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Musembe School: How One School and Surrounding Community was Transformed

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Musembe School: How One School and Surrounding Community was Transformed

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to the college from these different communities learn how to work together and appreciate one another as an important part of the community at FTC and within the global church. FTC is now the hub of incorporating the concepts cultural humility within its training programs, and the outcome is strengthening the Quaker church in the Eastern and Central African regions.

Musembe School

How One School and Surrounding Community was Transformed

THE STORY OF ELOISE and John's work in the Muliro Village area of rural Kenya perhaps best represents all of the tenets of cultural humility in play at the same time. Eloise and John had the unique opportunity to enter into a project that had not been on their radar, nor one they had envisioned or planned for. However, God had specific plans for one small primary school known as Musembe, and the surrounding community of Muliro Village.

In Eloise's previous visits to Kenya, she had the opportunity to visit the Muhanji farm and observe and follow the building progress of the house and other structures. Once the family had moved onto the site, Eloise had the privilege of spending two weeks on the farm during her sabbatical from George Fox. During this sabbatical time, Eloise rested mentally, emotionally, and physically, visited with family and community members, and observed the daily rhythm of community life in the village.

Every time Eloise had visited the farm, even before John and his family moved there, she was always told the sad story of the Musembe primary school, its lowest place academically in the entire nation at one point, and the disdain the community had for the school. It was not until John moved into the Musembe neighborhood that concerns of the school were raised out of his personal convictions of having his own children in higher-learning institutions. This would never be a dream seen by the children from this community. However, since the school was sponsored by another church group and not a Quaker school under John's organization, John was

at first reluctant to interfere with the work of the other denomination. And yet, children from the surrounding community attended this school in his very neighborhood; children who would grow up to be members of this community and have families; children who would still be entrenched in the cycle of poverty and mostly uneducated.

One morning during Eloise's sabbatical stay as John was driving her into town for business and errands, they drove past the school once again and Eloise's burden for this school became too much for her to bear. Eloise recalls that her heart finally broke over the extreme needs of the school and she knew God was speaking to her about her possible involvement. Initially, she was reticent to become involved since she usually worked with secondary schools, but the burden was too great and she knew she must do something. As John drove up the hill past the school, Eloise blurted out to him, "Who is going to care for these children and how will they receive a chance for a decent education and opportunity at a better life if someone doesn't help them?" Eloise continued to pour out her heart and John intently listened to Eloise's burden for the school. When Eloise finally stopped speaking, John responded that he had been convicted of his negative attitude toward the school and had planned to talk to Eloise about what to do regarding Musembe. However, as Eloise acknowledged in their discussions, she and John were already so busy with many other things. It was within those words that both Eloise and John realized they needed to make time for the *least of these*. Responding to the burden God had placed on their hearts, Eloise and John began the effort to consider what could be done for such hopeless children whose choice is not to be who they are.

Musembe Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG) Primary School is located in Bungoma County, a subcounty of Tongaren in Ndal. The school is built along the border of Trans Nzoia County and draws its students from the slums in the county. Most of these families are headed by single mothers, some who are widows or divorced, while others have never been married. Some of these women are local brewers of illegal beer in order to support themselves and their families. Often times, girls from the school are required to help make the brew during the night, thus impacting their time for their studies and ability to remain awake in school during the day. In the process of these illegal activities, the mothers have children out of wedlock and raise them without fathers. Still, other women are practicing prostitution to feed their children, with some even selling their daughters as young as twelve to older men in order to make money.

The population in the Musembe area has not been well documented, but it is estimated that ten thousand people live in the neighboring slum, and the Musembe neighborhood, which is the catchment area for the school, has a population of three thousand. The majority of the population tend to be middle to younger-aged people, with a general life expectancy of approximately fifty years. Children from the homes in this region have hardly any hope of going for future studies beyond their time at the Musembe primary school. The word *Musembe* actually means "tail." At one point, the children even knew of themselves as the "tails" of other schools.

The community's main economic activities center in agriculture, and since the majority of the parents do not own land, they make their living by contracting for work on other people's farms during harvest times. The pay for this type of menial labor is usually only worth a day's meal. A high rate of HIV remains prevalent in the slums and most of the children end up staying with their infected parents or guardians, and some of the children are even infected as well. The community is completely backward in terms of education and technology. However, the government has recently supplied the Musembe school with power, with the commitment that all schools in the country should have a power supply in order to progress with educational initiatives.

As Eloise and John discussed their options for any kind of involvement and helping the school, they knew that it was a delicate situation and they would need to proceed carefully. They first discussed the principles of cultural humility within the context of the needs of the school and community. Eloise and John had also read and discussed many related publications on international mission endeavors, and were determined not to enter into a new work and create any kind of a dependency or specific efforts that were not going to be welcomed, viable, or sustainable in the community. Eloise and John also knew they could not just march into the school to take over and force the leaders to let Eloise and John help them. Forcing their way into the school even with the honorable intention of helping would totally violate the principles of cultural humility in which they so strongly believed. The projects Eloise and John were already involved with had been informed by the main tenets of cultural humility, and they firmly believed in cultural humility as the guiding principle for any work they were currently involved with or would undertake in the future. However, Eloise and John also recognized that the burden for this particular school was divinely inspired, and they knew they had to make a concerted effort to assist in

some way, no matter if the effort was small or large. The remaining question was, how?

