you can join the team.

www.thesamburuproject.org



Pauline Kangai Emmaculate

Airkenya is a proud sponsor of The Samburu Project.