Analysis of the Koins for Kenya and Self Reliant Agriculture Projects in Mnyenzeni

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Eddison, Patrick and Lonny

From October 28th to November 10th I had the opportunity to work in the village of Mnyenzeni with Koins for Kenya (Koins) and The Institute for Self Reliant Agriculture (SRA). My purpose in going there was to evaluate the program and to assist in designing and implementing a goat milking project. The following is a report of my visit and an evaluation of the SRA program and the Koins project in general.

Overview

The Koins for Kenya project is very impressive. The key to the success of the project lies with Bret Van Leeuwen and his love for the Kenyan people. Bret has surrounded himself with some good people to help carry the work forward but the project still rests heavily on his shoulders. There are great synergies between the local Kenyan people and the American staff. This cooperation has led to a very efficient use of the funds raised by the Koins staff.

Bret Inspiring the School Children

The focus of Koins for Kenya is to improve the education of children by building and furnishing schools. There have been 5000 to 6000 children taught in these new and improved school facilities. Thousands of other people have been positively influenced by Koins presence in the Mnyenzeni area as the Koins projects have gone forward.

By combining K2 efforts with SRA it is hoped that their influence will reach broader and deeper into the lives of the Kenyan people. Families will be educated and assisted in developing their own gardens and small farms that will greatly improve their diets and eventually provide them a significant source of income. The focus of this project is to improve their diets so that the people will be healthier and the children will grow and learn better. There have been instances where improvements in the diets have already had dramatic positive effects on their ability to learn. SRA and Koins together make a good team.

The Institute for Self Reliant Agriculture (SRA)

The focus and goals of the SRA are to help the villagers become self reliant by growing their own food. This goal is reached through a program where the SRA staff teach and train the local population how to raise their own food. Most of these villagers have access to land where they can plant gardens and raise animals but the land is not used efficiently. The SRA model is very appropriate for this situation where the resources are available but not well used. The success depends a great deal on the ability of the staff to inspire and teach the villagers and the willingness of the villages to make the plan work.

Koins provides a fertile location for the SRA to implement its program. The structure is such that the SRA staff can set up their demonstration plots on the Koins land. The trust that the Koins staff has earned among the villages is critical to their acceptance of the program. This trust and respect can be leveraged by SRA as they start to teach the people. As the SRA program succeeds, the people can better feed themselves. As a result the students will do better in school. There will be more money produced and retained in the village. The combined Koins and SRA projects give the people the tools to lift themselves out of poverty and starvation.

SRA Staff

Tom Rasmussen is the vice president of The Institute for Self Reliant Agriculture (SRA) and has been the face of the SRA in Kenya. He has limited experience with agriculture but has a passion about the program that is key to its success. Tom hired two well qualified Kenyans, Patrick and Eddison, as the animal and garden experts. They are both well qualified for those positions and are aggressively pushing the project forward. SRA is able to leverage the Koins Kenyan staff so they can run very efficiently. As the project expands it will be necessary to hire additional staff to coordinate the project.

Tom, Patrick and a worker at the Rotational Gardens and Hen House

Rotational Garden

The rotational garden is set up to produce all year round. Each garden is divided into four sections that are planted several weeks apart in a rotational system. At least one of the garden sections is producing and ready to harvest at all times. Each of the four garden sections contains similar crops which are customized to the nutritional needs of the family and the availability of water.

Eddison has four plots set up and two of them planted. These gardens are well on their way to producing food. In addition to the traditional gardens they have a nursery for starting the plants. The seeds start out planted closely together, then once they have grown a couple of inches tall they are transplanted to the regular gardens. This is a way of jump starting the program for those who are planting their first garden.

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The principle purpose of the rotational gardens is to provide a balanced diet to the family first. Once the needs of the family are met, surplus produce could be sold providing some income to the family. The family would be better off because they have a balanced diet

and some additional income. The community would be better off because there would be more food for consumption. This would result in a net increase in the economic prosperity of the village. Less money would be going out of the village for food, and more money would come into the village as food was sold to the surrounding areas. For example, the tomatoes sold in the Mnyenzeni store and purchased in Mombasa but are grown near Nairobi. Mnyenzeni could easily grow their own tomatoes and sell their surplus to markets in Mombasa.

Animal Projects

Chickens

The chicken project was created to teach families how to raise chickens in a small enclosure near their home. The eggs are collected and stored by the family in a cooling chamber. This is done so that the laying hens will continue laying eggs instead of just nesting. One or more hens will be selected to nest on a dozen eggs at a time for the 21 day incubation period.

