



MARCH 2022



## EL BOKOCH SCHOOL PROJECT UPDATE

### Ileret, Northern Kenya

#### THE DAILY GRIND ...

Hard to imagine but at first glance it looked like children playing in a playground, however, the closer we got to them the bigger our eyes became at what we were actually seeing. The children were playing 'riding motorbikes' – however, this was no ordinary playground and these clearly no ordinary bikes, but dead cow carcasses albeit without the terrible smell. The sound effects were real enough though, revving cow horns instead of handle bars like it was the Grand Prix!



For these children home is the village of Ary on the Southern border of Ethiopia and Northern Kenya, on the eastern shore of Lake Turkana. We had gone there, some 13 miles north of El Bokoch to buy grain for the school after class meal.

The drought is very real with extreme consequences to the lives of the communities that live in this area of Northern Kenya.

Already vulnerable pastoralist communities have experienced the most extreme drought known in living memory, devastated by massive stock loss from starvation. And animals are currency to these people, not only to sell but also to live off for milk and meat.

This drought has been far worse than portrayed on the likes of Aljazeera news with many Daasanach families losing all their livestock.

The El Bokoch School students and their families have been hit extremely hard, their daily life a grinding struggle for survival.

Not before time, earlier in January the rain came with three solid days of downpour. With cooler temperatures many thousands of goats and sheep could not survive in such a weakened state. Cattle were the first to succumb.

More and more children are arriving daily at the school. These children have returned with their families from the remote cattle camps, no longer do many of them have any animals left to tend. Despite their circumstances, the kids are remarkably upbeat and wave excitedly every time you see them.

Saying “bye” for “hello”, being the nursery class, they are so enthusiastic to practice their newfound language skills.

#### **VISION FOR THE SCHOOL:**

Our achievements in this area are starting to get noticed and a month ago we had a visit by a representative from an NGO offering their help. We discussed the possibility of getting water piped from the borehole to the fertile flats so planting of crops can begin.

This forms a part of the extra-curricular sustainability vision for the school to grow food and have water security. The deep-water borehole represents a constant supply with an ability to pump 3,000 gallons / hour.

At the moment drinking water comes from a hand-dug hole in the dry riverbed. The water level is slow to rise to the surface so we cannot use an electric pump instead, bucketing into 5-gallon jerry cans and hauling across the riverbed in wheelbarrows when the pickup is not available. We also asked for water to be piped to the school buildings to make it healthier for children to access safe drinking water and also for cooking the daily meal.

Solar cooking will be introduced gradually with the inexpensive Haines cookers found in Nairobi. Once the teacher’s accommodation is finished, we still need to install solar lights in the bedrooms, kitchen and living area.

Thanks to Unite to Light in California for donating twelve solar lights and three solar chargers to our foundation. They were very interested in our project and hope to talk with them further about providing more lights and power charges for the school and library.

At the end of last term, we had a rousing closing ceremony with singing, dancing, exam results announced and Amy’s birthday books given out. To cap off a great day a new school garden was established and there is now desert rose bushes planted outside of classes 1 - 6.





*Books donated for Amy's birthday*

Mostly girls collect water from the riverbed and for some it's 2 miles to their homes balancing jerry cans on their heads. I asked the children to take care of the garden when they are passing the school and the following day found three girls watering the desert roses. Once water is piped to the school grounds more planting can begin.



*Term closing ceremony with students planting desert roses in the new garden.*

**ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION:**

The inaugural environmental conservation extra-curricular class was taught by a Daasanach man who had access to books for the first time from our library. Simon went onto become head teacher at El Bokoch, then was chosen to be part of the scout program in Sibilo National Park run by Kenya Wildlife Service. Planting of a tree nursery inside the 70 acres of school grounds can be done once the water supply is connected.

**EDUCATING GIRLS:**

This is an important focus for the school with now 85 female students. In this remote area there are a few girls who have attended high school outside the area whom then marry

later, have more opportunities and a greater voice within the community. Having food and water in a school greatly helps the attendance of girl students in these remote locations.

El Bokoch represents hope for a girl's future, to have an education in the safety of their own area in the care of their families. An opportunity you are making happen with your support and generosity.



## **THE WAY FORWARD**

### **REGISTRATION OF THE SCHOOL WITH THE GOVERNMENT:**

Though discussions with community elders, leaders in the community and the local member of parliament the next step is to get our school registered with the Kenyan Government, which will bring huge benefits long term. A visit to the Marsabit County education department proved fruitful and together with the education officers we did a hard and fast trip to Ileret. It was highly beneficial for them to visit El Bokoch first-hand and to meet with elders. They were very complimentary of what has been achieved and amazed that we had mobilised this effort from so far away. It was commented "You have done something even our government could not do". High praise for what we have achieved with our supporters.

