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## **A Way Out for the Orphans**

In Kenya, the streets are busy by 7 o'clock every morning; however, the phrase "Hakuna matata" (meaning "no worries" in Swahili) is often heard. This relaxed attitude is apparent in everyday business. An hour late is considered perfectly on time; and don't bother making appointments days in advance because they will probably be forgotten. Work will be put down when you call just an hour before to meet with someone. (Kenya-advisor) While this lifestyle has some advantages, it can also prove a disadvantage to a nation when it is trying to become productive on a global level and escape the snare of poverty.

According to Iowa Public Television, Kenya was among the first developing countries whose government noticed the danger of a large increase in population and started promoting family-planning programs in the 1960s. These programs have had great success regarding population control: "The average number of children per woman has dropped to around four from around eight in the 1980s, which constitutes one of the fastest-ever national declines in family size" (PBS). Masai men on the border of Kenya and Tanzania testify that the government and humanitarian organizations have come to talk to them about the importance and benefits of taking only one wife instead of following the age-old the tradition of taking multiple wives. Most men have taken this advice into consideration and are following it, although it is not strictly adhered to. The Masai men say it is not a big issue for them whether they have many wives or one, and often it is easier to have only one.

The economy of Kenya has been both a leader and a rock of stability among the Eastern African nations, with the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth remaining positive, falling slightly to two percent in 2008 after political post-election violence; otherwise, the GDP has remained strong. According to 2007 statistics, agriculture accounts for seventy-five percent of the labor force, producing mainly products such as tea, coffee, corn, wheat, sugarcane, fruit, vegetables, dairy products, beef, pork, poultry, and eggs. Industry and services account for the other twenty-five percent (World Bank). While the World Bank shows that the unemployment rate for Kenya in 1999 was a mere 9.8 percent, CIA World Fact Book puts the unemployment rate much higher at 40 percent in 2008 (CIA World Fact Book).

As with most nations in this region, the poverty rate is high, with almost half of the rural population living under the poverty level, which in this country is only one US Dollar a day. Half of the rural populations is approximately nine million people; not exactly a number to be ignored. On top of that, at least one third of the urban population is estimated to be living on less than a dollar a day as well. With the vast majority of the population depending on agriculture, the economic situation can turn from looking up to staring at nothing but poverty in a very short time, "with its erratic weather patterns and vast regions of arid desert, it is a very unstable sector. Periods of drought can be crippling, not only in terms of food supply, but in jobs as well" (Kenyan-advisor). Recently, there has been a drought in the Northern region that has sent this already harsh number soaring as people lost their only cows to hunger and thirst. There was simply nothing growing from the ground for the cows to eat, says Nkidiko Galgithale, even after her and her six children had walked for days, they could find nothing but barren land (World Vision News). Foreign aid was coming in to help the dire situation, but there is only so much they can do.

The education system in Kenya is very progressive, and has yielded great results. When the British took over, they first established formal education. Once independent, the government set up a system of 7-4-2-3, where there were seven years of primary school, four years of lower secondary school, two years of upper secondary school, and three years of university. In 1985 the 8-4-4 system was adopted instead. This

time, students went to primary school for eight years, secondary school for four years, and finally university for four years. Many primary schools are not boarding schools, while most secondary schools are, as well as all universities. "It was assumed that this new structure would enable school dropouts at all levels to be either self-employed or to get employment in the non-formal sector" (Africa Speaks).

The greatest breakthrough of all, however, came in 2003, when President Mwai Kibaki announced free primary school for all. Now not only students who had enough surplus money could attend primary school, but also all those who had just enough to sustain their family that they did not have to work all day. Now families could choose to do some extra work in order to let their son or daughter or brother or sister be the first to attend primary school, giving them a way out of the everyday struggle they faced. Still, too many children must go to work to help support their families, and orphans have little choice but to work when left to fend for themselves. Enrollment jumped 70 percent, clearly showing the willingness of the people to go, and the lack of money they had to pay for it. According to UNICEF, about 80 percent of young people ages 15-24 years old can read. This is a great number, but still missing a valuable 20 percent of the youth in this nation.

