

# **Education Challenges in East Africa: Observations From A Tour of Aga Khan Development Network Education Facilities in Tanzania and Kenya – October, 2005**

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## **Introduction**

Theresa and I spent most of our trip in Tanzania and Kenya visiting education related projects of the Aga Khan Development Network. We were part of a group of ten Canadians looking at providing financial and other support to AKDN educational activities in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda.

For those of you who may only have enough time to read a few paragraphs, these are some of my major take-aways:

First is poverty. Poverty and all of its attendant evils are pervasive in this part of the world. But poverty only stands out in contrast. It is disparity, not poverty, which leads to despair and desperation. How can anyone maintain hope in the face of daily, obvious, systemic and unjustifiable differences? Especially parents, who may eventually come to terms with their own circumstances but can not stop dreaming for so much more for their children and children's children. And the disparity is everywhere, not just between Africans and foreigners but also between fortunate and less fortunate Africans themselves.

Second is education. Education is the only way to tackle disparity. It is the only hope for everyday Kenyans and Tanzanians and for their children. It is the basis upon which local governments can build the tax base they need to support their citizens. This is an area where we can help, are helping now, and must do much, much more in the future. As you will see below, the education system in East Africa is a long way behind us, with significant challenges to overcome before it can close the gap.

Third is commitment. Local commitment. There are great things happening in this part of the world – big, little and everyday. Kenyans and Tanzanians are doing lots of good things for Kenyans and Tanzanians. You do not see enough of this in the North American media. There are great people in Kenya and Tanzania doing great things for their communities.

Fourth and final is trust. We need to empower committed local Africans who are standing up for equality, responsibility and peaceful change. Then we need to trust them to tell us how best to help. That does not mean we abandon accountability. The currency of responsibility must be accountability. But there are many local people in the areas we visited that we can and should trust to be leaders, not just of their communities but of our efforts to help their communities as well. After all, if our goal is development of an equitable and peaceful worldwide community, then we must be as willing to be led as we are to lead.

## Who We Were And What We Were Doing There

We were part of a group of ten people led by Sherali Saju and Jim Gray.

Sherali Saju is a retired businessman from Calgary. He is a client of mine, and a member of the Ismaili community. He has also been a volunteer with the Aga Khan University for the past twenty-seven years. His wife Dolly joined him on the trip.

Jim Gray is also a retired businessman from Calgary. He is a founder and former CEO of Canadian Hunter, a well-known Canadian oil and gas exploration firm. His daughter Christine Shields, from Vancouver, accompanied him on the trip.

Both Sherali and Jim are well-known philanthropists in the Calgary area.



The rest of our group included:

- Dr. Charles Webber, the Associate Dean for the Graduate Division of Educational Research, Faculty of Education, University of Calgary;
- Peter Istvanffy, President and CEO of Calgary Academy, a school for children with special learning needs which also runs a school and teacher development outreach program;
- Diane Jankowski, Peter's wife and a teacher at the Calgary Academy; and
- Last but certainly not least, Bob Remington, a journalist with the Calgary Herald.

The purpose of the trip was essentially due diligence. A few years ago Sherali and Jim had discussions with the Aga Khan University (AKU) about what they could do with their combined contacts and talents to assist the AKU with various projects, especially the establishment of an Institute for Educational Development of and for East and Eastern Africa.

A number of our group had already done due diligence in Pakistan in the fall of 2004, visiting several AKU education based sites around Pakistan, including Jim, Sherali and Bob. Our Africa trip included visiting similar facilities in Tanzania and Kenya.

Theresa and I were invited to join the group just two weeks before they left. It made so much sense for us to go. With a mostly empty nest, we had been talking about focusing energy outside our core family, especially in the context of helping families in less privileged countries. I have a large number of Ismaili friends and clients, and have developed a great respect for the work being done by the Aga Khan Development Network. I also sit on the governing board and board of directors of a degree granting institute of technology in Toronto, as well as the board of directors of private, Montessori school offering programs from pre-school to Grade 8, and have become more and more interested in education from a social development perspective.

Our group was hosted in Africa by Gordon MacLeod, the Planning Head of the proposed IED in East Africa; Rupen Chande, the Manager of the Professional Development Centre for East Africa; and their team in Kenya and Tanzania, including Judy Ogana, Manager, Communication and Resource Development for the AKU in East Africa. They did a magnificent job. Rafiq Noon, AKU Campaign Director and Shamsh Kassim-Lakkha, AKU President, both based in Karachi, Pakistan, also joined us for many events.