Outsiders

One of the key issues Eloise and John recognized and wrestled with from the beginning was that they were both outsiders within this context in Muliro Village. As strange as it may seem, John was an outsider even though he was Kenyan, had bought land in Muliro Village, moved into the community, and already knew many people in the region. Eloise was even more of an outsider because she was a highly educated White woman from America—*mzungu* (White person). In Andrea Nelson's dissertation research of Kenyan principals from Quaker secondary schools, she found that one of the challenges of the principals she interviewed was that they were considered outsiders when they were assigned to a school in different regions of the country and among different tribal groups. In Andrea's study, the principals reported that being outsiders often limited their work within the community until they were able to build relationships and trust with the community members. Just because one was Kenyan did not mean there was automatic acceptance within another community. Those relationships still needed to be intentionally built and carefully nurtured.¹

As Eloise and John continued to discuss possible strategies for Musembe, they finally decided that as a first step they would arrange a meeting with the school leaders at the Musembe school site. Eloise and John believed an introductory meeting would be the most natural way to begin any relationship-building process with the school leaders and teachers, and also gauge if the school was interested in or desired any kind of assistance from people within the community or outside. As Eloise and John were discussing the most practical way to proceed even with a first meeting, it just so happened Eloise was going to have visitors in Kenya while she was on sabbatical, and Eloise and John believed it was timely that these colleagues would be arriving to visit so they could begin their time in Kenya with a visit to the Musembe school. The first day Eloise's George Fox colleagues were in Kenya, John arranged for an afternoon meeting at the school with the teachers and the U.S. visitors: Linda Samek, her dean; and Andrea Nelson, her doctoral student.

1. Nelson, Knowing How to "Engage" Cross-Culturally, 82.

John, Eloise, and her colleagues first met with the teachers in their humble teachers' room, a mud structure with hardly enough space to turn around in, and barely enough square footage for a long table with chairs around for all of them to be seated. The deputy principal and John facilitated the visit, and all in attendance awkwardly proceeded with formal introductions. Once the introductions had taken place, the visitors were ushered outside and treated to a traditional welcome, which included a *parade* (assembly) with the students, teachers, and community members. As per custom in most Kenyan schools, several of the children's groups had prepared traditional cultural dramas and musical numbers for the visitors. After the assembly concluded and the children were sent home, the meeting with the teachers and staff resumed. John and Eloise first shared their desire to engage in some kind of partnership and inquired as to what the school needed. This was the first of the questions that represent a key component of cultural humility, specifically asking about the current needs. However, at this initial meeting the teachers were neither able nor ready to articulate specific needs, let alone any needs at all. As Eloise and John later discovered, while the teachers were grateful for the visit, they were too demoralized and overwhelmed in their work, and therefore did not have the emotional capacity to even know how to respond to the inquiries about needs at the school. Eloise and John concluded the meeting with praying for the teachers and the school, and then promised they would remain in touch. As John finished praying, several of the women teachers sitting in the back of the room were silently crying. As Eloise and her colleagues prepared to leave the school, they took a group photo with the teachers to commemorate this visit.

Eloise and John did not find out until a few years later the reason for the tears of those women. One of the women, Jane, had been at the school for over ten years, quietly laboring for the students the best she knew how, and praying for someone to come and provide assistance. Another teacher, also called Jane, had been assigned to the school just two years prior to Eloise and John's first visit. As Jane reported for duty and found the school in such a sad state of affairs, she prayed for God's intervention. As Jane later told Eloise this story, she relayed the following information: "I told my students that we must pray because God was close and was going to bring us someone to help." At the end of Eloise and John's first visit to the school, teacher Jane already believed God had just answered her prayers.

As Eloise drove off with her colleagues that day after their Musembe visit, Linda remarked, "What are we going to do about this school?" Nobody

had an answer to that question, but Eloise and John believed there was now a beginning. As Eloise wrote later in her journal, she felt dismayed that, in her assessment of the meeting, nothing was accomplished at all, or nothing that she could outwardly see. No decisions were made, no plans were made, and nothing concrete happened. However, as Eloise and John reflected on this first visit, it was the first step in establishing a relationship with the school, no matter what that relationship might ultimately look like.

The first lesson learned with this school was that a beginning point was necessary, and Eloise and John would have to be patient to see how that beginning would unfold and lead them into further interactions with the school personnel. Since God had clearly spoken to Eloise and John about the needs of the Musembe school, her initial personal expectations assumed that she and John would immediately embark on a project and get going. Not so. This effort was going to take time, and they needed to let God direct their steps at each stage and be patient with the timing. This was also an area in which Eloise needed to carefully and cautiously examine her own motives and her Western perspective of desiring quick outcomes to a project. John kept encouraging Eloise that they had to take a wait-and-see approach and could not force anything with the school. John would also need to continue relationship building within the larger community in order to garner their trust. The principles of cultural humility also include the attitudes of humility and patience, and to take time as one engages in the initial relationship-building process. Even though John and Eloise believed their burden was real and that God wanted them to do at least something at Musembe, they recognized the important lesson of waiting for God's specific directions. As Eloise left the village at the end of that first visit to accompany her visitors for the educational work for which they had come to Kenya, her heart stayed behind at that little forgotten and forlorn school at the end of the mud road close to the river.

A few weeks after that first visit to Musembe, Eloise returned to the village once more before she was scheduled to return to the U.S. Eloise had requested to visit Musembe again, but this time John's wife, Rose, made the arrangements and accompanied her. Eloise had wanted to be more active in the school since it was a part of the community, and this would provide her an opportunity to meet with the teachers within their professional environment instead of just greeting as they passed on the road. As Eloise and Rose were ushered into the cramped and dark teachers' room and sat around the wood table, they reiterated the theme of the previous visit: that they had come to

see what the school needed, and how they could be of help. Once again the visit did not seem to produce any fruit, and Eloise and Rose left with feelings of frustration. For one thing, nobody at the school had offered them anything to drink during the visit, which was a major cultural oversight, and Rose was appalled at this lack of hospitality. Secondly, the teachers seemed reluctant to engage in conversation and answer Eloise and Rose's questions, which prompted Eloise and Rose to wonder why the teachers were holding back. It is difficult for one to listen and learn the needs of others if the conversation is one-sided. As Eloise and Rose were about to leave, they were told that the teachers did not recognize Eloise when she arrived with Rose. When Rose asked the teachers why, they stated it was because there were more White people on the previous visit and they looked the same. However, upon further discussions with the teachers a few years later, they explained that the first visit was mainly an encounter with the entire group, with limited interactions among each individual. The relationship-building attempts during the first visit had barely scratched the surface for name and face recognition. This is another example that relationship building with others requires ongoing and consistent efforts. However, Eloise and Rose acknowledged once again that relationship building can take time and they were committed to the process, as well as engaging others in the community about how to help the school. Furthermore, Eloise also needed time to become a student and learn the culture of this village and its little school.

