

Sr. Marcia's Site Visit to Kenya, 2014



I went to Nairobi in January at the invitation of Sr. Jane Wakahiu, the Executive Director of ASEC and the SLDI program. Sr. Jane arranged time for me to speak to the group of leaders of member countries of ASEC and with each of the SLDI directors in each of the 8 countries. Our hope is to have these sisters assist us in 2 areas: 1) to assist by making site visits to projects in these countries; and 2) to ask them to identify SLDI graduates in their countries who would benefit most from funds we may be able to give SLDI graduates' ministries.

I arrived in Nairobi on January 7th. That afternoon, I met with Sr. Jane Wakahiu, Executive Director of ASEC and Project Manager of the SLDI (Sisters Leadership Development Initiative), and the Higher Education for Sisters in Africa (HESA), both funded by the Hilton Foundation, and the sister coordinators for SLDI in the 8 African countries where the program has been launched. I learned that 1100 sisters have attended the SLDI courses since its beginning 7 years ago. This year in 2014, 756 will be participating.

I was able to use the PowerPoint to explain the distinctions between the FFS and the Catholic Sisters Initiative (CSI), part of the Hilton Foundation. The coordinators represent Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda from East Africa; Zambia and Malawi from Central Africa; and Cameroon, Nigeria and Ghana from West Africa. One of the main purposes of my visit with these sisters was to explore the possibility of working with them to design a program whereby we could collaborate more closely with the CSI. The proposal was to see if we could give a type of "signature grant" to sister-graduates (SLDI alumnae) for their ministries. Since these sisters have gone through an extensive program with SLDI, they are likely to be effective leaders of their ministries.

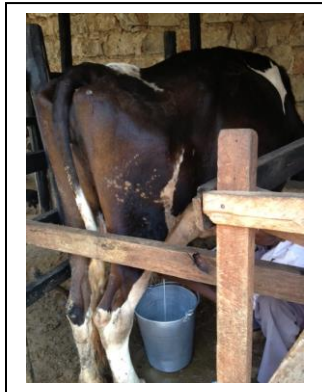


Together we proceeded to discuss and draft criteria and a procedure for initiating an SLDI Ministry Grant Program. The coordinators working with SLDI alumnae superiors would identify sisters who, in their judgment, would best benefit from grants of perhaps \$25,000 or more.

The following day, Sr. Jane and I began a series of site visits to projects that had been funded by the FFS and where SLDI alumnae were working. The number of people being served in these ministries was significant. My first visit was to the **Assumption Sisters Sustainable Initiative Farming Project**. Here I saw fish farming, coffee processing and

subsistence farming. Staff and retired sisters here also make uniforms for children attending schools in the area. This is income producing for the ministry. The sisters are managing a significant property and workers where all this is taking place. The sister in charge graduated from the SLDI Project Management Track and clearly is using her skills in this ministry that benefits so many people in the area.

My next visit was to the **Maria Immaculate Center**. Sr. Martha Wnanjiku showed us how she



has been able to use her resource mobilization skills learned in SLDI to administer the following programs: construction of an elementary and high school, a computer laboratory, a science laboratory, a borehole project and the procurement and operation of a grinding mill, and animal husbandry with pigs and cows that provides a supplementary diet for the children in the school. More than 700 children from poor families attend the nursery, primary and high school on site. This large project is a tribute to the success of the SLDI education Sr. Martha was able to put into practice to assist many to become self-sufficient.

The next visit was to **St. Francis Hospital** where the FFS gave a grant to purchase a baking machine and large washer for the hospital. The site not only serves many patients for medical conditions, but is also the site of other ministries.

The FFS also gave a grant for anesthesiology that enables women to deliver in the operating room. The baby in this photo was just born. The mother, who was in the operating room at this time, was able to have a successful caesarian section thanks to the FFS grant.

The St. Francis Community Based Center is serving more than 3500 children infected or affected by HIV/AIDS and children with disabilities. Sr. Esther talked about how the program provides medication, nutrition and counselling to children and home based care to the HIV/AIDS patients. The Ukweli Home of Hope Project for Street Boys serves the boys the sisters are able to rescue from homelessness. They rehabilitate the boys so that they may live lives worthy of human beings and become responsible citizens. The boys are able to attend public schools during the day and then return to their home with the sisters. 40 boys are currently in secondary schools, 10 in different colleges and universities within the country pursuing professional courses. One received a scholarship from the Little Sisters of St. Francis and the Maryknoll Fathers to attend a U.S. university. We met with several of the older boys who are now on their way to university. They gave their testimonies to how grateful they are for the care they receive, which now motivates them to go out and serve their communities. The sisters have actually been able to reunite 78 boys with their families and relatives after primary school.

