



Kisima News

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SCHOOL REOPENING - PHASE 1

We are so thankful that life is currently nearly back to normal here at school. We first reopened on October 12th, seven months after closing, but this was only for the Form Four students. It was hoped that the other classes would soon follow, but as COVID cases rose across the country, the government cancelled these plans. So for the term we had just one class in school. This meant they had plenty of attention from their teachers, and there was also enough room for social distancing - lessons were held in the exam hall, the dining tables sat two instead of four, and everyone kept apart in gatherings such as assemblies and the Sunday service.



Morning assembly

There were also other COVID-prevention measures in place, as called for by the government, such as mask-wearing, regular hand-washing and cleaning, and daily temperature checks. We were able to prepare for these requirements, including installing forty taps, because of everyone who kept donating to the school even when it was closed - thank you so much.

This ongoing support had also enabled us to continue paying our staff during the months of closure. At the end of term, all the staff - teachers, cooks, site attendants and others - gathered for a meal together. Reflecting on the year, they all expressed their great appreciation and gratitude to all our supporters.



Kisima staff

After a successful term of catching up with their studies, the Form Four students headed home on December 22nd. It would only be a short break but at least they could spend Christmas and New Year with their families.



Setting off at the end of term

SCHOOL REOPENING - PHASE 2

We opened again on January 3rd, but now all classes were able to come back to school as COVID cases in Kenya had reduced. So the Form One, Two and Three students returned after more than nine months at home. We are sad that two girls did not come back - one because she is pregnant and one for reasons that are not clear. But we are glad that everyone else returned in good health and ready to get back to their studies.

With a full school, social distancing is now difficult, especially in class, which the government has acknowledged to be true for the vast majority of schools. We continue with the other protective measures where possible. So far, everyone has remained safe, for which we are very thankful, and as the students do not go out of the school site, the level of risk now feels low.



Washing hands with the new taps

There are good plans for catching up with the lost learning time, though they require a lot of hard work and commitment. The Ministry of Education still wants everyone to cover the full syllabus, so the academic calendar has been revised. There are four terms this year and four terms next year, with very short holidays between most of them. We will not be back to the usual terms until 2023!

Each term is shorter than usual so we also need to fit in extra lessons. The first lesson of the day is now at 7am instead of 8am. Lessons used to end at 4pm but now after a tea break there is another lesson from 4.30 to 5.30pm, on three days of the week (leaving two days for games). Then every day after dinner there is a lesson from 7 to 8pm. We really appreciate our teachers for putting in these extra hours. The students are working hard and taking all the time they can to study. Many even take their books to read while queuing up for meals!



Revision in the dinner queue

Already this term is rushing by. There is only another month until the Form Fours take their national exams, which were postponed from November and will now run from March 26th to April 19th. Despite the disrupted year, the students are feeling well prepared and we hope they will achieve good grades and be able to proceed to university.

During the exam period, all the other students have to be at home again because of the rules on exam security. They will be back with us in May for the final term of the academic year. For that term we will only have three classes as the new Form Ones will not start until late July. We have received one hundred and fifty six applications for this class and will need to select forty of these bright but needy pupils to join us.

As we write in late February, COVID numbers in the country are averaging about two hundred cases and five or fewer deaths per day. Life is getting back to normal in many areas as well as in schools. There is still a nightly curfew from 10pm to 4am, a ban on public gatherings and the requirement to wear face masks in public places. But shops, restaurants and churches are all open. Many university students have resumed face-to-face learning, though some are still studying online and having to grapple with the challenges this brings.



A socially-distanced church service

Hearing from the students about their time at home reveals that only a few know someone who contracted the virus, and a small number had a family member who lost their livelihood as a result of COVID restrictions. Most of the students live in rural areas where the virus did not reach, and they depend on livestock keeping or farming, which continued as usual. In most parts of the country there was no ban on meeting family and friends, so they did not feel lonely or isolated. But they still experienced many challenges, such as the increased cost of living, the hard work they had to do to help their family, the difficulty of trying to study at home, the peer pressure they faced and the worry about what the future would hold regarding their return to school.

Elijah, a Form Two student from Samburu County in Northern Kenya, has this to say about his time out of school:

At first I thought that the virus would continue spreading until the country wouldn't manage. It seemed to me that it was the end of my chance of getting education. Many young people in our village lost hope completely and dropped out of their schools; getting married, finding petty employment and acting as criminals. I was always reminded by my mother not to accompany any of them and I managed not to follow their influences.

People in our village never understood what coronavirus was and what it meant, due to lack of education. They rarely wore masks and they always shook hands and congregated in their traditional customs. But the blame is not on them - if I was not educated I would have fallen victim of the same. I thank God for giving me a chance to get educated and to transform them in future.

While at home I helped my parents in taking care of livestock and in farming. It was rare that time was left for me to study due to the daily chores I was obliged to do, and that was my big challenge.

After all that we experienced, including rumours of school opening and unfixed dates, finally I am here and I am so happy.



OTHER NEWS

• We really appreciate our former students and their desire to give back to Kisima. The alumni association recently donated face masks, soap, sanitizer, biscuits and sweets, while one individual, Joan, brought large quantities of rice, sugar and cooking fat.

Alumni with gifts for the school



• We have also been assisted by another former student - Chrispine, who is now a Civil Engineer. The company he works for was involved in a project funded by the National Irrigation Board, which saw him overseeing the excavation of a water pan at the school farm.

This will collect run-off water when it rains, for use in the dry season.

Chrispine at the school farm



• We are happy that one of our recent alumni, Ann, has now been able to fly out to Costa Rica to take up her scholarship at EARTH University. Nine of our current Form Fours have submitted applications for the next round of scholarships, and those who are short-listed will soon be interviewed online.

• Congratulations to one of our supporters in the UK, Gillian Bullock, who was awarded the BEM in the New Year's Honours, for services to families in rural Kenya. This is through her work with the charity CHADIK, who have sponsored several students at Kisima as well as working with other projects in the country.

• Great challenges lie ahead due to a radical change in the Kenyan education system that sees eight years of primary education and four years of secondary replaced with six years of primary, three of junior secondary and three of senior secondary. Children in lower primary school are already learning under this new curriculum, with the first class set to join junior secondary in 2023. The government has been very slow to make plans for the new system and there is great confusion about the way forward. To complicate matters further, children under the old curriculum will continue to proceed to Form One until 2024. We await more information so that we know the implications for the future of Kisima.

PRAYER POINTS

Thank God for...

- The full reopening of schools and the good health of the students
- The ongoing provision of funds
- Low virus numbers in the country
- The students' assistance to their families
- Great support from our alumni

Please pray for...

- All students and staff to remain healthy
- The Form Fours as they take their exams
- The other students as they work hard to catch up with their studies
- The right pupils to be selected for Form One
- Clarity over the future of education in Kenya