

## REPORT ON VILLAGE MEETING:AFRICA

The evaluation of the August '76 ITI was a painful experience. The program that had opened the continent to us so well over the past four years seemed off target. The course had a forty thousand shilling debt and the participants primarily anticipated continued training towards a goal of ITI staff participation. However, the visit to Kawangware had been an obvious high impact experience for the whole ITI. The projection for 1976-1977 showed replication on the horizon. The situation seemed ripe for Town Meeting. We decided to take to the circuits with a "Village Meeting" balloon.

James Lwaniah attended the August ITI. He's thirty years old, has a high school education, has been married less than a year and his wife lives in his village up-country while James is looking for a job in Nairobi along with many other thousands of Kenyans. Our first circuit was out in the vicinity of James' village, so we invited him to accompany us.

The trip appeared to be uniquely disastrous, but since has become recognized as quite typical. We stayed overnight the first night out with an old colonial couple that sort of adopted Rupert Barnes some 25 years ago when he must have been more adoptable. Our arrival was marred by rain that got us washed off the road. So dinner was delayed but it was the most proper dinner I've had in my life. Silverware and dishes everywhere, a bell for the servants for each course, and because of our delay, a ten minute silence during the short-wave reception of the BBC news. Amidst all this James appeared stricken with Malaria--he had been well soaked and chilled, but was also struggling with all this British formality and the fact that all the servants waiting on us were his fellow Luo tribesmen.

James physically improved as the week progressed, and the day of our visiting his village, he astonished us by laying out a complete time-line of who we would visit, the role they played in the village and what the conversation would be about. Sare is 50 Km south of Kisii, or 150 Km south of the Nyanza Province capital city of Kisumu. It is north of the Tanzania border by again 50 Km, and east of the shore of Lake Victoria by 50 Km. One of the things that you notice as you approach Sare is that the telephone lines disappear, and shortly after that, the electricity is also behind you. A petrol pump occasionally shows up in a village and it has a hand crank. I apologize for all this detail, but when you take somebody who is nearly 40 years old and has spent all that time in the world of the 15% who have every resource imaginable, and place them in the world of the other 85%, it is a wonder-filled adventure.

In Sare James started us off with his primary school. James was greeted as though he were John Glenn just back from orbit with two creatures he picked up in space. We shook hands with 300 kids and all the staff. James finally took us aside with the Headmaster and the school's choir director. He did a long 15 min. conversation with them in the Luo tribal dialect, at the end of which the Headmaster turned to us and said, "James has told us all about your work. We welcome you to Sare and hope we might work together." Within the next 15 minutes the Headmaster and his choir director were the coordinators of the first Village Meeting Sponsor's Committee in all of Africa.

We made two trips back to meet with the full committee because that's how you get practices done, but we found that our coordinators wanted us to address the committee about the intent and expectations of a Village Meeting. This held true at the third meeting when we were sure all had already heard it. They listened and cheered and smiled as the same points of humanness were rehearsed. When we would get to practices, they would be quiet, take some notes and nod, but we could not get much feel for their progress. I kept thinking about those USA Town Meeting committees that bugged me with endless minutia discussions, and here these people keyed on memorizing the context. Strange strains of humanness.

We worried about the practics and built a plan to take a team into the village for the five days prior to the meeting to blitz any holes in the preparation. One week before the meeting they were to have their last committee meeting and we would use the data from that meeting to decide the last week's tactics. Now, a couple of weeks prior to this, the House automobile blew its engine and we were now using public transportation and hitched rides exclusively. With the advice of a local ITI grad, we took the country bus direct from Kisumu to Sare for the one week count-down meeting. We boarded the bus at 9:00 am in Kisumu with a well-negotiated price. Then the circumstances of the day took over. The bus never really broke down, but was tinkered with for a half hour at each stop, was loaded beyond capacity at five different stops as the Kenya Secondary Boarding schools were closing for the end of the year holidays, and we were stopped at two Kenya Police safety road blocks. There's more, but it gets hard to believe. The bus arrived in Sare at 5:30 p.m. The sun sets in Kenya at 6:30 year-round--the public transportation ceases at sun-down. We got off the bus and caught the last Matatu of the day back to Kisii, then the last to Ahero, etc.