### **The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN): An Introduction**

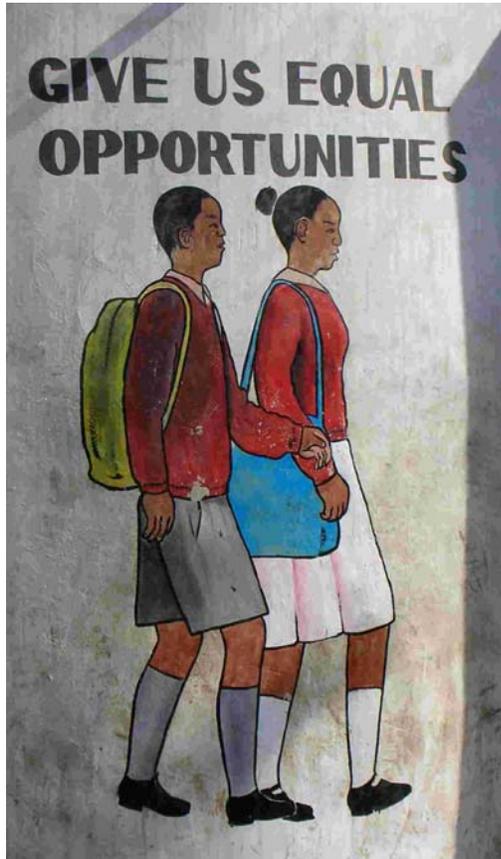
The Aga Khan is the head of the Ismaili community. The Ismaili community is part of the larger Shiite Muslim community. There are Ismailis in many countries throughout the world, with a particularly vibrant and active Ismaili community in Canada. The current Aga Khan is a well-known philanthropist widely respected throughout the world.

The Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) has been in existence for more than one hundred years. It is a secular and non-religious development network that focuses on countries that are poor, have a significant Muslim population, and have had or now have an Ismaili population. This takes in many of the world's poorest nations, including Pakistan, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and many countries in Central Asia. The AKDN deals with all persons in need, irrespective of race or religion, when working in these countries. It also has a particular goal of raising the status of women in these countries.

The AKDN is divided into three major divisions – Economic Development, Social Development and Culture. Each of these has further divisions.

The focus of the Economic Development division is the ownership and operation of private businesses in the target countries, the profits of which are used to fund AKDN activities including micro financing. It owns companies in a wide variety of industries including tourism, aviation, insurance, newspapers, banking and manufacturing.

The Social Development division includes The Aga Khan Foundation, The Aga Khan University, The University of Central Asia, the four Aga Khan hospitals, three hundred nursery schools, primary schools and secondary schools, and the Aga Khan Planning and Building Services.



The Aga Khan Trust for Culture is the main vehicle of the Culture division. Major recent initiatives include a \$300 million Canadian dollar Islamic cultural centre in Toronto and a \$30 million Canadian dollar contribution to a \$50 million dollar Centre for Pluralism in Ottawa. It is also known for its major commitment to excellence in architecture.

It is impossible to summarize all that the AKDN does on a worldwide basis. It has a total of more than \$1 billion US dollars under management and more than fifty-seven thousand employees active in more than two dozen countries world-wide, all devoted to economic, social and cultural development of less advantaged communities.

Canada is the number one donor country to the AKDN, in part due to the support of the Ismaili community in Canada and in part due to the ongoing support of the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA).

AKDN values we were taught include: only going where invited; working closely with local governments on projects which those governments value; but at the same time being independent from all governments and other donors; being a permanent part of the fabric of the local countries in which they are involved; making self-sustaining investments and projects which can run in perpetuity; localizing investments and project as soon as possible at all levels of a particular organization with local employees, management and executives; being non-denominational; having relevance and impact; running programs which have a ripple or multiplication effect; running small projects which set the highest possible standards of quality and excellence; supporting and integrating all parts of the AKDN with each other; and improving the status of women.

The AKDN is also an agency that refuses to pay or offer bribes or other under the table financial payments that are still endemic in African government.

Permanence, sustainability, relevance, impact, independence, integrity, and equality – these were common and unprompted values voiced over and over again by members of the Network that we met and interacted with.

