

Kawangware file

28 December, 1977

Nairobi House

REPORT OF THE GREAT TWO YEAR CELEBRATION OF THE TURNING POINT OF THE KAWANGWARE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT PROJECT.

Looking back, it's a bit surprising to realize that our first imaginations of a two year celebration originated after our staff returned from Joe's funeral, and did not get named as something which required assigned personnel until the first week of November. In six weeks we pulled together a fantastic week long celebration to mark the end of the KHDP and the beginning of a new era of the movement in Kenya.

From the beginning we worked with the community to decide what the contents of the celebration should be and what tactics were needed to bring the celebration off. The content began small with the opening of the metal shop and grew to a ten-day fiasco, finally settling into its actual six great days.

The community meets every Tuesday evening for dinner with the KHDP auxiliary and were very concerned about our level of visibility within the community and within Nairobi. The first planning and Saturday workdays concentrated on "preparing the Community" for the celebration. The community centre was first with a great scrub-down turning the muddy walls back into a white building with grid (our main labourers were the average age of 8 years); the scrub was followed a week later with an internal paint job (paint inkinded) to remove the 2½ foot high nursery school hand prints.

Meanwhile our staff was involved in two great tasks. The first was to secure a "bwana Kubwa" (hauncho) to be our guest of honor at the final day of the celebration. The second was to organize all the extras including inkinding food, etc.

J. Kameme and Barnes were our stars in collecting the guest. We discussed for hours who could possibly be appropriate without getting ourselves into hot water politically and who could as well help us raise "Harambee" money to finish the nursery school. The occasional error happens of course, we wrote a letter to a very wealthy and influential fellow with regrets that he was unable to come and present the cows he is giving "due to an unfortunate case of foot in mouth disease." We hope his English is poor enough to miss the slur. We changed our plans slightly after that and invited a civil servant from the Office of the Vice-President who most graciously accepted.

The other preparation tactics were, excuse the modesty, a series of miracles. We have now opened a new line of inkind called working the restaurants. We received a marvelous selection of seven cakes, pies, custard, cream, samosas, egg rolls and African dishes for thirty. After the famous Kenya Police Band had turned us down for the grand finale, Geri pulled a few contacts and secured the Administrative Police Training School Band who agreed to come free and an hour early to march.

The celebration itself began on a Market Day with a Fair in the Kawangware square/plaza. Each section of the project made a booth including such features as sewing machines and our newly born bull from the Demonstration Urban Farm. Next to the booths was the bulletin board which had been newly painted, 6-Ur montage repaired and greetings from around the world posted and connected to a world grid. The fair brought alot of attention from market shoppers and numerous offers to buy the calf.

The second day of the celebration involved two signal events. The Deputy Commissioner of Cooperative Development came for a site visit and then officially opened two new cooperative industries: the Kawangware Metal Shop and the Kawatex Sewing Industry. The first will be run as an apprenticeship school to train some of the many unemployed in Kawangware.. During lunch he gave a strong speech about the cooperative experimenting for the Ministry in what they have been talking about doing for the last several years.

The second event of the day was the first GWF held in Kenya for women from all over Nairobi. Geri had bumped into or manuevered into the elite African society of women and had some of Kenya's finest represented at the meeting. The Standard Newspaper had sent out a female reporter to cover the meeting of the cooperative industries she stumbled into the GWF and never made the openings. (Note the article written by Muthoni Wainaina.)

Thursday, the third day of the celebration was marked by our guest of honour, Her Excellency Miss Margaret Kenyatta (ex mayor and daughter of The Presiden, also current representative of Kenya to UNEP). Miss Kenyatta arrived in her big black Mercedes for a site visit, then opened our first low-cost murrum (local soil) block house. The construction crew had been working day and night for the last week to finish the house, the cement had a rather damp look for the opening, but she was very excited. She had lunch with the construction crew, a few local dignitaries served by our older e.g. She reviewed the site visit in her comments, complemented the children and invited us to be in contact with the UNEP. Her parting words were to be sure and invite her back to any other events we are having.

During all that we were having our second GWF with the women in Kawangware. The room was empty at 12:00 and packed to packed to the gills by lunch. Miss Kenyatta also stopped in and said a word to the ladies which was probably the highlight of their day. After watching the day before Mercy Kerou and Benedette Njuguna led the Kawangware GWF. Both women were stars and in the truest sense were "the new women" embodied.