When Eloise's scheduled time in Kenya ended, she went back home and continued to reflect on that little school seemingly in the middle of nowhere, among the cornfields of rural Kenya. She tried to process those visits to the school, and continued discussions with John about what could be done and how they should proceed. All through Eloise and John's discussions, they agreed they would follow the principles of cultural humility and wait for the right timing and not assert their personal desires or assumptions about what the school needed. As Eloise shared about the Musembe school with friends and family in the States, she continued to garner interest and support for her work in Kenya, especially the possibilities at Musembe.

Only a few months after Eloise returned to the States from her sabbatical in Kenya, an opportunity came her way to raise funds for the Musembe school. Eloise's church family believed in the work she was doing in Kenya, and during the Easter season raised funds for a local and global mission-related project. Although Eloise was not quite sure at the time of how she would direct the funds, her first thought was for clean water, which she

knew was a viable need at the school. The share for Musembe from the Easter offering was almost \$1,000. Eloise had no idea what would or could be done with the funds, but she and John were committed to partnering with the school to determine a worthwhile project.

Now that Eloise and John had the responsibility to disburse the funds and honor the donors' generosity, Eloise and John needed to develop a plan; more specifically, a strategy they could implement using the principles of cultural humility. The school had not yet articulated their needs or even indicated they wanted to partner with John and Eloise. They first discussed and agreed on several key principles, which were based on their prior experiences with mission and non-profit work and would specifically align with the principles of cultural humility:

1. Any project the school decided to pursue must first benefit the children. The first priority was to the children of the school and to assist with improving the learning conditions.
2. The project must meet the parameters of the available funds. The project could not be so large that it could not be completed. The final goal was a finished project. The added rationale for this stipulation was that Eloise and John also wanted to gauge the commitment and responsibility of the school leaders. Could they use the funds wisely and follow the project to completion in good time? These two factors would then determine whether Eloise and John believed they could move forward with additional projects and develop a collaborative partnership with the Musembe school.
3. Eloise and John did not want to create dependency within the school or community. According to the principles of cultural humility, any project needed to be a true collaborative initiative, with the school and community participating as they were able, and not relying solely on Western money. In no way did Eloise and John want to *do for them*.
4. Accountability for the funds was a priority. Eloise and John wanted to be sure the funds were disbursed in such a way that it would limit temptations for people to help themselves to the money. Having a clear procedure for accountability of the funds would help to deter any attempts for misuse of the funds, and Eloise and John believed this was a practical policy no matter where in the world they were doing mission work.

Eloise's next scheduled visit to Kenya was a few months after her church had raised the funds for the school. Rose arranged for herself and Eloise to attend a meeting at the school. This time, the newly appointed head teacher (principal), Joel, greeted them. As Eloise and Rose sat with the teachers, the atmosphere was greatly different than their first few visits. The school leadership greeted Eloise and Rose warmly and were excited to see Eloise again and by this time fully recognized her! One of the purposes of this visit was to provide this new head teacher with the history of what had transpired with the school to date, with the hope that plans could be made to move forward and continue the work at the school. It was critical to future collaborative work that Joel become acquainted personally with Eloise, Rose, and John in order to understand what efforts had occurred up to this point. It was during this visit that Eloise shared she had brought funds with her for a project. As she told the teachers how much money was available, she laid out the specific guidelines for a project as she and John had discussed and agreed.

The teachers carefully listened as Eloise and Rose outlined the main principles: any project must first benefit the children, and the project must be finished with the available funds. Once those guidelines were stated and agreed to by the entire group, all present in the meeting entered into a discussion about how to proceed with a project. The teachers first deferred to Eloise a number of times and asked what she thought they needed. Eloise continued to tell them she really did not know for certain and wanted them to decide together on a worthwhile project. After some time passed, the new head teacher suggested that he needed a new administration block. The school definitely needed such a building for administrative purposes, but needless to say, this suggestion did not go over well with Eloise at all! She recalls she managed to maintain her professional composure as she firmly reminded this school leader the guiding principles would be that the project must first benefit the children, while an administration block would only benefit him. Eloise could tell by the look on the teachers' faces they clearly understood and supported what she had just said. Finally, one of the female teachers sitting in the back of the room quietly stated, "The children don't have latrines." Eloise was so much in shock at that statement it must have seemed she did not speak for a long time. That statement alone revealed the level of poverty at the school, and Eloise immediately recognized all she did not know about the school and surrounding environment. After a period of silence, Eloise finally replied, "The children will get latrines!"

Everyone responded with applause of great appreciation and gratitude. Eloise also clarified that they thought the school could complete the latrine project with the designated funds. After the school leaders assured Eloise the project was possible with the designated funds, she gave them the permission to move forward as soon as possible. The school leaders created a budget, which John and several other community leaders first vetted then approved, and the funds were gradually released in stages with proper accounting for each phase.

Less than a year later, the latrines had been built just at the edge of the school property; two sets of latrines with four stalls each. The boys had one building and the girls the other. The design included deep enough holes to last for a long time, as well as constructing them well beyond the area which was prone to flooding. Parents from the school had assisted in the building project, thus making it a combined school and community effort. The school leaders had accepted their responsibility and accounted for the funds spent, and also followed up on the progress so that the project would not delay.