The AKDN ranks with the Ford Foundation as one of the most respected NGOs in the world.

### **The Aga Khan University (AKU): An Introduction**

The Aga Khan University is based in Karachi, Pakistan. It is open to all and accepts students of merit without regard to race, religion or nationality, providing financial assistance when necessary. It does not teach religion, although it does take its key values from the Ismaili interpretation of Islam, including humanism, pluralism, integrity, equality, community service, and taking care of the less advantaged. The AKU believes these are universal principles.

The University's goal is not to be a big university, but to be a small institution with an international reputation for quality, addressing the particular problems of the developing world. It has ten teaching sites in seven countries on three continents. Community service is a mandatory component of its education program.

In East Africa the AKU has established a post-graduate medical education program, advanced nurse training program, and a professional development center for teachers, and is establishing an institute for educational development.

### **The Institute of Educational Development (IED): An Introduction**

The AKU established the first Institute for Educational Development in Karachi, Pakistan in 1993. This IED is supported by the University of Toronto and Oxford University. It has graduated a large number of MEds and PhDs, including a significant number of MEds from East Africa who had to make the trek to Pakistan and spend two years there to complete their program.

The IED now wants to establish an IED in East Africa for East and Eastern Africa. A fourty acre site has been acquired in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, for this purpose, which will also include a Professional Development Centre and an Aga Khan Academy.

The IED's mission is to improve the quality of education through individual and institutional capacity building. It does this through teaching teachers, teaching teachers of teachers, research, policy analysis and advocacy.

The IED's offer certificates, advanced diplomas, Master of Education (MEd), and Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) programs through the AKU.

It also works with Professional Development Centres with courses for in-service teachers and some research capacity on a localized basis. A Professional Development Centre in education has been active throughout Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda for several years. It has already graduated eight hundred and fifty in-service teachers through various programs, only 31% of which have been from AKDN educational facilities.

The goals of the IED include providing field-based programs which are relevant and needs based and which focus on quality and equity; links with African public sector institutions and

individuals; at least one external University partner; to be a center of educational scholarship for the region; and to work directly with local governments.

The IED in East Africa is being established with the support of and in consultation with the appropriate ministries in Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda.



## **Where We Went And What We Did**

The trip started with a day in Nairobi, then three nights on safari in Serena Lodges across the Serengeti in Tanzania. That is a story in and of itself. However, we did get down to work, and spent about a week visiting educational sites in Nairobi and Mombassa, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Here is a list of some of the places we visited and things we did during that week, in no particular order:

- AKU IED and PDC offices in Dar es Salaam, Pakistan, including meetings with executives and managers, and several Professional Development Teachers.
- AKU Advanced Nursing Studies Programs in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and Nairobi, Kenya, each associated with the Aga Khan hospital for their city (Nairobi being the Aga Khan University Hospital).
- The Aga Khan University Hospital in Nairobi, Kenya, including a presentation attended by the President of AKU from Pakistan, the CEO of the hospital, the Vice-President for strategic development for the hospital, and senior staff members from the advanced nursing studies program and the post-graduate medical education program. We also had a tour of the hospital.
- An AKDN supported Madrassa School in Mombassa, Kenya. Madrassa schools are local pre-schools for children three to six. They are community-based schools, with minimal financial support from the AKDN, and are established in some of the poorest areas. This was a particularly moving experience. Needless to say none of the governments in East Africa have enough money to support a publicly funded early childhood education program.
- The Madrassa Resource Centre in Mombassa, Kenya.

- The Aga Khan Academy in Mombassa, Kenya, including a lunch with faculty, a tour of the school, and a meeting with local Professional Development Teachers, all of who had MED degrees from AKU, Karachi, Pakistan.
- The newly acquired, forty acre site for the AKU IED East Africa, imbedded Professional Development Centre and the Dar es Salaam AKU Academy, Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
- Presentations from three local PhDs on educational issues in East Africa, including primary, secondary and tertiary education.
- A teacher education workshop at Al Muntazir School, a private Muslim school, in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.
- Meeting with senior representatives of the Tanzania Ministry of Education and Culture.
- An AKU Certificate in Education workshop on Educational Leadership and Management at the Aga Khan High School in Nairobi, Kenya, including a subsequent meeting with local Professional Development Teachers, all of who had MED degrees from AKU, Karachi, Pakistan.