Also on this property was a dairy farm and gardens that supply milk and food for the boys. The

dairy cows produce waste that is recycled and the sisters and workers have developed a new biogas fuel source. The gas fuel will make the operation far less expensive than current costs of purchased fuel.

Sr. Jane and I attended an **AOSK (Association of Sisterhoods of Kenya)** six member executive committee meeting the following day. Sr. Agnes Wamuyu, Executive Secretary for AOSK, asked me to speak about the FFS and its offerings and we discussed the role the association plays in ministering in this region. The organization includes 157 congregations representing more than 5200 sisters. The congregations receive about 250 novices each year. Between 2002 and 2011, the number of sisters has risen from 3732 to 4935. Formation and education needs are great. AOSK provides classroom and ASEC equips the class with computer facilities for SLDI classes and facilitates in selection of participants to ensure equal representation of congregations. The SLDI Program Coordinator's office is located on AOSK premises. AOSK is active in soliciting funds and has benefited not only from the FFS grants but also from grants of Missio Achen, the Hilton Foundation and the GHR. They have an impressive website: <http://www.aoskenya.co.ke> created by Sr. Agnes after participating in SLDI Web Design training.

I met after the AOSK meeting with the **Executive Secretary and Director of ACWECA**, the sisters' organization representing many leadership conferences throughout East Africa. Sr. Catherine Okari, the director, discussed the Sudan situation at length with us. The violence there has been a great concern throughout the continent and the world. We also discussed the legal issues the sisters are experiencing in relation to their dioceses: being charged rent for their living in convents, difficulties funding their ministries, property issues, etc. The need for training in canon and civil law is becoming more acute. In buying and selling properties, the sisters see the need to consult attorneys from the outset of any negotiations.



Following our visit to AOSK, Sr. Jane brought me to the **Teresa Nuzzo Children's Home for Orphaned Children** managed by the Daughters of the Sacred Heart. Sr. Bernadetta Nzioka, the manager of this site, went through the SLDI Project Management program. Sr. Elizabeth, also on staff here, now helps in pastoral ministry at the local parish. Sister Bernadetta said the team building skills she learned at SLDI have helped her to mentor other congregations in preparing grant applications. Sister explained to us that the sisters receive information from local

people about children who have ended up orphaned or abandoned. The majority of parents have died of AIDS and some from cancer. The sisters go out to find these children, bring them to their home and care for them until they are 17 years old. The sisters are able to offer nursery school for the children in their care and then send the children to public school during the day.

They often keep them beyond this age until they are ready for university or have acquired job skills. The sisters care for 58 girls and provide much needed protein rich foods.

In the afternoon, Sr. Jane and I visited a program run by the **Evangelizing Sisters of Mary Immaculate**. This impressive ministry serves four major slums in the area. Again, the sisters here participated in the SLDI program: Sr. Christine started a micro-finance program for unwed mothers; Sr. Anne is congregational project manager. Ministries on this site include a school, an unwed mothers program, animal husbandry (piggery and dairy) and a dispensary that serves a mostly HIV/AIDS population. Sr. Wilfrida, a graduate of SLDI, mentored Sr. Mary, who in turn has mentored several staff running the HIV/AIDS program.



The religious and lay staff presented us with a detailed explanation of their programs. Most moving was the "recitation" or rather a performance, of an original poem, "I Am a Yaya (a servant)" by Lilian, a 14-year old girl. She wrote it as a story of her own life--a life of working as a servant from her earliest years. She was so gifted in her rendition that she may well have a career in writing or acting.

The staff tries to rescue children from their drug and alcohol infested environments. They are currently helping more than 8000 children in both the orphanage and the nursery school. These children represent 1360 families. The center provides HIV medications which must be taken with food; and therefore, people often don't take the medication as they have no food on the outside. The focus of the ministry here is to provide food security, to seek partners to assist in financing the care being given, to teach the children skills in such areas as finance and accounting in order to get jobs.