

December 15, 2021

Dear Members, Friends and Supporters of Hand in Hand for Kenya,

We have something very special for you in this newsletter: Christoph Schaller, active member in our association spent three months at Maisha Mazuri Children's Center (MCC) in Kenya this summer. We have interviewed him! His passion for Kenya and the MCC is evident in every word that he speaks and we are very happy to share his joy and experiences with you.

Dear Christoph, please introduce yourself briefly and tell us about your link to the association.

My name is Christoph Schaller, I'm 25 years old and I study Medicine in Vienna. Ever since my first visit to Kenya in 2014/2015, I have been a member of the association Hand in Hand for Kenya.

That means that you have not been in Kenya for about seven years. That also means that you didn't know the children and the team on site?

Exactly. The first time that I went to Kenya, the main building was under construction and there were only workmen there, no children. Because I have been a part of the organization for such a long time and because, naturally, I wanted to see the children, I had the chance to fly to Kenya for three months this summer and I saw the children's center and met the children and the youth workers.

Great! How were received by the team and children, when you arrived?

I saw the children for the first time at breakfast in the morning. They were rather shy, but only for

the first twenty minutes. Then, the spell was broken, they were extremely curious, very funny and happy, open and with lots of energy. You are heartily welcomed by the children and also the staff.

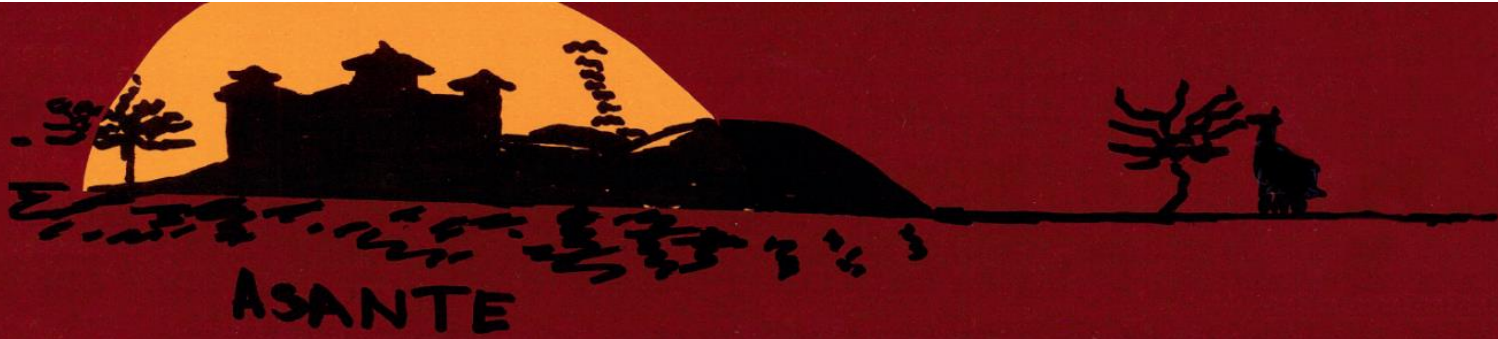
Which role concretely did you take on at MCC?

I was able to help with the organization, maintenance and planning of the construction projects, always in consultation with our manager on site, Michael, the director Jimmy and the board in Germany. With a lot of support, we were able to realize several construction projects and drew up calculations for new projects. In the afternoons, in the evenings and at the weekends, I have spent a lot of time with the children. There were many activities, like cooking together, library evenings, movie nights, soccer games, dancing together and making music.

It seems to be something special to be able to visit the people on site after the COVID-19 break?

It is and I also think that the welcome is even warmer after COVID. If that is possible (laughs).

Vorstand: Barbara Krohne Anita Wimmer Helen Milkau



You can notice that they have missed the volunteers from the programme. The children always receive lots of affection and attention from the volunteers and a lot of pleasure from all the joint activities. And last but not least, their English knowledge improves through play.

Of course, how good are the kids in English?

That depends on their age but basically you are able to communicate with them. In my opinion, communication difficulties lie in cultural differences and misunderstandings. In this respect, the children were ahead of the adults: I think that children have less implications when they are talking. Therefore, they communicate more explicitly what they want and there are less misunderstandings.