The next time Eloise came to Kenya for a visit, the latrines were finished. The school and community leaders proudly showed Eloise and her accompanying education team the completed structures. The school's parent teacher association (PTA) even held a special meeting so they could meet Eloise and her team and thank them in person for the special gift to the entire community. This particular meeting became a special example that Eloise continues to reflect on and share about with others. The community members held their PTA meeting in the morning, and then waited the remainder of the day under the trees until Eloise and her team arrived. As she later learned, these parents were so grateful for the latrines they wanted to thank Eloise in person no matter how long they had to wait for her to arrive. This *attitude of gratitude* was so profound and continues as an example of how even the poorest of the poor were grateful for a basic need.

The latrines were finished. Eloise and John waited again for God to show them what project would be next and how to proceed.

New Classrooms

Another need immediately emerged as the next priority for the school: new classrooms. The structures that constituted the school itself consisted of two permanent classrooms, and four mud rooms which were used for

classrooms. The older students utilized the permanent classrooms, which had doors, windows, cement floors, and tin roofs. The younger students used the mud rooms which had open slots for windows, entryways without doors, mud walls, and mud floors. During the rainy season the rain would often come in through the window and door openings, and water would seep in through the floor. The mud rooms, already dark and dreary even in dry season, become more damp and dreary in the rainy season, and ultimately unsuitable for any kind of habitation, especially for students trying to learn and teachers trying to teach. Eloise found out during one of her visits that teachers often sent the younger students home early in advance of an approaching storm. In this way, the students could get home before the torrential rains and wind would hit, and they would not have to endure the horrible conditions in the mud rooms. As Eloise continued to reflect on this situation, she realized that even though the teachers were ultimately concerned for the students' health and well-being, the students were also missing critical learning time. This lack of consistent teaching and learning time during the rainy season was already evident in the students' test scores for each subject. This barrier to the students' education was something to carefully consider as to what could be done.

As Eloise continued to meet with the school leaders to discuss future projects, it was evident that their entire demeanor, outlook, and interactions had changed for the positive since the very first visit. At each visit Eloise asked the question, "What do you need?" She was thinking perhaps they might suggest a well or rainwater tank since the school did not have water on site. But the school leadership had other ideas. This time they requested a new classroom. They presented the rationale that adding a classroom would remove the strain of the existing buildings with the current student population. In addition, other classes could then use the permanent structures so that all could benefit from a healthier learning environment. A new classroom became the next project! This was a good reminder that while working in cross-collaborative efforts of any kind, all involved must keep any assumptions in check and allow the people one is working with to articulate what they need. After all, they do live there and their priorities most likely would not be the priorities of those from the outside.

Eloise went back to the States to raise funds for the new classroom, while John and Rose continued to shepherd the relational efforts in the community. Their role in building and nurturing relationships was crucial to the work God was doing in the community. In addition, the community

was beginning to notice what was happening at the school and started to provide support on their own. As plans were made to build the new classroom, the community initiated plans to dig a borehole (well) on site. Their reasoning? If a classroom was going to be built, then water for the project should be on site so that the water did not have to be carried in from long distances. The parents provided the funds and the well was dug. Not only was the water used for the classroom project, it was also filtered with large donated water filters and then used for handwashing and cooking at the school.

When Eloise returned to the village some months later with another team, she was shocked to not only see the well, but the water filters and a feeding program in place for the younger students. When she inquired as to what was going on, the deputy head teacher explained, "The parents are now happy, and they have responded to the needs. They have seen that when even small amounts of funds are combined, much can be accomplished with those funds!"

Young Friends Women's Group

As Eloise was still in the beginning stages of relationship building with the Musembe school during her sabbatical time, another opportunity within the village unexpectedly presented itself to her. John's wife, Rose, and selected other women in the community had formed a women's group in order to support one another in business ventures, social interaction, and spiritual guidance and support. By the time Eloise discovered their work, this group of women already had registered with the county government, had set up bylaws and procedures, and had established a bank account. Many of the women in this original group of sixteen were barely able to support their families, and any extra income would assist with basic needs for their families, as well as providing school fees. This was just the type of venture Eloise had a passion for: support and education for women and girls. However, this time John was not involved. Eloise's new partner was Rose, and John remained in the background in order to allow the women to develop this new venture without his interference. In this way, he demonstrated he was fully supportive of the women's efforts and would only be available to consult as needed.

The women's group was still in its infancy and open to Eloise's guidance. She was not sure how to proceed, but relationship building was of the

utmost importance and she knew this process would provide additional information about these women and their group. As Eloise stayed with John and Rose during her sabbatical, she had the opportunity to interact with many of the women from this group. Some had been hired to assist with the maize harvest on the Muhanji farm. Eloise was eager to observe the entire harvest process, especially since it was all manual labor and with different processes than in the U.S. The women showed Eloise how to shuck the maize, and were most delighted when she demonstrated her ability. However, she finally did reveal to them that she had some experience, since she spent time as a young girl on her grandmother's farm in Minnesota and helped there with the corn harvest. As Eloise sat on the floor of the garage with several women, they showed her how to remove the kernels with her thumbs, then how to sort the kernels into the piles for human consumption, and the piles for the animals. They also took time to teach Eloise some basic Swahili words and were delighted when she correctly learned the proper pronunciations and context of their use. It was within these direct interactions that she not only learned the manual tasks of preparing the maize for the next year, but also learned about the personal lives of these women in the community.

