

# A Message from the Volunteer Coordinator

Hello, my name is Linda Alvarez and I am proud to be affiliated with LECDEN. I learned of them from an international student that I met at UW-River Falls. Being an orphan myself, I know first hand the kind of pain that losing your parents entails. I also know that with the proper intervention children can grow up functional with a healthy attitude and the appropriate behaviors that one learns in a caring community. This community has begun a bold venture- to see what it can do to take care of itself and its children. Your assistance could help this community develop initiatives that could help Kenyans bring themselves up and out of poverty. No one wants to be on the "dole." There is dignity and purpose in work. Kiambiu residents simply want an opportunity to develop local resources that they can develop into income making products and services.

It all begins with education, for both adults and children. Education is truly transformative. Women have fewer children, HIV rates go down, people exercise the principles of honest interaction as a viable alternative to corruption. Next, people become participants and change agents in their localities. That can lead to better government, more equality and societal justice.

In a sense, Kiambiu and the Leo Community Development Network is a noble experiment but one that can work. Kiambiu people are industrious, well motivated, capable and resourceful. Please join us over the next year to see what great things can happen when people come together as a community to create a better life for all.

Over the past six months, through the generosity of our volunteers and supporters, we have been able to save a life with the surgical facial repair of one orphan, who is now back in school; restored to functional good health a mother of four, who was incapacitated by AIDS/TB and near death; began a pen pal project; provided twenty micro-loans (thanks to the Peace and Social Justice Committee of our local St. Bridget Catholic Church in River Falls, WI); provided school fees for two students; provided AIDS education materials and provided start up materials for a day care. We have also written a few proposals that we hope will be funded.

It takes so little to do so much. Even 50 cents can buy a little kid a meal and keep the pain of hunger away for a few hours. But remember, no matter how little it seems to us, whatever we do confers HOPE and reminds our Kiambiu kiddos that THEY ARE SOMEBODY and that somebody CARES!

Please join us and contribute what you can. We also accept prayers and good energy. Please feel welcome to contact with questions. Peace, Linda Alvarez, Volunteer Coordinator [Linda.m.alvarez@uwrf.edu](mailto:Linda.m.alvarez@uwrf.edu)

## You Can Help

**We are looking for group leaders and strong, compassionate individuals to help the members of the Kiambiu Slum out of poverty. We need help in fundraising, donations, and volunteering. LECDEN is a tax exempt NGO 501 (c) (3) organization.**

**For more information or to donate, please contact Linda Alvarez at 715-425-3852 or by email at [linda.alvarez@uwrf.edu](mailto:linda.alvarez@uwrf.edu).**

**Visit our website [www.lecden.org](http://www.lecden.org)**

*Thanks to April Schmidts for designing the newsletter!*



# 2008

Summer Issue



## LEO COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT NETWORK (LECDEN)

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### About LECDEN

Leo Community Development Network (LECDEN) was founded on the principles of community development leading to eventual economic self-sufficiency. LECDEN members, like so many in Africa and the developing nations, need only a "hand-up (skills, training, expertise, + temporary assistance), not a hand-out (perpetual assistance)."

LECDEN was founded in 2005 by H. Kelli Wambua and Steve O. Olita as a response to the death and displacement caused by HIV/AIDS and the 80% unemployment rate in the Kiambiu slum of Nairobi, Kenya. Encouraged by the industriousness and faith of their Kiambiu neighbors, they jointly developed a community based organization which empowers its members with the maxim, "learn to fish and be hungry no more." When people are employed, they can buy food, education and medicine. They are also able to pay their rent and keep their children safe in a day care. With the hard work of the founders, the LECDEN Executive Board, and neighborhood members, they have begun the hard work of economic development. However, the community will need assistance temporarily while they explore and initiate innovative projects to help themselves (and someday others) out of poverty.



## NEWSLETTER

### FOUNDERS

Steve Olita and Kelli Wambua

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Committee Chairman John Omari

Organizing Secretary Lilian Chacha

Treasurer Teresa Akinyi

## Welcome from the Founders

Steve Olita and Kelli Wambua

Thank you for your interest in LECDEN. We were young men working for a garbage company when we came upon our first AIDS orphans, living alone after the death of their parents. There is nothing so heartbreaking as to see impoverished children suddenly becoming the sole caretakers of their younger, sometimes, quite ill siblings.



Above Kelli Wambua and Steve Olita co-founders of LECDEN

Despite the post-election violence, Kenya is a country of kind people, most of whom follow the "golden rule." Decades of displacement, unemployment, poverty, hunger, the AIDS/TB epidemics, lack of access to education, medical and social resources, has put our people at risk. Still, most have hope. Even if we could provide little more than that, we knew in 2005 that we had no option but to assist these forlorn children. As we were connected with neighbors (guardians) and other relatives, we began to see a community form around the increasing challenges of life in the slum. Utilizing the talent in our community, we applied for NGO status and LECDEN began its community building mission. So far, we have been able to start a tailoring project with grant money from the Kenya AIDS NGO Consortium (KANCO). With the help of volunteers and fund raisers in Wisconsin, we have been able to assist quite a number of our beneficiaries to start small businesses for themselves. Though it will take some time for these small enterprises to see a profit, we will welcome assistance while we investigate larger business projects which will employ and generate more substantive income for our members.