- A government school in the notorious Mukuru slum in Nairobi, Kenya, originally founded by the Sisters of Mercy from Ireland and still very much under their influence, including a meeting with the Head Teacher and some faculty and a tour of the project.
- Four major networking dinners: A dinner with the Canadian High Commissioner for Tanzania at his residence, including invited guests; a dinner at Gordon MacLeod's house in Dar es Salaam hosted by Gordon and his lovely and gracious wife Pauline, attended by numerous AKDN persons from Tanzania and Zanzibar including the AKDN representative for Tanzania and his wife; a dinner at the Tamarind Restaurant in Nairobi, Kenya hosted by Shamsh Kassim-Lakha, the President of the Aga Khan University; and a ninety person dinner in Nairobi, Kenya hosted by the ADKN representative for Kenya, attended by the Canadian High Commissioner for Kenya and four other ambassadors, the President of AKU, and numerous other persons.

## Africa: Continental Challenges

Here are some numbers presented to us:

- Africa is the world's poorest region, with 1/3<sup>rd</sup> the per capita income of the next poorest region (South Asia).
- Africa's total combined GDP is less than Mexico's.
- 440 million Africans live on less than \$1 US dollar per day.
- Half of all African women are illiterate, and one-quarter of all men.
- Africa is the only part of the world where life expectancies are falling, now less than fifty years of age for men and women.

## East Africa: National Challenges

Some more facts and figures about East Africa in particular:

	Canada	Tanzania	Kenya	Uganda
Area in Sq. Km.	9,970,610	943,000 A little smaller than Ontario	583,000 A little smaller than Alberta	236,589 Less than half the size of Alberta
Population	33 million	33 million	31 million	25 million
US\$ Per Capita Income	\$30,040	\$620 3 <sup>rd</sup> poorest nation	\$1,030 17 <sup>th</sup> poorest	\$1,430
Recent GDP in US\$ (millions)	\$979,764	\$10,851 (1.1% of Canada's)	\$15,600 (1.6% of Canada's)	\$6,833 (0.7% of Canada's)
Human Development Ranking (177)	5	164	154	144
Gender Equality (177)	5	127	117	109
Education Index (177)	12	145	136	129
Average Years of Schooling	10.9	3.5	3.7	4.2
Primary School Gross Enrolment Rates	102%	108%	104%	101%
Secondary School Gross Enrolment Rates	105%	6%	23%	19%

	Canada	Tanzania	Kenya	
Tertiary Level Gross Enrolment Rates	88%	1%	3%	4%

**East Africa: Educational Challenges**

The AKDN strongly believes that education is a key requirement for making permanent, sustainable, relevant changes, and that teachers and quality education are the bedrock on which education needs to stand.

While remarkable gains are being made in education, the quantity issue so overwhelms local systems that quality cannot be addressed without innovative approaches that do not completely depend on government resources.



Here is a grab bag of educational challenges presented to us during the trip, based on the public education system and in no particular order:

**Poverty**

As you would imagine, pervasive poverty cripples the education system and manifests itself in hundreds of ways. However, of most importance from my perspective is the lack of a tax base for governments to draw upon to support education. Every government has a limited percentage of GDP it can allocate to education. How do you cope when you have a population of young people greater than Canada’s to educate, yet a GDP that is smaller than some Canadian municipalities.

An interesting example of the pluses and minuses of poverty were encountered in a primary school we visited in the Mukuru slum. Because of the poverty, assigned teachers would either not show up or would take one look around and never come back. However, with the assistance of a donor organization and local parents, the school is able to serve a hot lunch (maize four days a week and maize with beans once a week). Since this is the only hot meal most of their students will have during the day, enrolment, retention and attendance are all quite high.

## **Culture**

Reading is not a cultural norm in Africa. I am not talking about literacy. I am talking about the value of reading among adults. It is not something African adults do for recreation. This was confirmed from several sources. One primary school Head Teacher found that only 5% of her school's teaching aids were being used. Some were unopened. She found that her teachers did not read recreationally, and did not believe it was important. They would not even read to their students. She initiated a program within her school community and increased utilization within a year to more than 70%. Part of that program including getting her own teachers to value reading as an activity.

## **Gender**

Gender is still an issue for all countries, but especially some African countries, where the status of women, and hence the status of female dominated professions like teachers, still suffers dramatically.

We were told that teachers in Kenya were 60% men and 40% women overall, with the percentage of male teachers increasing the higher you go in the school system.

