

Field Visit Report: Nyangidi Village, Kenya

Rafiki PenPals Program

20th October 2014 - 30th November 2014

Samantha Ayton

Executive Summary

During the initial phase of my stay within Nyangidi Village located in northwest Kenya, I assessed the currently established *Rafiki PenPals* program and how it is operated within the village by the locals. My evaluation during this period required that the program be conducted as it had in the past to enable an accurate assessment and to assist as requested by the local coordinators of the program.

Summary of Recommendations

- Establishment of a *Community Classrooms Collaborative* Kenyan Committee with full resources to assist with operation.
- Engaging an Australian coordinator and Kenyan coordinator to better facilitate the *Rafiki PenPals* program.
- Establish clear guidelines with an initial induction of the running of the program followed by continual intermittent training of local coordinators.
- Further develop operational tools such as educational tools, database utilised and central building to conduct workshops.
- Incorporate yearly biographies written on Kenyan children to be sent to Australian penpals.

Field Visit Objectives

- Strengthen the relationship and *Rafiki PenPals* program related communication between *Community Classrooms Collaborative* and one of its global key stakeholders.
- Assess and propose a potential development plan for the program.

Objective 1: Strengthen the relationship and *Rafiki PenPals* program related communication between *Community Classrooms Collaborative* and one of its global key stakeholders.

Overview

During the evaluation phase of the *Rafiki PenPals* program I conducted questionnaires on the operation of the program with the focus on communication and strengthening the relationship between Kenya and Australia. The relationship *Community Classrooms Collaborative* has with their

Kenyan stakeholders and the knowledge gained throughout this process is integral in the future development of the program.

Outcomes

From assessing the Kenyan operation of the *Rafiki PenPals* program, it is evident the current Kenyan Co-ordinator desires to and has the capabilities and drive to be able to lead the program once initial education has been provided to assist understanding of importance of the program and it's operation.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring was conducted on the running of the system with an indirect approach to allow an accurate review of the current operating system within the country. Further to this monitoring, questionnaires were conducted with the current Kenyan coordinator as well as the founder of the program.

Lessons Learned

Communication appeared to be the overall theme throughout the process with a cultural difference observed as to the importance of communication between the two countries. With the presence of an Australian *Community Classrooms Collaborative* representative within the village for an extended period of time, this can assist the Kenyan coordinator to better understand the importance of communication between the two countries.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided as an approach of strengthening the communication between the two countries-

- Establishment of a *Community Classrooms Collaborative* Kenyan Committee with full resources to assist with operation. Specific resources currently recognised include:
 - An email address to be accessed by the Chairperson of the Kenyan Committee.
 - A small stipend for town visits and Internet use for quarterly communication in line with postage. Any monies paid should be clearly defined what they are to be spent on to prevent being utilised elsewhere.
- Assistance to the Kenyan coordinator of the program to educate the importance of the running of the program to ensure it is effective and efficient.
- Engaging an Australian coordinator as the key contact with Kenya in regards to the *Rafiki PenPals* program. This Australian coordinator will also serve as the key contact to Australia parents. A clear role description should be established prior to engagement.

Objective 2: Assess and propose a potential development plan for the program.

Overview

The Kenyan operation of the *Rafiki PenPals* program was evaluated by conducting questionnaires on the operation of the program as well as observing the current operation of the program. It is anticipated that this process will assist with the development of the program.

Outcomes

The running of the program is split out over a number of weeks with about 20 children attending each week, which is unquestionably more manageable than all children on the one day. The issues that became evident with this was that a number of children that came in the first week proceeded to visit the following weeks, which caused a misunderstanding as the coordinator did not have a “tick sheet” of which children were still requiring letters to be written. Further to this, the letters were handed out previously to the children, who were told to return when the coordinator received money and the resources (book, pencil) to hand out, this not being communicated to the Australian team.

Although it is acknowledged that the Kenyan coordinator is more than equipped to run the program, engaging an assistant to share the responsibilities would be appropriate. This assistant will work with the children to ensure that the written letters are legible and that they learn of their mistakes throughout the process. This assistant can also serve as a back-up in case the current Kenyan coordinator is travelling or unable to attend on an assigned day. Assistance with the finding of children that do not attend one of the assigned letter writing days was identified as a weakness of the program. Further to this, the Kenyan coordinator should be further trained to assist with the operation of the program.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring was conducted on the running of the system with an indirect approach to allow an accurate review of the current operating system within the country. Further to this monitoring, questionnaires were conducted with 15 Kenyan children, the current Kenyan coordinator and the founder of the program. Questionnaires were conducted to determine what the children and the coordinator would find educational and entertaining to incorporate with letter writing gatherings.

Lessons Learned

It was unanimous that the running of the program quarterly is not only effective but the most efficient means of the program operation. Coordinating letter writing with the children on the Kenyan front was quite difficult with many children not being able to be located, which caused a significant delay in finalising all letters. Further to this, it became apparent that the Kenyan coordinator needs to be educated on the organisation of the program and how it is fundamental to the program. The overall effectiveness of the program is there, though there can be factors that could better assist with the process as outlined in the recommendations below.

It was once again unanimous that both teams within Australia and Kenya would like to develop *Rafiki PenPals* into an awareness program with a shared teaching and as a learning experience not only between the two countries but also with other issues, e.g. environmental education.