As Eloise continued her interactions with the women, she was praying and discerning what the next steps might be for this group. She also had time to reflect on her personal abundance in comparison with the little material resources of these women. Eloise also knew that material resources did not equate to wealth, but that the basic needs of life were critical for each person—access to clean water, access to clean sanitation, safe housing, and food security. Article 25 from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states:

1. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.
2. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.²

2. United Nations, *Articles 1-2*.

One day Eloise had clarity in what God was asking her to do. Before Eloise left for Kenya on her sabbatical trip, several friends sent funds along with her for the expressed purpose Eloise use those funds as she would deem appropriate. She had held on to those funds for weeks, waiting and watching for the right opportunity. Those funds were still available. Eloise felt led to use those funds as a seed project for the women's group. They were eager to begin a joint business venture, but needed funding to jump-start their efforts. The funds Eloise had would be the catalyst for the projects of these women, and the completion of this small initiative would let Eloise know if these women would be able to handle larger projects. This women's group was still rather new, and they needed to acquire the skills of working with one another, meeting set deadlines for the work, and each taking responsibility for their share of the work. This beginning project was really a test for them.

The women created a business plan and shared it with Eloise. They kept her updated on their progress, as well as their financial records. This small project was successful, and each woman had an equal percentage of the \$100 profit. Although a small amount by American standards, these women were excited about the ability to use these funds to help with various expenses within their families. More importantly, these women now recognized the potential of this group and gained in their own self-confidence as entrepreneurs.

Throughout the next year, this women's group was awarded several grants which they used to increase their business ventures. Each woman either began a new business or expanded an existing one. In addition, they divided themselves into smaller groups and each of those groups jointly entered into another business venture. In this way, all of the women benefited together, and each received a share of the dividends from the group businesses at the end of the year.

As the women gained confidence in their business efforts, another interesting phenomenon was taking place, in that they were recognizing the need to become leaders within the community and take on various social justice efforts which would benefit the community. Eloise taught sessions on servant leadership along with other leadership concepts to these women when she visited the village. The practical application of those concepts was bearing fruit in practice as they became vital partners in new initiatives within the community.

The village and the surrounding area was in need of such an example as these women were providing. In Kenyan culture, it is not common for people to volunteer their time for a cause or a social effort. Often there is expectation of some sort of compensation. For these women, they were living out and modeling the biblical mandate to meet the needs of the poor, needy, orphaned, and widowed.

Sanitary Supplies for School Girls

As Eloise continued her work in Kenya with John, she had the opportunity to visit many Quaker secondary schools. As Eloise asked about the challenges these schools faced, one main theme kept rising to the surface: girls often missed school during their monthly periods because they did not have sanitary supplies. As a result, for approximately one week every month, girls would stay home during their periods and miss school. As they missed their coursework and studies, they would then fall behind academically. In addition, if girls were home during the day, they would often become victims of men in the community looking for easy sexual targets. Overall, not only it is safer for girls to be in school during the day, but the academic focus is critical to their development and their future. For the majority of girls in developing countries and in impoverished regions around the world, girls are mostly marginalized and are the least educated, have little to no economic freedom, have limited opportunities to earn an income from respectable sources, and are often isolated within the community.³ Further, for girls in these same backgrounds, the onset of menstruation is still treated according to traditional culture as the indicator that a girl is now ready to become sexually active and get married, and therefore school is no longer a priority or even important.⁴ Here then, was an opportunity to discover just what was needed for the girls from Musembe and if the community would support any assistance for these girls. Early adolescence provides a critical window of opportunity to intervene at a time when girls are experiencing many challenges, but before those challenges have resulted in outcomes which may be irreversible. A lack of economic assets has also been cited as a barrier to translating sexual and reproductive health knowledge into behavior change, especially during adolescence, as

3. Kenya Demographic and Health Survey, *The DHS Program*, 23-43.

4. Lloyd, *New Lessons*, 27.

girls are often financially dependent on men and therefore lose decision-making power in their sexual relationships.⁵

At one of the secondary schools Eloise visited during one of her trips, Levi, the principal, shared his story of how he learned about this very issue the girls faced at his school. He observed that some of the girls would walk around school with their sweaters tied around their waists and he would chastise them for not properly wearing their school uniforms. The girls would ashamedly comply with his direction to put their sweaters on properly. One day, one of the female teachers at the school took Levi aside and shared the reason the girls were wearing their sweaters around their waists and why their attendance was often sporadic. She explained the girls did not have sanitary supplies and were embarrassed during their monthly periods. Levi was immediately ashamed of his attitude and lack of knowledge of the girls' issues. After all, he was a father of girls himself, but he did not even make the connection with the girls in his school. Levi immediately took action and gathered sanitary supplies to keep on hand at the school. In addition, he applied for a grant from an NGO which would provide continuous supplies for the girls at his school. Not only did the attendance of the girls at his school improve, their academic performance followed suit. This new knowledge planted a seed in the back of Eloise's mind which would become useful later on.

As Eloise continued her work with the Musembe school, the story of Levi's school and the issue of sanitary supplies kept coming to her mind. She finally asked Rose if there was a similar problem at Musembe. Rose consulted with the female teachers at Musembe and they confirmed the girls often missed school because of lack of sanitary supplies. In addition, the academic performance of the girls was also low as a result of missing class days. Here was another opportunity to assist the girls from this school and village. The next step was to discern what could be done to support the girls of Musembe.

