



Theosophical Order of Service (TOS)

(Founded in February 1908)

A Union of Those who Love in the Service of All that Suffers.

www.tos-uk.org.uk

TOS EMERGENCY AID FOR STARVING FAMILIES IN EAST AFRICA

In the face of the current acute food shortage in **Somalia**, **Ethiopia** and **Kenya**, the **TOS in Nairobi** has undertaken a project on behalf of us all. The town of Kitui, 130 km east of Nairobi, was selected and a church identified as local partner. At the end of August, fifty families were given enough staple foods to keep them alive for a month as part of a programme that will last six months. (No, wait! In fact fifty-five families were fed, because it was impossible to turn away the extra ones that turned up.)



The food was personally delivered and distributed, principally to the mothers, by **Mrs Usha Shah**, **TOS convenor in Kenya**. Accompanied by a local area facilitator, **Mr Paulo**, she travelled to Kitui via Machakos where a pick up van loaded with maize flour, oil and salt was waiting. They then left for Kitui, about two hours away. Here is **Usha's** account:

"The road to Kitui is all tarmaced except for a badly pot-holed stretch of two kilometres. The countryside all along is dreary and depressing. We can see grass which is brown, shrivelled and ready to catch fire but for long patches of bare earth. The trees are leafless and waiting for the rains which have not arrived for three years. The savannah shrubs and cacti are battling to stay alive. It is brown throughout, with little green except for the trees which refuse to surrender to the harsh conditions. The fields display the brave but failed attempts of the small land holders to grow maize and chick peas - failed because all the plants have dried up, even before seeing the light of the day.



"On both sides, women and children are trekking long distances to find and buy water from designated places with boreholes. Improvised ways of lessening the weight of the water are seen: cans held on strings, children rolling drums along the road, donkey carts. We see women carrying their babies on their backs with water cans in their arms and scores of children, even young ones, trudging along in pursuit of water. We, who live in developed countries, cry about child labour in Africa and elsewhere but those who complain should come and see what in many cases, is a necessary evil. They are working for their very survival. This search for water keeps them out of schools and keeps women from earning a living by knitting, sewing, etc. Animals also trek long distances in search of water. On our way, we see a donkey licking the pebbles along the side of the river to see if there is any water – a pitiful sight. The rivers have dried up and offer nothing but boulders and rocks.



"Already saddened at seeing these desperate conditions so close to Nairobi, we reach the arranged venue where more than 50 people are waiting patiently for us to arrive. The women surge forward to welcome us with songs and dancing. Amongst them are some very elderly ladies barely able to walk, and even two blind ones. This brings tears to our eyes. A speech of welcome is made and in reply I explain about **Theosophy** and the work of

TOS worldwide. The people are amazed when I mention that **TOS** members in **Spain, France, England, New Zealand, Germany, Australia, Italy**, and the **USA** care about their plight and have made it possible for **TOS Kenya** to bring them food. Hearty applause and prayers of blessing are given by all before we even start on the work at hand.

“Everything is set up quickly and the food distribution starts in a very orderly way. Some of the recipients cannot hold back their tears when they see the flour and oil. The elderly and blind ladies are helped to carry their share by the younger ones. Some biscuits, sweets and stationery from a Kenyan donor are then distributed. The elderly ladies are the happiest to receive the biscuits - a special treat indeed! It is hard to see them so thrilled with simple things to which they never have access and which we take for granted. Many come to hug us, shake hands or just be near. At such moments I feel good to be alive and able to be of some service to our fellow beings! Amid shouts of “**Asante Sana, na Mungu na Bariki**” (Thank you and may you prosper by God’s grace), we leave to return to Nairobi. On the way we see smiling women and children carrying their very welcome load, assured of a daily meal for at least a month.

“At one point we stop and give some small things and a shirt, trousers and cardigan to a very elderly man walking along the road. He clutches the clothes, staring at them with amazement as though he can’t believe the gift is real! When we get back to Nairobi after our long day, we are tired but so very happy that **TOS Kenya** has embarked on this project. As I try to go to sleep, all I can see is the smiles on the faces of the elderly ladies in particular and the delight of the old man on the road side, and I can still hear the shouts of happiness that greeted us when we arrived.

“Some of you are asking about the possibility of developing a project that will allow ‘our’ families to feed themselves rather than depending on emergency aid. Excellent question! We have put down a bore hole on the church property at which our food distributions takes place so that the villagers can have not only drinking water but water for the planting of high quality seeds. There are also plans to provide the villagers with fruit-bearing trees such as mangoes and pawpaw. Meanwhile, I extend heartfelt thanks to all of you who put a smile on the faces of the residents of the Kyambevo Village, Kauma Location, Kitui West. **Each penny you have donated has gone to the beneficiaries and there have been no administrative expenses whatsoever.** Many, many thanks.”

The **TOS in Kenya** is itself supporting five of the **TOS**’s 55 families at a cost of 2,000 Kenyan shillings per month per family. This covers supplies of 22 Kg of maize meal, cooking oil and salt. That’s for a family of two parents and three children per month. (The total sum for the full period of six months including all five families comes to US\$700. One wonders how long a family of five from an affluent country would last on what would seem to be a mono-diet of maize meal.) **TOS** groups and an individual member in other countries have matched the five families taken on by the **TOS in Kenya**, allowing us to cover **45** of the **55** families so far. **Usha Shah** assures us of complete accountability in this project. She has assured us that not a penny of our donations is going on administrative costs such as is the case with the big charitable organisations on the spot.

P.S. Thanks to the addition of generous donations from **Leeds Lodge** and **Torbay Lodge**, and the magnificent fund-raising musical concert organised by **Cornelia Crowther** and given by **Sarah Waycott** and **Hannah Mitchell** at the **2011 European School of Theosophy**, in **St Albans**, the total money sent to **Kenya** by **TOS (UK)** exceeds **£1,000**. (May 2012).

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