That's an interesting observation you have made.

And the other way around, did you also learn a little bit of Kiswahili?

Yes (laughs). Most of the time, I wasn't talking in full sentences, but just in words. Verbs especially are sufficient to communicate with. You can say for example *Napenda chai nyingine* for *I would like to have another tea*. Or quite simple expressions like *Kuja* or *Kimbia* - *come here* or *run*.

Can you tell us how the donations are currently being used in Kenya?

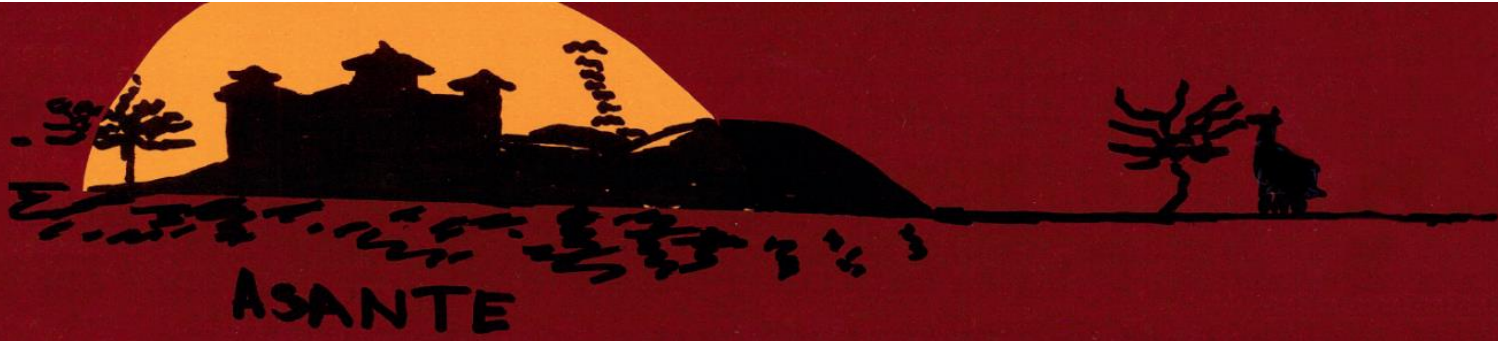
During the time I was there, the majority of donations were being used for running costs [= food, electricity, water, medicine, health care ...], which have been increasing drastically because of

the pandemic; the donations are also being used for construction projects e. g. the modernization of the water supply and photovoltaic system, but also for maintenance. For the future, donations will be necessary for the renovation of our children's center, which is already 7 years old. The building urgently needs a new coat of paint and a creative roofer. Another part of the donation is needed for the children's education. As this school year had four trimesters, the school fees have been especially high.

And what was your impression, Christoph: To what extent can Maisha Mazuri help children on site as well as children and families in the surrounding areas?

There are a few points: The children in the children's center receive a secure environment, enough to eat, medical care, they can attend kindergarten and later school. Most of all I would say that they are taken care of in a secure place that supports the kids to grow up healthy. The children in our Secondary School benefit from our curriculum. We are different from the Kenyan curriculum in teaching more practical competences in addition to the general curriculum.

And there are also the children from the community who are either directly supported by the partner program (MMP) or indirectly helped through the fact that we provide their families with fresh water from our well, initiate small



projects like soap making or kickstart agricultural projects. Various families receive young animals like ducks, rabbits or goats to take care of and build up their own animal farming and as a result are able to make their own living. As a consequence their and their children's situation improves. Another point that I hadn't thought about before, is social work. Every family that needs help, can approach our social worker at the MCC. Normally, the social workers also do regular house visits. Due to COVID those had to be cancelled.

You have already mentioned that there are a few restrictions at the MCC due to the pandemic. To what extent does COVID-19 define everyday life in Kenya?