Friday was the Farm Field Day, totally organized by the farmers. A number of guardians came for lunch, rabbit being featured with other great vegetables from the farm. To our surprise a pig arrived the day before; rather pregnant, after many months of work on inkind. We had received money for the pig industry so were rather relieved to have the sow arrive to fill our empty sty.

Most of us were still alive by Saturday and Fred led us in a fine work day: planting trees along Kawangware road-complete with cement planters, creating a playground for children by the market and a general clean-up. The goats love the trees and the children have moved into the playground. We did not know how many children could be stuffed onto each side of the teeter totter. Their mothers are probably wondering what is keeping their children until past 10:00 at night.

The Sunday "Grand Celebration" to be very honest was the least clear day to me. It began as a graduation, then Harambee fund raising and finally back to graduation, speech image. By Sunday my stomach, which had been annoying me during the week, totally gave up; my spirit was not far behind. At 1:00 our guest of honor Mr. Motiga from the Vice-President's office arrived for lunch and a site visit. As he left the office I received a call saying the fellow providing all could not be found. The band was also an hour late and had not arrived and the company with a sound system had not shown up; we had word that they only realized that day that we wanted a donation.

As imaginable, I was ready to go to bed and ignore the whole thing. Fortunately our sewing teacher came in and forced me to help her fill out certificates for the sewing class. Sitting there we suddenly heard in full force the Kenya Police Training Band-set and ready to march. At That one can hardly remain hidden upstairs. We ran down with instructions of where to march and they were off - the Band previously reserved for the white settlers now marching down the muddy, bumpy lanes of Kawangware.

The band did its job well. The parade was led by several community leaders, followed by the band and completed by program arenas marching with banners. They had a full crowd when they set out from the square but were almost lost by the time they arrived back for the awards and speech.

As the band set-up in concert a large crowd gathered filling the square, climbing on cars and planters to have a good view of the band and speakers. Our community fellows appointed themselves as guards to keep the crowd from gathering too closely. Up front were J. Kameme and P. Njuguna making introductions. Joram Ng'ang'a, a very shy fellow in charge of the DUFarm read "The Great Accomplishments of the Past Two Years." He was followed by the presentation of graduation certificates by the teachers to representatives from the Kawangware Youth Corps, Sewing, typing, Adult Literaty and English classes. Our guest, Mr. Motiga, gave a challenge speech all in Swahili so I'll confess to not understanding it all. We think it was good. The sound system had arrived during the band's march so all around the event was well projected.

Little things of course do happen. A disposed Member of Parliament who is very popular with the top political figures but less so locally arrived in his big black Mercedes dressed in his political clothes, leather jacket etc. Barnes turned six shades of green for fear of political errors and the rest of us politely bit our tongues. We had a fine reception after, the food was found, no political speeches were made and all went home pleased and exhausted with the week.

To only mention the following Tuesday is probably to understate the most significant event. As is customary we have Tuesday night community meetings, but the following Tuesday was a special celebration. Our older leaders were all up-front, the collegium room was overflowing and only 3 wazungu (whites) in the room. It was a fine event and properly marked the beginning of a new era. Kawangware is different now. The community leaders are now looking at a new task with the rest of Kenya, going out on Village Meeting circuits and signing up for the new project.

One last thing, we reached new levels in national coverage. I contacted my good friends at the Standard and Nation, our two local papers. Reporters were sent out with photographers which ended up in two articles in each paper. The radio also covered the visit of Miss Kenyatta. The grand finale really came when we received a call from Mr. Mungai with the Voice of Kenya who had read our article and wanted us to come for an evening talk show on television, Mambo Leo (Today's news).

Mungai came out for a site visit and met Joram and myself and recruited two others for the show including the head mason and the Assistant Chief. We made it and had a fine interview mostly in Swahili. The men were more prepared than me, but I added the female and non-Kenyan touch. I answered a few questions about the Institute and project in general, then the once-shy-Joram explained ~~my fellows like him joined, telling about the drop in unemployment and crime.~~ Our mason complained about not being able to tell everything he wanted to afterward but made one of the most helpful comments. Asked if the community could run the project if the ICA left he unhesitatingly replied, "Of course." The Assistant chief did his job, praising the project and assuring government support.

Well, we are all new folks now. Kawangware has become a sign of hope to the world.