

## Final Project Report to The British & Foreign School Society

June 2014

**Organisation name:** Advantage Africa

**Project name:** Improving Educational Opportunities for Disabled Children in Rural Kenya

**Report period:** June 2013 to end May 2014

### **Introduction:**

This project aimed to improve opportunities for disabled children in rural Kenya to attend school and access a good quality education appropriate to their needs so that they can reach their potential. To achieve this aim, BFSS and Advantage Africa supported the work of three special units for disabled children within primary schools at Thinu, Kisayani and Mitaboni in eastern Kenya. The project was very successful and made good progress throughout the year with no significant deviations from the original plan. The whole of the BFSS grant was used and high levels of positive impacts for beneficiaries were achieved.

The three special units we worked with provide education for around 120 children with various levels of learning disabilities and some pupils have multiple disabilities. They range in age from 6 to 17 years and many live a significant distance from the schools. All pupils are therefore boarders and stay at the school during weekends. The three schools are located in rural settings and have basic facilities including semi-reliable electricity supplies and water from wells and rain catchment. The schools are staffed by government-employed teachers in addition to support staff such as cooks, housemothers and security guards, only some of whom are paid by the government.

At the start of the project the head teachers and staff at each of the three special units were asked to provide detailed budgeted requests listing the support they felt was most appropriate for their school's particular needs, within the parameters of the BFSS grant. The requests were then discussed with Rob Aley, the Advantage Africa Kenya Programme Manager and finalised as described below.

### **a. Outputs achieved against outputs proposed**

We are pleased to report that all of the planned outputs have been achieved with no significant problems or delays.

*The project outputs were:*

- Output 1: provision of learning resources and equipment.
- Output 2: provision of bursaries for the most disadvantaged children.
- Output 3: teacher training.
- Output 4: School maintenance and renovation (including construction of a toilet block).

### **Output 1: Learning resources and equipment.**

At the start of the project the three special school teachers and head teachers were asked to identify the specific learning resources most appropriate for their pupils' learning. Some requests were for conventional classroom teaching equipment, but in the main there was an emphasis on requests for practical resources designed to help to develop pupils' independent living skills and their social inclusion. Two schools implemented small scale agricultural teaching initiatives. At Kisayani a poultry keeping project was started, with the construction of a chicken house which was stocked with local breed (hardy) birds for egg production. This provided pupils with SEN (special educational needs) at Kisayani with their first opportunity to learn about and have hands on experience of rearing livestock. Other learning is also incorporated into the practical projects such as numeracy through counting and recording egg production and sales. At



**A pupil with SEN feeding the poultry at Kisayani special unit**

Mitaboni a vegetable and fruit growing plot was established early in the project year through the acquisition of tools and seeds etc. This has not only allowed pupils to learn gardening to grow food, but we have also seen a significant impact on teacher morale because they are now teaching skills that they know will be of relevance to the lives of the pupils with SEN rather than emphasising

formal classroom lessons with pupils who have limited academic capacity. (See learning impact in section 'b'). Two of the schools installed playground swings so as to advance the social inclusion, physical development and enjoyment of the pupils. This has also increased the playtime interaction between pupils with SEN and the mainstream children; helping them to learn how to share, take turns and build positive friendships. In a wider society where stigma and prejudice against people with disabilities is still very strong, the integration of pupils with SEN and mainstream pupils is critical to promoting positive attitudes to disability for future generations. At Thinu school a training bicycle was purchased and 8 pupils have learnt to ride, a useful skill for getting around in rural Kenya.

Mitaboni and Thinu schools purchased televisions and DVD players for use during lessons and for entertainment and information during weekends (all schools are boarding). Very few of the pupils will have televisions at home, so access to programmes and educational DVDs at school is advantageous.