Secondary school and University have not received a similar increase because they still must be paid for. However, those that do go are generally very hard workers. When giving presentations at secondary schools in Nairobi and Nakuru, not once did our leaders have to ask the students to quiet down, or pay attention. There were no girls or boys sleeping in the back, as you might see here. Instead, at many schools, every single student was diligently taking notes on what the American and Kenyan mixed group had to say about how they could achieve better grades in school.

Kenya's government has been proactive in population control and promoting education, but it could not foresee the impact of AIDS. Caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), AIDS arrived on the scene in Kenya in the early 80s, starting in a group of sex workers. Now the number of people infected by HIV in Kenya alone is between 1.6 million and 1.9 million. In 2006, 85,000 people died from AIDS related illnesses. Among these, most are infected between the ages of 15 and 24.

Assistance has started coming in to promote preventative measures such as condom use, and also to give mothers treatment so that they do not pass on the HIV virus to their children. In addition to that, Avert states that "in 2003 only 5 percent of people needing ART were receiving antiretroviral therapy.<sup>76</sup> In 2006 Kenya's President announced that antiretroviral drugs would be provided for free in public hospitals and health centers.<sup>77</sup> by 2009 the number of people receiving antiretroviral therapy had significantly increased to 336,980 a coverage of 70.4 percent". Through public awareness and medical programs such as these, Kenya has been successful in lowering the percentage of the public with AIDS from 13.4 percent in 2000 to 6.9 percent in 2006 (Avert).

While Africa has always been the home of many orphans, the number of orphans in Africa rose from 30.9 million to 41.5 million between 1990 and 2000, and those orphaned by AIDS increased from 330,000 to seven million (IPS News). "In Kenya alone, it is estimated that there are 1,100,000 orphans, with a similar number in South Africa, Tanzania, Malawi and Zimbabwe" (PlayOurPart). In a population of just over 39 million, this number is highly significant. In 2003 UNICEF stated that 10-14 percent of the children in Kenya were orphans. At least one of every ten children had lost a parent, or even both. This number is so high mostly because "typically, half of all people with HIV become infected before they are aged 25, develop AIDS and die by the time they are 35" (PlayOurPart). Also, the most common activity to get the HIV virus from is having sex. Therefore at this age and by engaging in these activities, a person will likely become both HIV positive and pregnant. Once the HIV virus is in a human, they usually have around ten years to live, depending on conditions, their own body response, and medical treatment. By this time, the children have grown to around the age of ten when their parent dies, and if one parent has AIDS, the other one is almost assured to get it as well. This results in what is called a "double orphan",

one who has lost both of their parents. For these children, “the loss of one or both parents has serious consequences for a child’s access to basic necessities such as shelter, food, clothing, health and education” (PlayOurPart).

Currently, UNAIDS estimates that there are 2.4 million orphans in Kenya. About half of these are due to AIDS. Of these children, 443,000 are double orphans. Of the double orphans, around 349,000 are due to AIDS, while the remaining 94,000 are due to other causes. A study of sub-Saharan Africa showed that extended families have assumed responsibility for more than 90 percent of orphaned children. Today, 20 percent of households with children in southern Africa are caring for one or more orphans. (UNICEF) This also creates a heavy burden on the families that must take more children in to their already scarcely fed families. E.O. Nyambedha points out that orphans never really used to be a problem in African countries because another family member would simply take them in; whereas, “now there are too many, and not enough families with the ability to take on more children” (Nyambedha).

Miriam Lyons is quoted in an issues paper saying “The effects of HIV and AIDS on children who are orphaned, or in families where parents are living with the virus, not only include these calculable losses, but also the immeasurable effects of altered roles and relationships within families”. Living with another family member or the eldest child assuming the parental role of the family is still by far the most common situation that plays out after becoming orphaned. This obviously forces the new young family to work instead of going to school to further their education. Their life as a child is now officially over as they assume the role as head of a family. Before that, however, many children also help take care of dying relatives in their last days and months.