Saturday we sat in Nairobi hosting the Hollingers (Amos and Ruth) from Altoona, PA--guardians on their way to the Lusaka consult. We had just learned that our in-kind transport had fallen through and we still had no idea what the latest situation was in our village. While we discussed our options, we asked the Hollingers what they would most appreciate during their three days with us. When their answer was "see some of Kenya", things clicked. Sunday the Hollingers saw a great deal of Kenya in their rented car. In fact, they were the honored guests of the Sare Village Meeting Sponsor's Committee for dinner that evening. We left two staff in Sare to keep the practics on track. We also learned that "close to a hundred" had been at the committee meeting we missed. When we got back to Nairobi we ran off more workbooks and registration forms.

Tuesday night six ICA staff boarded the bus in Nairobi bound for Isebania on the Tanzania border. At 5:00 am in total darkness we got off in Sare and felt our way along the dirt road to the school. As we approached the school at about 5:30, we found light shining through the rafters. It turned out to be the 59 Standard 7 students doing independent study in preparation for their CPE exams. And nearly all of the 59 were there. With no teachers, no parents, 50-something kids, aged 13 through maybe 18, studying individually or in pairs by kerosene lanterns at 5:30 am for the exam that determines their future education possibilities. It had to be an omen of some kind.

At breakfast we found out our two staff had enjoyed their three days in town talking with folks over tea and visiting, but were still in the dark, practics-wise. So we organized ourselves into task forces and went after the practics in the morning so we could do workshop training with the villagers in the afternoon. (Six out of our 8 staff had never seen a Town Meeting- none had ever led a workshop, and two had not had any workshop training.) Rupert went after the lunch arrangements with a passion and was appalled that it was inadequate--why, people would leave! He worked out an acceptable menu with the committee, calculated the quantities and came up with a budget of over 600 shillings. This good news he brought to the staff, then turned around and went back to the committee with the good news that this was their responsibility. Becky Grow went off after decor and set-up information and was finished quickly by the information that the Standard 5 and 6 girls would do that early Thursday morning. She could help them. Other investigations went similarly. We did buy pencils, broke them in two and sharpened them. Knowing that this was essentially the only local practics we had touched, and we were less than 20 hours away from the first Village Meeting in Africa, gave us a strange uneasiness.

That afternoon at 2:00 our Headmaster and committee Chairman, Daniel Ouma, provided us with a classroom and ten local workshop leader trainees (I had asked for 8 when I spoke to him at 10:30). Eight of these were school teachers and two were businessmen. Together with our staff we ran through a 3-hour training session. We only got to cover the morning workshop, but we had a happening. We had them put some content on a quick run-through. They listed no electricity, no industry, and no cooperatives. We pushed for what was underlying, and they stung themselves in short, quick jabs. "We're not organized- we don't have any local leaders, and we just don't care enough to do anything about this situation." The awakening that was taking place in these people was awesome. The ICA staff sat with frozen grins, or giggled. We finished off our training by making assignments of 4-man workshop leader teams. Our ICA African staff would be the up-front men leading the group in the Luo language. The local people were going to be the newly committed village leadership wherever they were.

That evening we took stock and found that the unknowns and ambiguities hadn't been appreciably reduced, but we all sensed a confidence. We anticipated a good size turn out. The luncheon would not be disastrous, the decor and set-up would be adequate, and the afternoon workshops would go well, even if we didn't have any more corporate staff time. Even the chronic cynics couldn't shift the staff mood that night.

In Africa, daylight determines your work-day, especially in rural areas where most of the people live. Meetings are held during the day; celebrations are also daytime activities. So, at day-break things start moving quickly. The Standard 5 & 6 girls were at the decor early, filling out a large banner "Sare Village Meeting" with the VM logo and the date. They did a striking job on the school building. It has a dirt floor, open window frames without windows, frames or shutters, and an open roof frame with corrugated sheet metal roofing. They had hung tied bundles of flowers to the rafters of the large classroom hall, and draped 8-10 foot long banana tree leaves over the rafters so that they hung like majestic chandeliers. The Village Meeting quotation posters with the words of Kenyatta, Kaunda, Nyerere, Mbiti, Gandhi, hung around the outside between the windows. The chalk boards at the front and back of the room had been made into elaborate murals by good artists using colored chalk. They depicted things like diverse hoards on their way to the Village Meeting and groups seated in discussion. Another seemed to be a montage of the community with farming, marketing and schooling depicted. The three-person bench-desk furniture pieces were arranged in a double row on each side of the room facing each other. We were ready.