The wheels of official processes often turn slowly, however once the school is registered the government will take up the reins by providing teachers, grain, stationery, the necessary new curriculum books and the national exams. They have indicated the process of formalising this will take less than six months.

### **THE FINAL CHAPTER:**

#### **TEACHERS ACCOMMODATION BUILD, FINISHING TOUCHES AND REPAIRS TO THE MCFT**

**LIBRARY:** The construction of the El Bokoch Primary Teachers accommodation is progressing well with a team of four down-country fundis (tradesmen) and Daasanach locals. With a team of 12 and using manual block makers a total of 4,700 blocks were made at the dry river bed site. The accommodation facility comprises of bedrooms with a designated space for a shared living area. It is situated a short walking distance from the school in a place assigned by elders.





*El Bokoch Teachers accommodation nearing the finishing stages*

We need to complete the teacher's accommodation and principal's office (together with construction of the cookhouse and bathroom facility for the teachers' quarters). The finishing work on all classroom buildings involves plastering floors, walls, windows, painting and with bat, bird and snake proofing a necessity.

Repairs to be done to the library are re-roofing, new window frames and a door. Once completed we have a sustainable plan for transporting books back & forth from the library to El Bokoch.

The perimeter security fence materials, main gate, chain link and standards are already on-site as is framing for the principal's office.

This final construction work will take 3-4 weeks to complete.



For constructing a concrete slab, beams and columns ballast is hauled from further up the dry riverbed to the school site. Hardcore comes from an area a 40-mile round trip away and water for plastering and curing is hauled from Lake Turkana.

## **FUNDRAISING:**

We will be fundraising for the next three weeks to raise much needed funds to finish the teacher's accommodation and for operational costs until government funding steps in. We haven't asked for donations in 2021 as we had enough funding in hand to enable us to do work on the buildings, provide teacher payments, stationery, after class meals and books.

Please make a 2022 donation to our foundation to enable us to hit a home run. We are this close to cutting the ribbon and completing what has been an enormous project, building a school in one of the remotest areas of Northern Kenya, one in which many hands have contributed to.

It would be super appreciated if you could make a donation to get the teachers accommodation completed. There is a real urgency to get this project finished.

Please send a check to:

**Michael Cronhelm & Taft Conlin Foundation - 501(C)(3)**

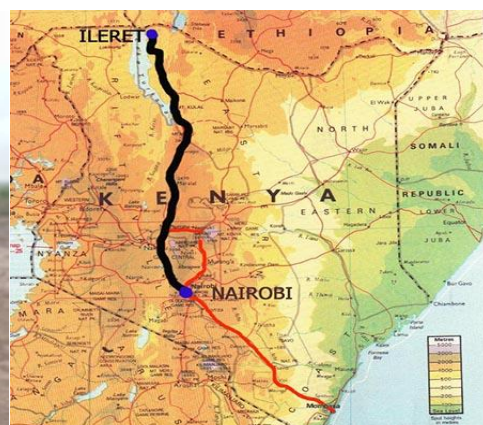
c/o Ingalls Brown office  
20600 Chagrin Boulevard  
Suite 430  
Shaker Heights  
OH 44122  
USA

❖ **PAYPAL – use Donate Button on Home Page of Website**

Go to: <https://www.michaelcronhelmfoundation.org/>

## **YOUR CONTRIBUTION IS GREATLY APPRECIATED**

Climate change has had serious ramifications for the people in this area of Northern Kenya. For parents the El Bokoch School represents hope for their children's future. Your donations have enabled this school to really take off, complete now with all eight classrooms and for children to have a daily meal in this time of greatest need and food insecurity.

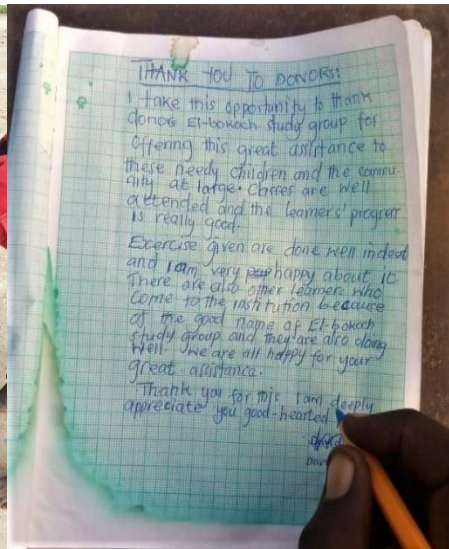


*A typical style of Daasanach house built out of sheeting iron, mud & animal skins bound with rope.*





**Walking to El Bokoch carrying firewood and water for cooking the after-class meal of boiled beans & maize.**



**Returning from the waterholes / planting a new garden at El Bokoch**

**Thank you for your time reading this update on the Kenya Projects.**