Of the 443,000 double orphans, according to the study of Kenya made in 1999 there were 35,000 orphans found in almost 200 orphanages in the country. Some orphanages are government controlled while some are run by private organizations. Some provide schooling, some are only for certain aged kids. Some are exclusive to kids who live their day and night, while some accept kids that have nowhere else to go during the day and little family to support them.

While many people picture little children as the only or main orphan concern, k4health states that “adolescents who are orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS are a large and growing population with numerous unmet needs. While many programs and publicity efforts focus on young children, more than half of all orphans are in their teen years”. Children on the Brink also reports that around 55 percent of all orphans are between the ages of 12 and 17. Soon, these adolescents will be out of the orphanage and on the street; the next generation that will either be hungry, or able to support themselves and those they choose to be responsible for.

The kids in the orphanages that are about to “graduate” out are the kids with no inheritance, nor a trait they learned from their father or mother. This is where a change can be made, where a step towards hunger can stop dead in its tracks. While there are many solutions to help counter world hunger, most of the solutions will focus on the majority of the population, as a good solution should most of the time. However, even though impacting strictly only the 35,000 kids in the orphanages of Kenya may not seem like a very worthy cause in comparison, those 35,000 children are the poorest of the poor. They are the ones with absolutely nothing to start on. Instead of having a little, and being able to work hard to make the little into something more, they are tossed out of the orphanages often times with absolutely nothing; nothing to make something more come out of. This is where the difference is made between life and death for this select group of beautiful valuable young souls.

Take a place that is institutionalized, that everyone is participating in for a common goal; an orphanage. With the assistance of a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) such as World Vision or Heifer International, give each orphanage that is the last step before moving out (not baby or toddler orphanages)

eight chickens and two roosters. Also, give them some cheap materials to build a small simple hen house, a few months worth of chicken food, and a quick training session on how to raise the chickens most effectively. The chickens will be of one of the most available of these breeds: White Leghorns, Production Red, Red Sex Links and Golden Comets. These chickens will produce 250-300 eggs each year, and will also produce more chickens. For the various tasks involved in taking care of the chickens daily, the orphanage leaders would be in charge of designating which grades of orphans will take care of which duties, making the raising of the chickens a team effort by the kids old enough to help. To implement this, the following is suggested: children ages 8-11 will gather the eggs in the morning, ages 12-14 will keep the area clean and distribute the necessary feed to the chickens, ages 14 and up will maintain the coop and add on if necessary, as well as take the eggs to market each day, and the accounting will be left to the headmaster, who may then choose to share the responsibility with a bright student who shows the interest and ability to take care of the accounting. This is simply the suggested, and may be adapted to fit the individual needs and capabilities of each orphanage. When the chickens start reproducing (which they will do naturally), grow those chicks into hens which will also start laying eggs, and then send one (or more depending on how reproductive they are that year) with each orphan as they go out into the world.

Although the exact cost of feed in this region could not be found, Heifer International shares a story of a family who had been living on 50 cents a day, and, after receiving a flock of chickens, was able to feed the chickens, feed their families, and send their children to school (Heifer International). Therefore we can assume the profit from the egg sales will easily cover the cost of the small amount of necessary feed. When the graduating orphans take the chickens out with them, they will be able to provide their first adequate homes for the chickens by using a thorn bush native to Kenya to make a fenced in area as the Masai tribe do to keep their flocks and livestock fenced in and protected from other animals. Having spent a number of years working with and caring for chickens, these individuals will have a high likelihood of success with poultry or have at the very least gained a stepping stone to another aspect of animal agriculture while growing up in the orphanage. This way the child who would have had nothing will now have something to start with. They may choose to stick with chickens and multiply them, or follow a different route of making money to stay out of hunger. Either way they have a simple basic fairly reliable income to start with, so that the cycle of poverty creating orphans who go back into poverty and create more orphans is cut off. This basic plan could be started in Kenya, and, if successful, implemented throughout the entire continent and on to the rest of the poverty-stricken world. What a miracle it would be if no more orphans coming from orphanages ever walked in hunger again.

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