



Kenya Drylands Education Fund

In developing nations around the world, major progress has been made toward achieving the inspiring United Nations Sustainable Development Goal: **to ensure that all children have access to free, equitable and quality education by 2030.**

In a remote, rural and ultra-poor region of Northern Kenya, we're answering the call.

The Kenya Drylands Education Fund (KDEF) works to expand access to education for students in Marsabit and Samburu Counties. By engaging deeply with communities—listening and learning—we have developed a holistic approach that helps families to overcome the cultural and economic barriers that have traditionally led to school enrollment rates as low as 30 percent.

Less than nine percent of residents here obtain a high-school education, and only 26 percent can read and write. This keeps families locked in generational poverty.

KDEF breaks this cycle through a student-responsive, multi-faceted model we call **EnART: Enrollment, Attendance, Retention and Transition.**



Education is the most empowering force in the world. It creates knowledge, builds confidence and breaks down barriers to opportunity. For children, it is their key to open the door to a better life. However, it is a sad reality of our world today that millions of children never receive this key. They are destined to stay locked in cycles of disadvantage and poverty.

—Helle Thorning-Schmidt (former Danish prime minister and Save the Children CEO)

ENROLLMENT

Education begins when children enroll in school. In Kenya, primary school is free and compulsory starting at age six, yet many children still do not attend.

That's why KDEF implements enrollment campaigns in the rural villages where we work. We hold public meetings, open to all, and invite government, school and village leaders to speak. We share information about Kenya's education policies, promote the value of education, and encourage families to send their children to school.

We start early, too: For children in Kenya, school can begin as young as four years old. It's especially important to enroll children of rural pastoralists at this age. If not attending school, they're put to work fetching water, collecting firewood and herding livestock. The doors to the classroom close forever for these young children, who are left with little choice but to become a herder, or the wife of a herder.

That's why we encourage early enrollment, and also create and equip Early Childhood Development (ECD) classrooms for children ages four to six. To date, we have built six new ECD classrooms and renovated four more.



As many as 300 residents attend KDEF school enrollment meetings, often convened under an acacia tree. Typically, each meeting will result in 40-50 new enrolled learners from that village.



OPPORTUNITY KITS SO GIRLS CAN STAY IN SCHOOL: The Deputy Headmistress of Korr Primary School reported that prior to 2014, 50 percent of her female students missed up to one week of school each month due to menstruation. After the kits were distributed, absenteeism dropped to 10 percent.

ATTENDANCE & RETENTION

We improve school attendance and retention by creating a conducive learning environment for students. This work is far-reaching, addressing the complex issues that have made it difficult — or impossible — for students in Northern Kenya to learn.

- We build and equip classrooms, often with kitchens and dormitories.
- We construct housing for teachers who otherwise would travel many miles to reach the school.
- We install water and sanitation systems — toilets, latrines, hand-washing stations — to promote health and hygiene.

KDEF's three signature programs also promote attendance and retention:

OPPORTUNITY KITS: In this poverty-stricken part of the world, girls have limited access to sanitary products. Having protection during their monthly menstrual cycles is essential if females are to stay in school. KDEF donates menstrual hygiene "Opportunity Kits" and provides training in care and use for school-going girls. With this simple support, girls can attend school without interruption—no longer missing one week of instruction every month. They can achieve their full potential, getting the education they need to obtain jobs that contribute to the economic stability of their families and communities. KDEF currently supports 32 primary schools with kits.

MENTORSHIP WORKSHOPS: Every year we hold a three-day Mentorship Program for our scholars and students from host communities. Students develop skills in leadership, conflict resolution, stress management, and educational and career goal-setting strategies.

They also learn about the effects of female genital mutilation and teenage pregnancy, which keep them from realizing their full potential. There are workshops on reproductive health, anti-terrorism messaging, HIV/AIDS, women's empowerment, and the role of men in facing these challenges. The workshop is led by Kenyan teachers, community leaders and experts selected for their experience and eagerness to mentor students at this formative stage in life.



DATA COLLECTION: We've also developed a custom cloud-based Salesforce application that helps selected primary schools track attendance in a systematic way. It's supported by an offline data-collection app installed on tablets. School officials can now follow up in real-time if a student drops out or is absent for more than 10 days.

KDEF is now tracking approximately 2,400 learners through the EnART Salesforce system and continually adding students at a rapid pace.



KDEF focuses primarily on educating girls because boys have traditionally had more opportunities than girls in Kenya. 65 percent of our sponsored secondary students are girls.