*See Appendix 1 for a full list of learning resources supplied.*

### **Output 2: Bursaries for the most disadvantaged children.**

Bursaries for the most disadvantaged children were requested as part of this grant because evidence shows that in poor countries the proportion of children with disabilities who are left out of school is alarming (fewer than 10% of disabled children attend school in Africa, UNESCO). There are varied and complex reasons for this situation, with the underlying causes being a product of the misconceptions, negative attitudes and stigma associated with disability, which are still prevalent in most developing countries, including Kenya. Advantage Africa has found that this statistic is born out in the project special units where teachers verify that families prioritise education for their non-

disabled children in preference to their disabled siblings. It is often difficult to get parents of disadvantaged families to enrol their disabled children in school and to maintain their attendance. Although primary education is now officially free in Kenya, the resources needed for special education are higher per child, especially in boarding facilities like those in this project. Head teachers protest that there is almost no recognition of these extra costs from the Kenyan Ministry of Education, and parents have to be asked to pay fees to cover the day to day running costs of the special units. The project identified 56 children that were at risk of dropping out of school and bursaries have been sent to the schools to ensure that these children were able to maintain their attendance uninterrupted because of the BFSS grant. This number is made up of 17 pupils at Thinu, 15 at Kisayani and 24 at Mitaboni. It is clear that the ongoing challenge is to maintain this level of attendance in the longer term, and this issue is discussed in section 'e' of this report.



*The bursaries supported children like 15 year old Nzula Kalungu to continue to attend school. She has severe learning disabilities but is making progress with learning life skills such as how to wash and dress herself and to use the toilet independently. She is from a very poor home where both her parents have learning disabilities themselves and cannot support their child independently.*

### **Output 3: Teacher training.**

The three special units identified various means of supporting their teacher training needs:

*Mitaboni* – In order to support the new initiatives in vegetable and fruit growing (and livestock rearing – see section 'd') two teachers enrolled on horticultural training courses in the nearby town of Machakos. As mentioned above this has not only increased the teachers' knowledge and confidence in this area, but has also boosted their morale because they have experienced the school investing in their professional development and they are now able to teach new and appropriate life skills to their pupils. The other teacher at Mitaboni has been attending training in basic computer skills which will help the special unit access online learning materials and create their own teaching resources.

*Kisayani* - The two teachers used their modest training budget to undertake learning visits to other special educational facilities in Kenya, including one of the other BFSS project schools – Mitaboni. They also visited two schools near Thika, Maria Magdalena Special School and St. Patrick's School for the Mentally Challenged. The schools visited were special schools (not special units within primary schools) and were larger and better resourced than their own school. They learnt about the admissions and assignment procedures, approaches to medical and social issues (such as managing aggressive behaviour) and parent / school relationships. They visited a special class for autistic children and classes from nursery level through to vocational training. They also saw a sheltered workshop at 'attachment' level. The teachers identified initiatives and methods which could be transferred to their own teaching, including establishing a greenhouse for vegetable growing and the possibility of keeping dairy cows. The

teachers were excited by their visit and returned with renewed enthusiasm and energy. (Their 9 page visit report is available on request).

*Thinu* - One of the long serving housemothers who looked after the boarding needs of the pupils transferred from Mitaboni to help start up the new Thinu unit. She has a special needs qualification and, with the support of this project is now training to become a fully qualified special needs teacher. She has completed her first year of study with excellent results and will qualify in June 2015. It is expected that she will return to work at Thinu Special Unit and she will add to the small pool of much needed specialist teachers in Kenya. Advantage Africa will be paying her fees to complete the training.

#### **Output 4: School maintenance and renovation (including construction of a toilet block).**



**The new toilet block at Mitaboni Special Unit**

Each school had different maintenance and renovation needs which have now been completed. At Mitaboni a much-needed toilet block for the special school was completed in March 2014. They have also fitted new fascia boards and guttering to the existing dining hall which will complete the water catchment system which feeds a large cement water storage tank. There is no piped water in this school so these improvements will greatly help the year round supply of water for washing, cooking and laundry. As Thinu is a newly built school, they requested an extension

to the fencing around the special unit compound because they had had an experience of a vulnerable pupil leaving the site and wandering the villages outside school. The fence is now complete. At Kisayani the BFSS funds were used extend the electricity supply to a small storage building and to convert it into a dormitory for four of the older boys. Originally they planned to use this room as a study room, but they have found that the alleviation of overcrowding in the boys main dormitory to be a greater priority.