Upon speaking with the Kenyan children, it was clear they were eager to include a cultural dance and/or song aspect within the letter writing days.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided as an approach of strengthening the operation of the program-

- Establishment of a *Community Classrooms Collaborative* Kenyan Committee with full resources to assist with operation. Further to resources included in Objective One Recommendations:
 - A camera with computer connectivity for photographing children.
- Engagement of Australian coordinator and Kenyan assistant. The Kenyan assistant preferably a teenage girl to break the age gap between the coordinator and the children. A clear role description should be established prior to engagement.
- Establish clear guidelines with an initial induction of the running of the program followed by continual intermittent training of local coordinators. Guidelines should include:
 - Letter writing content.
 - The letter writing day rundown program.
 - General Q & As
 - Contact information for Australia
- Mailing of letters to be conducted via a binder folder rather than loose sleeves. These binder folders should contain a sleeve for each child, preferably with a photo of each child on each sleeve for recognition purposes.
- Initially develop the current spreadsheet utilised for the program with further progression into establishing a full database. This spreadsheet should be printed out and sent with the letters from Australia to enable the Kenyan team to better facilitate who requires letters to be written. *Microsoft Access* is the current recommendation for this database with *Microsoft* having a Non-Profit license available.
- Source funds for a learning centre to be built within the Kenyan village. This centre will house all educational tools within the one location and serve as a central point for educational activities. This further can be used for other *Community Classrooms Collaborative* programs.

The following recommendations are provided as an approach to develop the *Rafiki PenPals* program-

- Have resources on hand to utilise with letter writing days, e.g.
 - Pencil sharpeners and erasers.
 - Colouring pencils
 - Stickers
 - Stencils
 - Reading/learning books
- Lengthen the Kenyan program to a half day activity with provision of lunch to children.
- Incorporate an age appropriate educational aspect within each session to enable the children to learn in an entertaining non-school based environment as well as communicate with their penpal. This is further recommended into:
 - A group activity that allows all children to work on something specific to their country with this being sent to the other operating country and vice versa.
 - A group activity that allows the children to take home the educational tools utilised.

An example would be explaining the seasons, animals, rivers, culture, food, etc. specific to the country. The theme of the quarterly mailing should be established upon discussion between the two countries.

- Incorporate a cultural element within each letter writing day, e.g. Drumming and dancing in Kenya, singing and dancing in Australia.
- Incorporate yearly biographies written on Kenyan children to be sent to Australian penpals. Biographies should include changes that have occurred within the family, e.g. the birth of a sibling and how they are progressing with their education. This should be written by the Kenyan coordinator with the assistance of each family. This will give the Australian families a clearer vision of how their funding is assisting the Kenyan family as this would not be apparent in the letters written by the children.
- All funding provided by Australian penpals to be utilised for the operation of the *Rafiki PenPals* program rather than *Community Classrooms Collaborative* projects as a whole.

The possibility of additional fundraisers to be conducted should be taken into consideration upon further review of the program within Australia. Funds sought from such events can be used for one-off purchases that support the community as a whole, e.g. Sports or art equipment, educational road trip outside village area.

It is further recommended in the long term to engage other countries within the program once this system is efficiently running.

Annex 1: List of Travelling Personnel

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Dates Travelled</i>
Samantha Ayton	Kenya In-Country Coordinator	20 th October 2014 - TBA

Annex 2: Questionnaire for Kenyan children participants

1. Do you enjoy receiving and reading mail from your friend in Australia?
2. Do you like receiving a notebook and pencil each time you come to write a letter?
3. If you could receive another small gift, what would you like it to be?
4. Would you like to visit for a whole/half day and do some activities when it comes to writing a response to your Australian friend?
5. If yes, what sort of thing would you like to do on this day?

Annex 3: Questionnaire for Kenyan adult coordinator

1. Do you have the time and energy to give the program 100% when in operation?
2. Do you think the responsibility should be shared between different parents and compounds?
3. Do you think that running the program based on seasons (4 times a year) sufficient and effective?
4. Do you think the communication between Kenya and Australia is sufficient?
5. Do you feel that you are equipped to handle the program? If not, what would you like to happen to assist you?
6. Have you recognised any issues with the program so far? Do you have any suggestions on how to correct/improve?
7. What changes would you like to see to develop the program?

Annex 4: Questionnaire for *Community Classrooms Collaborative* President

1. Is there someone in Australia that has the time and energy to give the penpal program what it needs to improve/run effectively?
2. Do you think that running the program seasonally is sufficient and effective?
3. Do you think the communication between Kenya and Australia is sufficient?
4. Do you feel that those running the program in Kenya are sufficiently able to run the program and are well equipped? If not, how do you feel they can become to a standard that you find suitable?
5. Have you recognized any issues with the program so far? Suggestions to improve?
6. What changes would you like to see happen to develop the program further?
7. What are your plans for the future of this program as a whole?
8. Are all funds that come from Australian penpals distributed directly to the penpal program or to *Community Classrooms Collaborative* as a whole?

Annex 5: Questionnaire for Australian adult of *Rafiki PenPals*

1. Does your child enjoy receiving and reading mail from their friend in Kenya? What is it that you feel your child gets from this? What do you want/hope your child will get from this program?
2. Do you think that running the program based on seasons (4 times a year) sufficient and effective?
3. Are you happy with the management of the program?
4. Do you think the communication from *Community Classrooms Collaborative* is sufficient? If not, what are your expectations?
5. Do you think the suggested donation is acceptable and reasonable? If not, what do you suggest is a good amount?
6. Do you know specifically where your funds go? If not, is this something you would prefer is communicated?
7. Are you willing to raise more funds as a once-off program? E.g., Christmas drive. If yes, would you prefer this money went directly to your child's Kenyan penpal, the penpal program as a whole or to *Community Classrooms Collaborative's* projects based in Kenya?
8. What would you like to see incorporated in the program? E.g. Educational activity, workshop, parent group, etc.
9. Is there any other feedback that you would like to provide to assist this review?

N.B. This questionnaire was not issued at time of reporting due to time factors in relation to the establishment of the system. As a result of this, this questionnaire was not deliberated within the reported findings above.