TRANSITION

While primary school in Kenya is free, secondary schools charge tuition and fees far beyond the financial reach of most dryland families. KDEF provides promising students from vulnerable families with the resources they need to complete four years of study in high-quality boarding schools.

Boarding schools provide structured study time and nighttime lighting that’s not possible at home. They also offer three healthy meals a day—in contrast with tea and bread once daily, a typical meal at home—plus onsite health services and for girls, a haven from family and peer pressures of early marriage.



KDEF scholar, Dezelan, at home in her village of Losuk in Maralal, Kenya with her two nieces.

KDEF SUCCESS: DEZELAN NASERIAN LEPARACHAU

“The school I’m in now is the best! The teachers and environment motivate me to make my goals and dreams vivid. I know that to make my tomorrow better I need to do my best every day. I would like to be a neurosurgeon so I study hard and someday I can benefit others, help my village and family, and help more needy students in the world.”

Dezelan Naserian Leperachau studies at St. Teresa’s Wamba Secondary School. The fact that she is there, and a straight A-student, is nothing short of miraculous. Dezelan lost her mother a few years ago. She and her father and sister live in a typical tiny thatch-roof hut in a remote part of Northern Kenya that’s suffering from drought. They can afford one meal a day and walk long distances to find water and haul it to their home. Learn more: kdef.org/students



“To educate girls is to reduce poverty.”

—Kofi Annan (Former Secretary-General of the United Nations)

WHERE WE WORK: The Drylands of Northern Kenya

We work in Marsabit and Samburu Counties, a remote and rural region that covers 100,000 square kilometers (38,600 square miles) of arid and semi-arid land in Northern Kenya. It's home to semi-nomadic, pastoral communities that for centuries have lived by raising livestock—cattle, goats, sheep, camels. It is a deeply patriarchal culture in which men typically manage the herds, women raise the children and tend to the homestead, and children stay home from school to help with chores. Girls are far more likely than boys to leave school early to help their mothers—or to enter an arranged marriage.

Climate change—severe cycles of drought and expanding desertification—is now disrupting this traditional way of life. Men are gone from the villages for months, ranging far afield to find grazing territory for their livestock, or migrating to other countries to find work. Left at home to support the children, women are now raising animals, or picking up a meager income through unskilled labor.

This cultural transition presents many challenges but also an opportunity to foster the economic empowerment of women. It's within this context that KDEF is focused on education as the single-most powerful level for transformation and community uplift—for all children, but primarily for girls.



OUR IMPACT

12,000 menstrual hygiene kits distributed | **10** communities supported with water resources

20 schools supported with construction of classrooms, dormitories, sanitation blocks, kitchens or staff housing

150 high-school scholarships provided | KDEF's new center will serve close to **2,000** students each year

To learn more, visit tinyurl.com/KDEFImpact



INFRASTRUCTURE to SUPPORT ENROLLMENT and ATTENDANCE

Access to water, classrooms, and proper sanitation is important to the success of our programs—and a big barrier to school attendance in the Kenya drylands. KDEF builds and equips classrooms, student dorms, staff housing, kitchens and latrines to ensure that students and teachers have a safe and conducive learning environment.

Because groundwater is scarce and often contaminated, KDEF works with communities to find solutions. We built rain-harvesting rock catchments and masonry storage tanks. And through generous donations, we've purchased a water truck to supply schools and villages during dry seasons and emergencies.



OUR FOUNDERS

Sarah Hadden and Kura Omar first crossed paths in Kenya in 2010. Kura, a native of Northern Kenya, was then a Director and Cofounder of The BOMA Project, working to economically empower ultra-poor women in the arid north of the country. Sarah, a trained health educator with 21 years of experience working with adolescents, was especially moved after witnessing the widespread poverty and the lack of even basic supplies and resources in the schools. She knew she wanted to help. Kura, who grew up in Marsabit County, and who spent over a decade working for the betterment of his people, saw the biggest need among the pastoralist communities was access to education.

Deciding to put their skill sets and talents to work on behalf of area students, Sarah and Kura launched the Kenya Drylands Education Fund (KDEF), designed primarily to help girls stay in school.



OUR MISSION: Kenya Drylands Education Fund strives to improve educational opportunities for underserved populations in the Drylands of Northern Kenya.

Learn more at KDEF.org

KDEF is a U.S. 501(c)(3) nonprofit and a registered Kenyan NGO.