#### **b. Outcomes / benefits. Including unexpected (wider) outcomes / benefits and whether BFSS funding helped leverage any additional funding for the project or beneficiaries**



**Pupils growing seedlings**

Learning outcomes in all three schools has improved since the introduction of the changes resulting from the BFSS grant. This has been measured by the class teachers through their ongoing individual pupil progress records and assessments. The improvements in learning are most immediately apparent where new initiatives have been introduced and pupils are gaining new subject knowledge and skills. Good examples are the

vegetable garden at Mitaboni where nearly 60 pupils now have practical lessons in preparing the ground, planting, weeding, watering, harvesting and eating the vegetables, and at Kisayani where pupils for the first time are involved in feeding poultry, cleaning the chicken house and collecting eggs.

Improved social interaction and inclusion amongst pupils is less easy to quantify, but teachers have seen various indicators which suggest the playground and other learning resources are having a positive impact. For example, some pupils with communication problems are growing in confidence, in part through playing with others on the swings, and their attempts at speech and social interaction are improving. Four girls and four boys at Thinu have learnt to ride the bicycle, and the



physical activity of pupils is generally improving. The televisions and DVD players are helping pupils with their listening, concentration and language skills and they give them the opportunity to expand their access to news and entertainment. With the absence of other electronic equipment, the TVs are also used for playing music DVDs to encourage singing and dance.

A further outcome which is equally as important as the direct pupil progress is the marked increase in teacher motivation and enthusiasm, as reported by the head teachers (especially at Kisayani and Mitaboni). This is not only as a result of the knowledge and skills they have gained from the training they have received, but also the fact that they now have the confidence and support to apply the special education syllabus in a way which places more emphasis on the teaching of practical life skills and less on academic achievement. The pupils are happier learning away from the blackboard and the results of this approach are more rewarding for the teachers.

During the project year some other support for the schools has been forthcoming, in part because of the BFSS grant. The shift in interest towards teaching practical / physical skills has encouraged the head teacher of Mitaboni to request support from local sources. Hence he has been successful in receiving donations of a large greenhouse for the school (from the Kenya Red Cross), two cows from the Catholic Diocese and some PE equipment from the county Government.

During this report period a visit to two of the special units was made by Roger Howarth (BFSS's former Chair) and we hope BFSS received useful feedback from him.

### **c. Lessons learnt, both positive and negative**

During this project Advantage Africa has been reminded of the significant impact a modest amount of money can make at local level, if it is well spent. We have been particularly struck by the reinvigoration of the enthusiasm of the teachers who have been involved in this project. In a resource poor setting, a small amount of investment in the staff's professional development and teaching resources not only has a direct impact on the pupils learning but gives the staff a new lease of life too.

With regard to the wider development approach, Advantage Africa continually works to form strong and trusting partnerships with its beneficiary communities. We avoid imposing external solutions, however well intentioned, but instead we respond to the requests and needs of the beneficiaries and this usually maximises the chances of achieving appropriate and sustainable changes. This approach generally works well, but we have learnt that it should not be over played. By definition, the recipients of assistance often have limited exposure to innovative and new methods and approaches, so it is also good to offer appropriate advice and suggestions which are not always immediately apparent to the recipient. For example, in this project when the schools were asked what learning resources they required, the initial requests were for very conventional academic and classroom-based teaching materials and equipment. However, after more explorative discussions with teachers and head teachers, together we developed ideas for more activity-based vocational resources which were more appropriate to the pupils with SEN. In short, we have learnt that a balance must be found between listening to the needs and requests of beneficiaries, and providing them with exposure to new and progressive ideas.

#### **d. Future activities and significant changes likely to affect the work**

A Trustee of Advantage Africa (Charlotte Cashman) visited the project during the year and conducted some additional teacher training sessions. She also worked with school staff to start to develop a future activity, namely, a programme of 'school to community' integration for those pupils who are near to school leaving age. Outcomes for pupils with learning disabilities who leave school are notoriously poor, especially in societies with high levels of prejudice and for those with little or no family support. Therefore, the school needs to develop a school leavers' programme which supports pupils and families to make successful transitions from school to further appropriate education or to gainful activities / employment in the community. This will involve teachers visiting the homes of the older pupils to start working with parents / guardians on identifying appropriate activities for school leavers to take up when they finish school. In school the skills and knowledge required will be worked on with pupils to prepare them for the transition.