At 9:00 am we had a registration table manned by two people who would take each name, P.O.Box, occupation, age and sex (we weren't sure what we wanted) and provide them with a name tag and pin, and a work book and pencil. Mr. Ouma produced a box for the table for each adult to deposit his one shilling and each student his 20 cents. At 9:10 the que at the registration table was over 150 people long. From then until 10:30 we frantically registered people. Every staff was registering. Lines and tables were everywhere. Roving registrars worked from the back ends of the lines. We asked those who were registered to help register others. At 10:30 we were still mopping up, but invited the 450 who were registered and were eagerly studying their workbooks to enter the Great Hall.

We sang "Oh, Afrika"--a song we found in a book and everybody we asked about it said, "Oh, yes, people know that."..They pretended not to, here in our first run. Our song leader was a school teacher and he had a core of obedient students, so he didn't stick his thumb in his mouth and quit, but asked them to do it again. The kids were better. Our song leader then suggested Kenya's "Harambee" song which has endless verses and a common chorus. The choruses got stronger and stronger, and as it became

obvious that we had won, it became fuzzier how we would shut it off. They were smiling at us, at each other, at the room, at their workbooks, at their name tags. The emcee, Mr. Ouma, again was a natural. I don't know what he said, but it seemed right. I did a form of a New World talk with our African ICA staff translating into Luo. Essentially we told them change was the way life is everywhere- pointed out where Sare was experiencing its share- and, people were finding a new excitement in life by participating in creating and shaping the future of their local setting. We repeatedly hit the "you do it" theme to guard against the hope of "somebody has finally come to give us what we want."

The morning workshops went extremely well. Our team of ringers weren't skillful at dropping the bottom out in the underlying contradiction team discussions, but they sure recognized the difference between challenge statements that got beyond the "we don't have" level, and those that didn't. Miraculously all the groups finished at nearly the same time--only about a half hour behind schedule. We had seventeen challenge statements in Luo and English.

Rupert's fears of a catastrophic lunch disappeared with a feast of boiled bananas, bread & butter, and tea. After lunch the school's girls choir entertained with folk songs. The mood of the day enhanced their performance. The fact that they won the Kenya national folk singing competition the year before showed in their poise and maturity. As the honored guests, we politely and delightedly asked for two encores and decided that having not corporately prepared for the New Human talk, we would let the present mood carry directly into the afternoon workshops.

We had not noticeably lost anybody, and the afternoon workshops had about seventy-five adults in each. The children played soccer in the afternoon, but each workshop had about 5 youth who had been captured by it all, and became significant contributors. In spite of the training inadequacy, the afternoon workshops were very loyal to the methods.

Late in the afternoon the sub-location Chief came by. This is the local level of the national government. We had let our local sponsoring committee deal with all the political structure. A meeting such as this requires a license from the District Officer. This is usually processed through the Chiefs' network. The newspapers are filled with accusations of tribal jealousies and rivalries that result in meetings cancelled at the last minute. We had been anxious for information about how this authorization had been handled, but got lots of "no problem" answers. As Daniel Ouma and I walked to meet the Chief, Daniel talked fast. They had not asked for a license. They had instead gone through the Board of Education for permission to hold a "Parents' Meeting", closing the school for the day and using the building. Just two days before the meeting, Daniel notified the Chief's office that something was going to be happening. He had counted on the Chief's schedule being so full that he would not be able to visit at all. I was a little relieved to see that the wind had torn up the "Sare Village Meeting" banner as we walked to the Headmaster's office. The Chief asked many questions rapidly and over a wide area, writing nothing down. Elijah Odour, one of our African Luo tribesmen, ICA staff, popped in with some questions about workshop procedures. The Chief listened to our exchange, asked Elijah a couple of questions in Luo, and told us he was glad to see us doing things like this meeting. He left as quickly as he had come, just before the plenary, much to the relief of Mr. Ouma who explained that if he had accepted my invitation to attend the plenary, he would have made a long speech and we wouldn't have had time for the reports.