Eloise went home once again and shared her concerns about the girls and lack of sanitary supplies with her friends and supporters. However, this time she faced some interesting challenges of others involved in such global efforts. One group of women in Eloise's area had been sewing reusable cloth sanitary napkins to send overseas to Uganda and India. They suggested Eloise arrange for this type of approach for the girls at Musembe. The rationale was that supplies could be purchased locally in the village,

5. Kenya Demographic and Health Survey, *The DHS Program*, 23-53.

and then women could be employed there to make the supplies for the girls. Eloise thought the idea sounded like a very practical solution and began to take the steps to move forward with that plan. However, before any commitments were made to the project, Eloise consulted her friend Rose for advice and presented her with the two options, paper sanitary supplies or the reusable cloth ones. Rose replied back to Eloise's inquiry that cloth napkins would not be a solution for their region. Rose stated they had deep pit latrines, and paper products could be easily disposed of in those latrines. In addition, Rose brought up another important point. Washing the cloth supplies would be less sanitary all around because of the lack of water supplies in their area. Most homes in the Musembe region have to haul water from the river to the home, which is already burdensome for the families. Issues with lack of access to clean water and water-related diseases are common in this area, making paper products the most viable solution for these girls. This example was a great reminder for Eloise that although the cloth supplies might be a practical solution for some places around the world, it was not a practical solution for Musembe and Muliro Village. This region had different needs. The women had spoken.

As the sanitary supplies project for the Musembe girls gained momentum, Eloise continued her conversations with Rose to organize this new project and together they outlined the details of the implementation. The women's group took the lead to purchase the supplies locally at the retail rates to benefit local shopkeepers, organize the supplies into packages for each girl, then deliver the supplies to the school. The women's group collaborated with the school leaders to design a special program to carry out this project. In concert with the women teachers, the women's group arranged for a class session with the class (grade) 8 girls to not only teach them the proper use of the supplies, but also instruct them in basic life skills. The first session was a rousing success, with the girls and their families expressing gratitude for these basic supplies. Through this effort, the women also became the mentors and role models for these girls, who had few such positive role models in their lives. The women in turn recognized that their efforts were a critical component to the development of these girls not only at Musembe, but for their futures, and ultimately the future of the entire village.

When Eloise later returned to the Musembe school with a group of educators for professional development workshops with the teachers, one of their scheduled events was to collaborate with the female teachers and

the women's group to provide a health and counseling session for that year's class 8 girls and then give them their supplies of pads and panties. As was the custom after a special session or event, the girls were asked to give a *vote of thanks*. The girls' leader for the school carried out her duty as a leader and expressed her gratitude on behalf of all the girls for their gifts. She also reminded the others that of all the areas in the world professor Eloise and her team could have gone, God directed them to Musembe of all places, and they should all be grateful. This young girl further stated that she had only seen White people before from a distance, but through the interactions between Eloise, her team, and the girls, this girl now knew these Americans were real people just like she and her classmates were.

The words the adolescent girl spoke that day became a deep cultural lesson for Eloise and her entire team. These girls also had biases and assumptions of *mzungus*, White people. However, as those girls interacted with Eloise and her team during their time in the village, those biases and assumptions changed. All the interactions as a part of this sanitary supply project were vital for both groups in their understanding of the other. One of Eloise's team members shared later in a group debrief session about the girls' responses to the sanitary supplies, "I was filled with so much emotion because of how they were receiving the gifts. It was . . . I mean, the things we gave them—they're necessities. We did not give each of them a car or TV; we gave them necessities. And they were so appreciative."

This discussion of basic needs and gratitude continued on through the remaining time this team was in Kenya. Their observations noted that people did not have many things in their lives which provide distractions in the way Americans have. The cultural lesson for this group was that material things were not important. The basic needs of life and family were priorities for the Kenyans in this village, and this lesson impacted Eloise and her team.

During one of Eloise's follow-up visits to Musembe, she gained permission to personally interview a sampling of the class 8 girls about their life challenges. The girls she interviewed came from the local slum area and are considered the poorest of the poor at Musembe. When asked about their access to the sanitary supplies, all of the girls stated that they did not have the funds for supplies during their monthly periods, so they had to stay home from school, but would prefer to be in school. One girl said she would come to school no matter what since she did not want to remain home at all. Some girls tried to beg supplies from female friends

and relatives, but the majority just were not able to find the supplies they needed. They all said that they were grateful for the program of the women's group in providing the sanitary supplies. This theme of gratefulness was still present even several years later in these girls' responses.

As this program for sanitary supplies continued, it also became necessary to evaluate the processes and procedures of the program, as well as determining if the program should continue. Three years after Eloise and Rose's group began this initiative, Eloise examined the school data for attendance and academic records of the girls. In addition, she interviewed both male and female teachers regarding attitudes and dispositions of the girls. What the data showed was very encouraging. First, the attendance for the girls receiving the supplies increased, but so did the attendance for all of the girls. Secondly, the girls now in class 8 were making noticeable gains academically, and some were now on par with some of the boys. In addition, girls in the lower grades were making gains—girls who had not yet been a part of the sanitary supply program. The overall effort in mentoring girls in life skills was spilling over into the younger classes. Finally, when Eloise collected this round of data, there were no pregnancies reported within class 8 as in previous years. When Eloise asked the teachers why, the teachers responded that the girls now had more self-worth than before and attributed this self-worth to the sanitary supply program and the mentoring of Rose and her women's group. God's work was evident in this community as the results showed. The program had to continue.

Feeding Program

Each time Eloise was in Kenya even from the start of her work there, it seemed God had a specific lesson for her to learn. The topic of hunger was another such lesson. Eloise was a continuous learner of everything and anything related to Kenya and Africa. In preparation for one of her trips she had been reading a book which described the issues of hunger throughout the country, and specifically how hunger affects children in their learning. She was not quite sure what to do with that information, except to keep her eyes and ears open to learn what she could while in the country. One important aspect of Eloise's learning was to visit schools as often as she could. As an educator, she continues to be a life-long learner, and school visits helped to build relationships with principals and teachers while learning more about the Kenyan educational system. As she visits mostly

Quaker schools throughout western Kenya, she usually begins with one of her common questions: "What challenges do you face in your school?" This one open-ended question allows for many types of responses, which then leads to follow-up questions for more in-depth learning. During this particular visit to Kenya, every school reported that the topic of hunger was a major challenge. Especially during the times of year before the maize harvest, children were often limited to one meal a day, or sometimes less than that. Some of the schools had initiated lunch programs, which ensured the children would receive at least one substantial meal a day while school was in session.