#### **e. Sustainability, including generating funding for school fees in future**

It is acknowledged that the largest single ongoing challenge for the three special units in this project (and others throughout Kenya) is to consistently secure funds to cover the essential day to day running costs of the units. These include the cost of support staff salaries, the pupils' food and other costs such as electricity and firewood etc. The Kenyan Basic Education Act of 2013 (Part VI) states that provision must be made for special needs education and the new Kenyan constitution states that 'A person with any disability is entitled... to access educational institutions and facilities for persons with disabilities that are integrated into society to the extent compatible with the interests of the person'. Despite this legislation, the reality seems to be that support from government for special education is inadequate. During the project year central government was under pressure to cut overall spending on public services, and teachers

went on strike several times to protest against proposed pay cuts. Although we continue to lobby the appropriate education officials (District Education Officers) it seems unlikely that any immediate increase in funding for special education will be forthcoming in this economic environment.

To keep the special units running head teachers have to devise other ways of generating income. They look for local and international sponsorship and they also initiate income generating activities at the school, such as the poultry-rearing and the greenhouses described above. These efforts go some way to securing funds to cover school running costs, but head teachers also have to charge school fees to cover some of the costs of the childrens' boarding. Advantage Africa continues to hear reports from schools that there is a short fall in payment of fees, with the poorer parents unable to meet the costs. To some extent this has been alleviated by the money for bursaries in the BFSS grant, but in the absence of government support it is challenging to find a sustainable alternative to outside donations. Head teachers are therefore faced with difficult decisions as to whether they enroll children who cannot pay, or turn them away.

*Advantage Africa will continue to take the following steps to tackle this situation by:*

- Lobbying the Ministry of Education so that they act on their policy commitments and properly provide for pupils with SEN as and when central education spending resumes to normal levels.
- Continuing to demonstrate the success of the pupils with SEN who are in school, to secure local sponsors and supporters (such as churches and well-off individuals) that can assist the schools in cash or kind.
- Working with communities and families who give less priority to their disabled children (compared to their non-disabled siblings) so that they understand their child's potential and commit themselves to supporting them through their education as far as they are able.
- Applying for funds from international sources such as charitable trusts, foundations and government aid budgets.

We acknowledge that the model of government-funded education found in most western democracies does not easily directly transfer to low income countries such as Kenya where demands on limited government funds always outstrip supply, but we continue to strive to identify ways of ensuring that pupils with special needs can access the education that is their right.



## Thank you

On behalf of the project schools and the pupils and their families, Advantage Africa would like to thank the staff and trustees of The British Foreign School Society for their support and vision in assisting some of the most disadvantaged children in East Africa.

Thank you for giving them the chance of an appropriate education and for the positive impact it has had on their learning which they can carry into their future lives. Your kind support is also acknowledged on the appropriate project pages of the Advantage Africa website, [www.advantageafrica.org](http://www.advantageafrica.org).



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## Appendix

*Full list of learning resources supplied:*

### **Mitaboni**

Vegetable plot farming equipment: 3 jembes (local hoes), 3 forked jembes, 1 spade, 1 panga (machete), seeds, manure (1 load), fertilisers and pesticides. Classroom learning resources: TV / DVD player and DVDs, exercise books, pencils, crayons, chalk, erasers, manila paper and building blocks. 3 seater playground swing.

### **Thinu**

TV/DVD, educational DVDs, small bicycle, swings for play area, shape box, number value tray, treading counters, weather chart, communication board, nature table, 8 plastic chairs.

### **Kisayani**

Poultry keeping project start-up including: construction materials and labour, feeders, drinkers, laying cubes, first batch of growers and layers mash (feed). The first 30 local chickens and their immunisations, and the extension of electricity and conversion of store room to small dormitory.