We appeal to others to join us in working toward our dream of an economically self-sufficient Kiambiu community. Together, we can build a better future for ourselves, our families and our neighbors

## Day Care Still Needs Help

Below is a list of some of the items that are needed on a regular basis. These items you may have in your very own home and have no use for them. Don't throw them away-throw them OUR way!

- \*Funds (for many causes)
- Funds (food/medicine)
- \*shoes (gently used or new- all sizes)
- \*school supplies
- \*medical supplies
- \*baby supplies
- \*hygiene supplies
- \*diapers
- \*children's books
- \*books that 'make music'
- \*learning toys
- \*toys that make noise or move
- \*small musical instruments
- \*classroom posters and decorations
- \*dolls with washable rubber bodies
- \*eating utensils (strong plastic ware)
- \*Expertise from your own experience in international humanitarian service

Contact us with any of your donation questions at **715-425-3842** or email [linda.alvarez@uwrf.edu](mailto:linda.alvarez@uwrf.edu)



## Day Care Up and Running

(PHASE ONE)  
By Lillian Mola,  
Early Childhood Teacher

LECDEN's small office in Kiambiu also doubles as an infant/toddler day care center. It was started in 2008 as a result of the post-election mayhem. Many of us lost our teaching jobs due to the political fracas. Hence, I had to look for alternatives to earn a living. I decided to start a Day Care. Little children were often left alone or unguarded as their parent or guardian looked for work. Child traffickers took advantage of the situation; making their way through the slums, kidnapping children for the slave trade, sex work or child soldier trade. Fifteen kids from a nearby neighborhood went missing. We thank God that the children were rescued in Mombasa at the border.

Many of our Wisconsin volunteers and friends have helped us get started.

A day care center in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, even sent us money for a Christmas Dinner. I truly wish they could have seen the children appreciating Holiday meal! We started with 2 children and in five months have grown to 26. Our office is small, 12' by 12', is poorly ventilated and has no electricity. Due to lack of room, some children are now being turned away. There is no

running water, latrine or playground with facilities.

Children of course, learn better through play, i.e., they socialize, explore, experiment, gain self-esteem and become creative.

Last semester, we were fortunate to receive a "special project" from Feed the Children.

They gave us 5 bags of rice which insured that the children had one meal each day. FTC has no more extra rice and with food inflated at 400%, there had been no feeding program until one of our Wisconsin volunteers raised enough for a month of porridge. We have been sent books, some toys and school supplies.

**"A well fed and rested child learns better and faster."**

Music is also an activity of early childhood education but the daycare lacks the tools needed to

teach them real music.

For them to grow and learn, they need rest and nutrition. A well fed and rested child learns better and faster than a malnourished and tired child. Therefore, the feeding program and obtaining nap time supplies is a current concern.



## Hopes to Build a Bigger School

(PHASE TWO)  
By Gladys Atieno  
Pre-school Teacher

Riverside School and Daycare started in 2003 in Kiambiu slum with about 5 children. Recently, we became part of the LECDEN network and now serve about 60 children, ages 2-6 years of age. The school's goal is to prepare children for primary school.

Most of our children are from impoverished families, broken homes or have been orphaned. We are currently housed in a sheet metal building which is approximately 20' by 25' with a dirt floor

Some of the problems we encounter are:

- most guardians have been unable to raise the small fee that is required for the maintenance of the school.
- Insufficient teaching staff because we are unable to pay salaries.
- lack of classrooms for different age groups concrete,
- lack of a concrete floor
- lack of a latrine or playground equipment
- no running water or electricity
- we do not have a food program
- we do not have mattresses or blankets for the rest periods
- we have very few toys, books or school supplies

Our vision is to build a bigger school center that will cater to the children, providing them with holistic education, as well as basic needs

## "His Prayers Were Answered"



BEFORE



AFTER

Jackson, a 19 year old member of the Kiambiu slum, had his prayers answered this year with the removal of a deadly tumor in his lower jaw. It had been growing steadily since he was 5 years old. Its impact on his life has been profound, preventing him from going to school since he was eight because the children became increasingly afraid of him. Now, thanks to members of LECDEN and volunteers, he can live a long and happy life and has returned to school!

## Pen Pal Project

Field Workers: Isaac  
Musundi, Sammy Kelli

While there had been some disruption of this project due to the chaos on December, 2007 and January, 2008, the Pen Pal Project is up and writing!

Through the vision of Andrea Turek, an education major from UWRF, Kiambiu kids have been able to connect with their age-mates in Wisconsin. This has been a great boost to the psychological well-being of these kids. Knowing that someone so far away cares about you is the best gift anyone can receive!

The Wisconsin friends have written twice and we are encouraging the little ones on this side of the pond to quickly finish up their second letters for mailing. The more the children put pen to paper, the better they can practice writing English and organize their thoughts. Wisconsin, your pen pal letters will be arriving soon!