The closing plenary was late. The workshops had pushed hard at the end to finish up the proposals. The magic markers had run dry in epidemic fashion so groups were running about and improvising with colored chalk on butcher paper. Finally everybody was assembled in those four long rows and the windows were all four deep. Then Daniel led

as fine a plenary as I've attended. He contextualized the reports and led a traditional rhythmic applause to receive each guild report individually. The local people contextualized their reports and then read loudly and with passion their written statements. The fellow who presented the village symbol held it from view while he spun a masterful web of anticipation. It was a fine demonstration of contextual skills and selfhood. We then led a corporate reflection conversation that was translated back into English for us. Most of it was bouquet-tossing, but one fellow broke in with a scream of "what do we do next" which broke the whole village loose to move beyond the emotion of the day, and many of the private comments after the plenary were related to their ideas for implementation of the proposals. A brief shower during the plenary produced the most perfect rainbow I've ever seen stretched from horizon to horizon.

The workshop leader teams and the co-sponsors gathered at the staff house for tea and mutual congratulations and then the climax of a group photograph. There is an almost uncontrolled fascination with cameras. We bought two rolls of film in the village shops and got a total of three pictures developed from the negatives--another local example to ground the challenges. Our hostess, Mrs. Aduwo, who was also the school's choir director and whose husband is a District Education Officer, served us a fine feast that evening as we reflected on the events of the day. Then, back at our staff quarters, the Aduwo guest house, we had a kerosene lamp evaluation. We were most excited by our new core of workshop leaders and their readiness to travel with us. The early designs for a January maneuver to set up seven more villages in Nyanza Province were taking form.

Early the next morning the eight ICA staff set off for the center of Sare Village and the bus to Nairobi. Our hostess and Mr. Ouma and a few invited guests that had shared breakfast with us accompanied us on the walk to the bus. As we passed the school the children had broken from their pre-class clean-up of the grounds and facility to make a single line along the side of the road. Three hundred kids were waving and shouting good-bye. Six of the larger boys had been selected to carry our bags, and marched proudly in our procession past what moments ago had been their peers. At the village we had an endless reception line. Those who didn't come apologized and shop owners who had not closed shop for the meeting promised they would next time. Those who attended continued their words of gratitude and the core said "We'll be waiting to go with you to other villages."

Our plan for the future calls for two Village Meetings in Quarter II, 10 in Quarter III, 18 in Quarter IV, and 20 in Quarter I. That will be 50 for the year. We feel that this is a challenge, but fully achievable, and have organized our forces to have everybody in on the action. Individual geographical responsibilities give everybody a general's opportunity. We have found two critical back-up functions and are plugging those with special task forces. The first of these is the area of Village Meeting materials. We have put together workbooks (Swahili/English), an 8-page Village Meeting brochure, a VM flyer or hand-out, a 4-page ICA (Africa) tract, VM logo posters, a set of quote posters and a Swahili social process triangle. We have a fine track record with in-kind printing and paper supply; however, we now can sense the acceleration and anticipate a new day of logistics dealing with quantities of 50,000 to 100,000 workbooks for the year. This exposes the other task force area--development. We have published the cost of a VM as 8,000 shillings (about US\$1,000). We ask 2,000/- from the village and another 2,000/- of in-kind. Then we specify ICA will raise the other 4,000/- from national and international sources. These seems compatible to the way Harambee and other projects are financed. The villages, especially up-country, are poor, but they are expected to put something into the pot. Nairobi and other cities are the centers of the money--the key is the loyalty strings of the city money back to their home village. Harambee fund raising is very much like an alumni shake-down. We anticipate the 4,000/- will be easy to raise, provided we make the match-up of the urban businessman and his home village. Finally, we will be integrating these task forces with the Nairobi Nexus staff.