All that being said, enrolment in public primary schools is very close to 50/50 for girls to boys, and more than 50/50 in some situations.

## **Demographics**

Tanzania, for example, has a population of 33 million, 45% of which are under the age of 14.

Each of these countries has adopted the UN Millennium Project goal of free primary education for all. Collective primary enrolments in Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya went from 12 million in 1995 to over 21 million in 2003 and are continuing to grow.

These countries have huge rural areas and huge rural populations. This creates special challenges. For example, local educators must provide housing to attract teachers. Tanzania has recently built 12,590 teacher houses, but is still short over 120,000 teacher houses at the primary level alone, as reported by Ministry officials.

Finally, because of the push to universal primary education, it is not unusual to find primary schools with older teenagers, or secondary schools with students up to twenty-two years of age. This certainly adds to the issues faced by teachers and educators.



## **Language**

East Africa is made of many different tribal structures. As such, a class of students can include several different mother tongues.

On top of that, Swahili is the dominant everyday language in East Africa. Speaking Swahili is an essential part of everyday life. Reading and writing Swahili, on the other hand, is a different issue. Many East Africans who have fluency in speaking Swahili have a substantially lower fluency in reading or writing Swahili.

Finally there is English, a prominent language of commerce and the chosen language of instruction in East African schools. This is an issue very much under debate. While English is the mandated language of instruction, it may be a third language for both teachers and students, and a language not spoken as much at home or on the street depending on their community.

## **Geography and Infrastructure**

These are still largely rural countries with many remote areas. The transportation and communication network is primitive by our standards. You cannot take roads, bridges, electricity, sewers, municipal water supplies, telephone landlines or Internet access for granted. The good news is that cellular service networks seem well established and pervasive. Unfortunately that has limited use in an educational context.

These issues particularly impact the possibilities for teacher professional development, since travel and distant learning opportunities can be difficult to arrange or access. We met teachers who had no computer access at home or at school, and had to go to a local internet café to not only access the internet but also to work on their assignments and projects. In fact, most government schools do not have any computers or Internet access.

## **Health**

Malnutrition, HIV/AIDS, communicable diseases, poor public health and related health issues are a fact of life in these school systems as well.

We visited a community pre-school in a terribly poor part of Mombassa, Kenya. About forty pre-schoolers were singing a beautiful, pastoral song in Swahili that sounded a lot like Au Claire du la Lune. It was in fact a song about how HIV/AIDS is a bad thing. I still cannot get over the need to establish values around HIV/AIDS in children three to five years old.

Water and latrines have to be provided for schools, many of which are located in unserved areas. We visited schools using out-houses for latrines, and schools which had painted murals on the sides of their latrine buildings advocating the importance of hand washing and personal cleanliness.

## **Capacity and Resources**

Educational capacity and resource issues are huge.

There is a significant shortage of teachers, with classes of sixty to one hundred students being the norm. It is not uncommon for students to show up for class and find no teacher at all. Similar shortages are apparent in school inspectors and other non-teaching positions. Significant efforts are underway to increase the supply of government-educated teachers, but this promises to be a problem for many years to come.

In addition, because of the teacher shortage, many Head Teachers have teaching responsibilities, and cannot focus 100% on school development.

Some examples from Tanzania:

- Tanzania must find 40,000 qualified teachers at the primary level just to get teach pupil ratios down to 1:40.
- Tanzania has constructed 36,540 new classrooms, and is still short 84,000 classrooms at the primary level alone.
- Tanzania has improved the book to student ratio from 1:20 in 2000, but it is still only 1:5 in 2005. That's right, one book for every five students.
- Tanzania has funded 8.5 billion Tanzania shillings to supply 460,000 desks to primary schools, but is still short 1,800,000 desks at the primary level alone.

And this is without even considering what Tanzania needs to do to build public early childhood education systems, secondary school systems, tertiary education systems, or provide for students with special needs. At this time, for example, the Gross Enrolment Ratio in Tanzania secondary schools is only 6% and is only 1% in tertiary education.

Classroom aids are also an issue. In the poorer schools we visited rocks and corns of cob were used as counting aids. Blackboards were old and run-down. One teacher searched for a piece of chalk and never did find one. Government officials informed us that many schools have no blackboards or chalk. Paint cans had been made from plastic automotive oil refill containers.