As chicks hatch out of the eggs, they are separated into a nursery and new eggs are introduced to be incubated. Using this method, Mwayele, a neighboring farmer, has raised close to 2000 chickens from an original flock of 12 hens in only two years. The sale of these ŎKʎŎ˺ŜyãLJI·ʎŘ Kʎă ŎKʎtŘℕŜyℚă ăŎK22f úʤʎúʎ2y˙I·yŘ ∃I·ØŜ KʎY˙ ăŜŜŘ Y˙2yŜè ű2 ăúI·ℕú a goat project.

Eddison and Patrick with a trainee in front of the Hen House

Patrick has set up a hen house next to the garden area on the Koins compound. The structure has layer hen boxes on one side, a roosting area in the middle and a nesting area on the other side. The structure is built up off the ground so that the manure and urine will fall

Lonny, Patrick, Tom and Eddison with school children taking a short break from the construction of the new goat house

The goat project will be more complicated than the other projects and require more training and follow up by the SRA staff. However, if managed correctly, this project has the most potential for dramatically changing the community. This is because the goats will provide enough income for a father to provide for his family without having to procure outside work. Currently many of the men leave home and travel to Mombasa to work a week at a time, leaving their families without a father for long periods of time. This social situation causes many problems which can be resolved if the fathers are able to work in their own village and be with their families. Overall, the goat project can and will have a major positive effect on the community.

Water

A critical component in the lives of these people and a major focus for Koins and the SRA is providing them with clean water. There are two rainy seasons where water is plentiful, but these seasons are separated by months of very dry conditions where water becomes scarce. There is one small water line that runs past the village and provides a little water to some of the people. However, most of the people obtain their water from puddles in the roads, the river bottoms or man-made storage ponds.

The water storage tank that collects the water from the KCC roof

Koins has implemented several water storage projects and is currently implementing several other new ideas. Large water tanks have been constructed to collect rain water from the tin roofs of the community center, the church, the hospital and the dispensary. This water is much cleaner than what is collected from the rivers and puddles. A significant amount of water is collected this way but is not enough for the needs of the compound and new ideas for obtaining, cleaning and storing water are needed. As the garden and animal projects expand, it will be critical to have more water available for these projects.

Koins partnered with engineers Kevin Nielsen and Shad Roundy from CH2MHill to build a retention dam in a river bed that is near the village. This dam will provide a significant amount of water to be used for the garden and animal projects. It will also serve as a model for building additional dams in the future on this river and on others in the surrounding area.

Kevin and Shad surveying damage after a sudden downpour

Kevin, Buffalo and Lonny as construction continues

In order to provide more clean drinking water for the village, Koins is also working with WHOlives.org which has a hand-operated well drilling machine called ŭKŜ ά∅ΰtfI·∃Ŝ Řℕΰffε◊ Lű ΰă hoped that the Ben Taylor Workshop on the Koins compound can serve as a manufacturing site for these village drills. It is hoped that they will be able to drill wells in all of the surrounding villages at very reasonable rates. Because of their simplicity and their manual component they can be used with a limited amount of training and skill. The villagers drill their own wells which gives them pride and ownership of the wells.

Obtaining, cleaning and storing water is critical to improving the lives of the Kenyan people and is central to the success of any projects. Koins has developed successful ways of retaining the water and is continuing to look for and develop additional water resources. The lives of these villagers will be forever improved as they learn to better use the resources that are available to them.

Summary and Analysis

Overall I am very impressed and excited about the cooperative project between Koins for Kenya and The Institute for Self Reliant Agriculture in the Mnyenzeni area. The land has incredible resources that will provide food and income for the people as they learn how to develop and utilize them. Koins has the confidence of the villagers and provides a location for training. The SRA provides the model for success and the staff to implement the training.

The SRA model of teaching basic self reliance to alleviate poverty and death has been well researched and proven successful in other areas. Because it takes time to gain the respect and confidence of the villagers in a new area, partnering with an existing organization that has already developed this confidence means that more lives are saved faster.

This same type of cooperative effort should be used in many other villages to hasten the work of teaching people how to lift themselves out of poverty and into a successful, flourishing condition. Positively changing the lives of these wonderful people is exciting and fulfilling.

Patrick, Lonny, Eddison and Jones in front of the completed Goat house