In the meantime the situation has improved a lot. Our staff is now completely vaccinated ~~by now~~, regarding the children we are currently waiting for governmental approval. Restrictions are especially visible in the daily life. For example, the children are not allowed to go to church. Instead, they organize their own services in the MCC – with a lot of excitement. The financial situation affects the children, because a few projects like the construction of a playground had to be paused due to increasing prices in the progressive inflation in the country. Additionally, the schedule in school has changed during the pandemic. The Kenyan government has decided that the missed

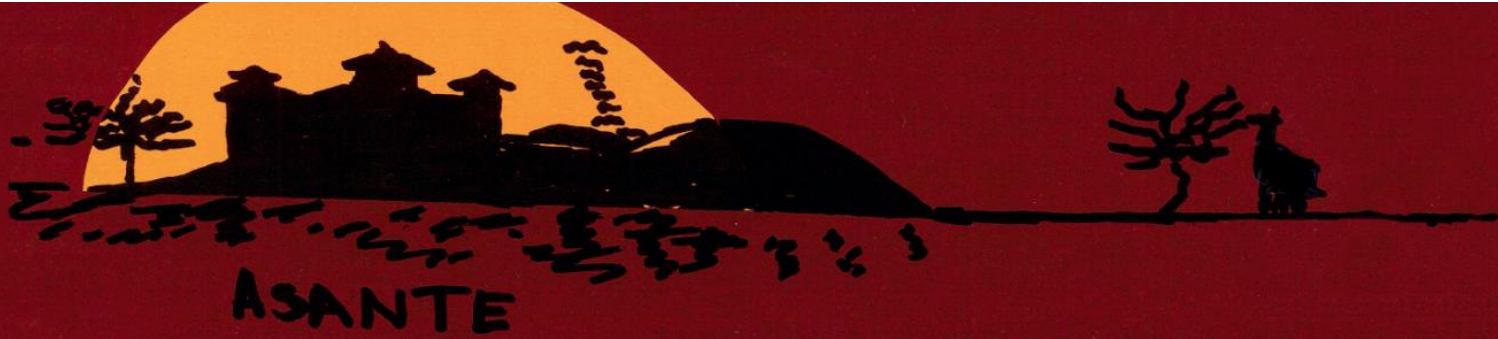
year has to be made up for at the expense of the holidays.

What did you experience in Kenya outside of Maisha Mazuri?

In August, I experienced so much, as the photographers and filmmakers Markus Beham and David Hennerbichler stayed at the MCC. We hiked up Mount Kenya together, drove to the Lake Victoria and I was able to see for myself what one of the largest slums in Nairobi looks like. Additionally, I have visited the second largest city in Kenya and the most important seaport in East Africa, Mombasa, that I can recommend to anyone.

Retrospectively on your time in Kenya, what have you learned, what do you take home with you?

You can learn a lot in Kenya, but the experience also depends on what you bring to the table. I have definitely learned how important communication - as well as initiative and patience - is (laughs), especially regarding any activity with groups of children in double figures! But I could also see that the children get a lot from the volunteers as well, in form of time, attention and exchange in English. In school for example, children in the centre mix with children from the surroundings. You can see the difference in their development pretty clearly. Therefore, I can only recommend anyone who has the chance to fly there, as the children and the visitors grow a lot with their experiences.



Besides that it was impressive to see how independent the children are. You can learn a lot from their strong team spirit, where it is only natural to take care of one another. As a consequence, the people carry a certain calmness within themselves when problems arise.

Pole, Pole...? [= slowly, slowly/always take it easy]

Exactly.

Are you going to return to Kenya?

Definitely, but next time it won't take seven years (laughs).

We hope that you have enjoyed the interview as much as we have. We would love to pack our bags immediately and fly to Kenya – are you tempted, too?

Christoph has realized how important it is that the home of our children is well maintained, furthermore the costs of living have been rising and rising due to the pandemic, the children have become teenagers and young adults who are going to visit fee-based Secondary Schools and colleges. Since our foundation in 2005, there has been enormous rise in inflation – all of these bring us to our financial limits. Therefore, we have to raise the minimum contribution for new members and MMPs by 5 euros (to 30 /10 euros per month). We ask you, who have been supporters and members for a long time, for a non-binding, voluntary increase in the minimum contribution so that we can overcome the financial squeezes and challenges. Thank you for your further support and loyalty!

We wish you all a wonderful, relaxing and peaceful Christmas time!

Anne Roll and Carline Mutz

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