It was while visiting one of the day schools Eloise once again came face to face with an issue of extreme hunger. While touring the school grounds with one of her Kenyan colleagues, the principal took them to inspect the dining hall. As they were standing outside of the dining hall, Eloise noticed two young boys with a plate and a spoon walking along the outside wall of the dining hall and peering into the windows. As she continued to observe these boys, the principal also took notice and commented that the boys must be hungry. She called the boys over to her and they came to her as frightened animals. As the principal talked with the boys, she confirmed to Eloise and her colleague that these boys were in the stages of starvation and pointed out the specific physical signs of starvation. The principal then called out to one of her high school students to come and take the boys to the kitchen so they could get some food. Eloise's heart became heavy from this experience and she turned aside to gather her composure before she could continue the tour of the school property. The thought kept running through her mind: "What about the students of Musembe? Are they hungry?"

When Eloise saw John a few days later after the observation of hunger at that school, she asked him about the students of Musembe. He confirmed they were also hungry, especially in the months before the next harvest, known as the hunger season. Eloise had already been thinking about what could be done at Musembe and her first response to John was, "We need to start a feeding program for Musembe!" John did not disagree with Eloise's concern or her idea, but he also wanted to discuss a solution which would be realistic and manageable. Eloise had been thinking big, but John was wise in his response to discuss all of the implications of such a program and what would be manageable. For example, if they started a program to feed the entire school, the financial commitment could become too much

for them and their supporters to maintain. Further, if they started a feeding program, the result could draw other students to the school, which would then put a strain on the school's overextended facilities and resources. After much prayer and discussion, John and Eloise decided they should begin small and start with a feeding program for the class 8 candidates during their week of national exams. In that way, Eloise and John could begin such a project and keep it manageable, while still providing the Musembe students the necessary nourishment during that critical time at the conclusion of their primary education.

As Eloise and John finalized their idea for the feeding program in consultation with the school leadership, the women's group also became a crucial partner to carry out this project. The women eagerly accepted the challenge and engaged in the planning. However, they took it one step further. Not only did the women plan for lunch for the class 8 students, but they included breakfast, morning devotions, and a snack at the end of the day. Even during that first effort, the government testing officials who were monitoring the exams remarked they were impressed with the positive environment at the school, and they had not seen anything like it before. God was already blessing this new initiative.

Scholarships for the Students

As fund-raising efforts continued for the needs in the village, Eloise and John continued to discern next steps for the Musembe school. Ongoing conversations with the teachers and community members were a vital source of information. Through some of those conversations, John discovered that when students completed class 8 at Musembe, it was the end of their formal schooling. In the Kenyan school system, if a child does not earn high enough scores to be accepted to high school, their class 8 education is the end of their school career. The majority of the students do not have the monetary resources to even attend a trade school or other training after class 8, thus limiting their future work to mostly menial labor. As John learned about these issues, he shared with Eloise these concerns and they began to consider a way forward to help students go to high school. They began to brainstorm: What about offering scholarships to high school for students from Musembe?

Background knowledge about barriers to education was also important in assessing this need for further education for Musembe students,

and how additional education could benefit students and the community for the long term. For example, according to research from Dawo and Simatwa, the rate of primary school completion in Kenya was 82 percent from 2000 to 2006, with only 68 percent completion for girls.⁶ Data from the Kenyan Bureau of Statistics also showed that more girls started primary school than boys, but dropped out in more numbers by the time they would have finished primary school.⁷

According to household survey data provided by Unicef in their 2015 report on *Findings from the Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children*, the countries of Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, and the United Republic of Tanzania accounted for almost one half of children not attending school in all of Eastern and Southern Africa.⁸ Primary education is a critical component for foundational development of a child, but secondary education provides additional life skills necessary for increasing economic capacity for the rest of a child's life.⁹ In addition, more education benefits women economically and is shown to positively influence main health-related issues such as: proper nutrition, pre-natal health care, infant and mortality rates, and the reduction of early pregnancy rates.¹⁰

As Eloise and John discussed the need of high school scholarships for Musembe students, Eloise was at first only interested in offering scholarships to girls, for a number of specific reasons. First, girls are still marginalized members of society in Kenya, especially in the rural communities. Traditional gender roles generally favor boys for education while girls are considered a labor commodity, which then competes with their education. Even if girls are allowed to go to school, for the most part they are still required to help at home with various chores, thus limiting their ability to focus on their studies.¹¹ Boys are given preference for education since the belief is that girls will only be wives and mother and do not need any education beyond the primary grades. Extreme poverty also limits access to education, especially for girls.¹² While Eloise had data to back up her assumptions and beliefs, John reminded her that equity was also important

6. Dawo and Simatwa, *Opportunities and Challenges*, 730–741.

7. Kenya Demographic and Health Survey, *The DHS Program*, 23–43.

8. UNESCO Institute for Statistics, *Fixing the Broken Promise*, 5–10.

9. *Ibid.*, 5–10.

10. *Ibid.*, 5–10.

11. *Ibid.*, 5–10.

12. *Ibid.*, 510.

in any work they would undertake. While it would be noble to focus on the girls' education, the boys should not be left behind. In fact, since Kenya has begun a major focus on *girl child education*, the pendulum has swung the other way and boys have been left behind in the educational process and almost ignored. After much discussion and prayer once again, Eloise and John agreed that scholarships would be provided to both girls and boys.