Playgrounds and play areas were not common in any school environment we visited, public or private. In one school we found climbing equipment made out of old bed frames welded together on a rocky patch of ground next to the school latrines.

## **Teaching Style**

These countries inherited the old British-based education systems, but have not developed further. In particular, lecture-based, "chalk and talk", exam based education is the dominant, accepted teaching style from Grade 1 all the way up. Child-centered, activity based, non-exam

based learning is a revolutionary idea. Conversion takes time, and comes long before reaction. In many situations, Head Teachers are against the newer approaches and fail to support changes or education reform.



### **Teacher Salaries**

As in many places, teacher salaries are low. At one pre-school we visited the teachers were paid \$16 US dollars per month. Overall, teacher salaries in the public system seemed to range from \$60 to \$200 US dollars per month depending on the location and country. It is hard to translate this into cost of living based on the short time we were there, but gas was over \$1 US per liter throughout our time in the region.

These salary numbers are before taxes. In Kenya we were told that taxes took roughly 30% of a teacher's salary.

Getting paid on time cannot be taken for granted. We heard of teachers who were three to four months behind in their pay.

There were benefits and housing allowances in some cases, but they do not change the fact that teacher salaries must improve if high quality people are going to be attracted to the profession or will stay there once they get started.

### **Teacher Quality**

Teacher quality is a major issue. Many teachers have only a primary school education or partial secondary school education. Very few teachers in the public system have any tertiary education or have a chance to participate in teacher improvement programs. In Tanzania, we were told 1% of teachers had a BEd and about 60% had a teaching certificate, but that the rest did not seem to have any formal teacher training at all.

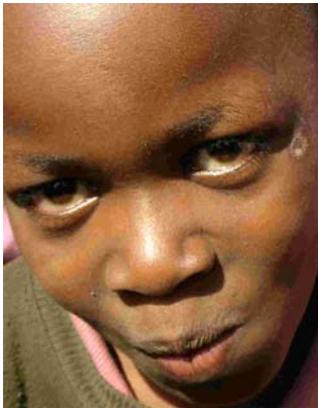
Added to this are all the other issues facing these teachers in their classrooms on a daily basis. It is easy to see how hard it must be for them to provide a quality educational experience to their students despite their best efforts or enthusiasm.

While there are a number of organizations working on teacher development in East Africa, including local governments, the AKDN, UNICEF and other NGOs, the size of the need, combined with the fact that public secondary and tertiary education are massively underdeveloped and underutilized, means that this will be a vital area of investment for many years to come.

## Some Concluding Remarks

I am writing this after being back in Canada for less than forty-eight hours. I am still surprised that I did not feel more culture shock while travelling in Africa. I am even more surprised by the amount of culture shock I have felt since returning to Canada. I told a friend yesterday that my body was home but my heart and head were still somewhere behind me. The things we find to be in conflict with here seem pretty small to me right now. I mean, if we have trouble making it work here in Canada with all our advantages, what hope is there for people in places like Kenya and Tanzania?

I also keep returning to what we did not talk much about during our trip to East Africa. The secondary, vocational and tertiary education systems are so under resourced and under utilized that they are doing virtually nothing to help with economic development. Without a tax base these governments cannot provide more for their people. Their education system is not doing enough to produce graduates that will build that tax base. A local ministry official in Kenya admitted to me that they were going to graduate a whole generation of public school children with no job skills and virtually no secondary system to go on to.



Then there are things we take for granted here, like sports equipment, playing fields, school clubs, swimming pools, school trips, bussing and special events. There are things we can do for our children like sports leagues, ballet lessons, music lessons, family vacations, books, magazines, crayons, toys and the countless everyday things that so enrich the lives of our children, that are more than impossible for most African parents.

I cannot imagine what it must be like to be a parent of an African child with special needs.

However, there is opportunity in every challenge. I have said that for many years when counseling clients in tough situations. Jim Gray reinforces that message whenever he gets the chance. Therefore, because there are so many challenges in education in East Africa, there must be countless opportunities as well.

Of all those opportunities, the one that resonates most with me is the opportunity to help educators in East Africa build a quality, child-centered education system in a context which values tolerance, pluralism, equality, integrity and social responsibility. It is an opportunity to address disparity and despair in both skills and values. We cannot let this opportunity slip away, not just for the sake of African societies, but for the sake of our own societies as well.