

Sunday, September 19, 2010

Greetings all,

We have just completed our tour of projects in Kenya. Communication here is a big challenge. We had no Internet service until today, just a few hours before flying out. During the past two days, we visited food relief and food security projects among the Maasai people of Kenya. These projects were funded by NCM Canada and Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (Canada) through Canadian Foodgrains Bank (CFGB).

We travelled from Nairobi in a jeep to the bottom of the Rift Valley, about 50 km or so outside the city limits, and then took a dirt trail (or should I say a “dust” trail) on the arid Rift Valley floor for hours, bumping along with the dust literally rolling over the top of the jeep and down the windows. We had no air conditioning and had to travel with all windows and vents closed. Every twenty minutes or so, we stopped to open the doors and get fresh, clean air into the car! It was a dirty, rough and stiflingly hot ride, but we arrived at a small Maasai town and stopped for a bottle of cola, which we bought from a local shop.

While standing in the road in the middle of the town, we were greeted by an English-speaking Maasai community member named Moses. He approached us and recognized the NCM Kenya Project Coordinator (who was travelling with us) and said, ***“Thank you for the food. The distribution last week went very well and was very orderly and fair.”*** That distribution of food had taken place the previous Friday at a Nazarene church just outside of the town. We passed the church and travelled about an hour to another Maasai village. There we were given a tour of a Maasai home by the local (Nazarene) pastor’s wife. The house was made of “locally available materials” – wood sticks, mud and cow dung. Inside were 4 rooms and one room had a “stove” (a clay structure with a fire pit). All rooms had a wooden/stick bed with 1 blanket and very little other “furniture”.

We went another 10 km, where a Nazarene church building was being constructed by the local tribe, and we passed a ‘stone quarry’ on the way to the village. We were told that the men of the church break out slabs of stone and then chisel them by hand into blocks and set each block in place with mortar. They make the mortar by mixing powdered cement, by hand, with water and sand. Cement is expensive and must be purchased, as well as the wood for the roof trusses. They are trusting God to supply the money for these materials, as most of these Maasai villagers lost their livestock over the past two years due to recurring droughts and shortages of grass. Their livestock, especially cattle, are their livelihood and only source of food and income. They are nomadic people and do not know how to till the soil. Therefore, when they lost their livestock, they had no means to feed their families and faced starvation.

The local Nazarene pastor contacted NCM Kenya to let them know about the situation. NCM Kenya, along with another indigenous church, contacted NCM Canada

and Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (Canada), who supplied food through Canadian Foodgrains Bank. In this village, the food was given as “Food for Work”. Because there was such a shortage of water, the people dug a plastic pipe about 10 km in length, by which to carry water from the nearest bore hole to a tank near the church. They were paid for this work in food. In the Maasai tradition, food is shared, so they shared the food with all who were in need. We learned that this particular water tank also serves as a baptismal tank for the church, and it has been used to baptise believers into the Christian faith. The tank also has an outlet to another tank which waters the few remaining livestock, and from which the women draw water to wash the clothes.

Elders in the Maasai tribes make most of the decisions and they also speak for the tribe. While we stood at the church, one of the elders of the tribe came up to us and said, ***“We are very, very grateful for the food. Without it, me and my people would have starved.”*** The Maasai face many challenges, as continued droughts threaten their livelihood. They are also quite resistant to changing their nomadic lifestyle.

The next day we visited another Maasai village and spoke with a chief. He had started a garden and was learning how to grow tomatoes and cabbages. We took a 2 hour trip down a dusty path and found another village with a Nazarene church where the people were trying to grow tomatoes, beans and maize. They were learning to use these foods in their diet. This was another food distribution point in a project which Canadian Foodgrains Bank funded, but NCM Kenya was able to reduce the amount of food distributed there because this village now had a ready source of locally available food from the gardens.

***Change is difficult. Please pray for these people.
Thank you for giving to the work of NCM and the Canadian Foodgrains Bank.
You are making a difference in the lives of the Maasai people of Kenya!***