Fund-raising in the U.S. for the projects in Kenya were going well, but how would Eloise and John begin this effort and sustain it? They first had to agree on the criteria for selection for a scholarship to high school. If based on need alone, all of the students were needy. In fact, most of them were from the local sum area and the families had little to no extra resources for basic needs, let alone for expenses such as high school tuition and fees. Eloise and John finally decided their beginning point: offering a scholarship to the top-performing girl and boy on the national test taken at the end of class 8. As word spread throughout the community about this potential opportunity, excitement mounted as the test results were announced. However, Eloise and John had a little bit of a miscommunication they first needed to resolve.

When Eloise was checking on the funding available for scholarships for high school, she knew the Africa fund account had enough money to fully fund one student for high school for four years. Eloise and John had set the goal at four years so that they would be sure the child could stay in school all four years and not have to worry if enough funds were available or not. Eloise desired to be a good steward of the funds people had donated for the Kenya projects, so she told John they could fund one student—or so she thought. Even though she and John had discussed the scholarship plan over the phone, it was a text message exchange which caused a mix-up. John thought Eloise had said to go ahead and fund a girl and a boy, so John communicated that information to the school. When the national test scores were released, Eloise reported there were only funds for one scholarship, so she wanted to select the girl who had qualified. As she faced an assembly of students at Musembe, she announced the scholarship for the top girl, Mildred. It was then Eloise learned of the mix-up in communication. The boy who had the top score was at the assembly and had believed he would receive a scholarship because of his scores and what had been communicated to the community. The boy ran home in tears and became depressed, refusing to even eat for several days. When Eloise heard about the boy's emotional state she was obviously devastated about the mix-up but

was unsure how to proceed. She consulted with John and Rose and tried to determine what could be done. As she prayed about the issue, she sent an email home to her supporters sharing the mix-up and her concern for this boy who was so devastated he would not be able to go to high school after all. By God's grace, when Eloise woke up the next morning and checked her email, one of her prayer partners responded they would sponsor young Daniel for the four years of high school! Through the miscommunication, God provided a solution for future scholarships Eloise and John had not even considered yet—that of sponsorships for the students. Mildred and Daniel became the first students ever from Musembe to attend high school, which resulted in rejoicing throughout the community. Their students now had a chance for continued education and a better future for themselves and their families.

Through this example of the scholarships, Eloise and John learned a valuable lesson about the importance of clear and explicit communication. They also knew they needed to accept responsibility for their role in the mix-up and not blame the other. The way they handled even minor conflict with one another needed to be within the realm of cultural humility and respect for the other. Even though they had discussed the scholarship process, the communication had not been clear. Effective communication can be a major challenge in cross-cultural work, especially when one culture is more direct in communication than the other. Once the scholarship issue had been resolved and Daniel was on his way to high school, John showed Eloise their text message exchange. When Eloise saw the words she had written, she knew they were open to a different interpretation than what she had intended. Eloise readily admitted her mistake and apologized to John. Even more importantly, John never once said to Eloise, "I told you so." Eloise and John moved forward from that point with the resolve to improve their communication with each other. Mistakes and misunderstandings will happen, but how we handle those mistakes is critical to building effective working relationships within the framework of cultural humility.

Professional Development Workshops

As relationship building continued with the school and community, the school leaders asked if Eloise could bring teachers with her on one of her trips to deliver professional development workshop sessions. Without giving a firm promise, she assured them she would take their request under

consideration. In this way, if she could not find a team of teachers to join her, then she was not breaking a promise. In the Kenyan culture, even saying "I will see what I can do" could be interpreted as a promise. Eloise and the teachers also discussed some potential topics which could be included in a two-day workshop session. As they articulated their needs, Eloise realized again she did not have all of the necessary background information. She did not understand the children they were working with, or the limitations in resources or teacher preparation. However, she was prepared to learn all she could in preparation for this next project. At times the challenges of the extreme needs in the village seemed to be overwhelming, but John continued to remind Eloise they needed to begin small and keep things manageable. That continues to be wise advice.

Less than two years after Eloise and John's first visit to the Musembe school, Eloise brought along a team of four educators from the U.S. to conduct the first professional development session at Musembe. With Rose's guidance, another neighboring primary school was invited so they could also benefit from the U.S. team's visit.

This first professional development team involved people other than George Fox faculty colleagues. Through Eloise's work at the university, her graduate students and others in the community had caught the vision of the work she and John were doing in rural Kenya and wanted to participate. Inviting others into the vision and work in Muliro Village was an exciting opportunity. However, with the opportunity came immense responsibilities. Not only was Eloise responsible for the group as team leader, but she felt the weight of preparing this first group for the professional development teaching sessions, in addition to the cultural preparations.

Eloise and John discussed the type of Kenyan cultural knowledge which would be an integral component for the group preparation. It was important to prepare for the culture aspects, but not to over-prepare. Learning about basic cultural expectations and norms is one thing, but experiencing those first hand is something a person cannot adequately prepare for ahead of time. Eloise selected several key resources to assist the group with the cultural information she believed would address Kenyan culture in general, but also contain principles of cultural humility, which was the overarching philosophy for the entire trip and the preparations. Each participant was required to read selections from the following resources:

- *The Last Hunger Season: A Year in an African Farm Community on the Brink of Change* (Roger Thurow, 2012)

- *Cross-Cultural Servanthood: Serving the World in Christlike Humility*, (Duane Elmer, 2006)
- “Cultural Humility: A Framework for Local and Global Engagement” (Eloise Hockett, Linda Samek, and Scot Headley, 2013)

The pre-trip planning sessions included preparations for the content Eloise and her team would be sharing with the teachers in attendance. The teachers prioritized a list of topics they believed would further assist with their work in their classrooms.

Eloise and her group first created a basic schedule for their teaching days. Since she had already presented numerous workshops in Kenya, she was familiar with the overall structure, as well as cultural expectations for the day. Rose also assisted in the pre-workshop planning by meeting with the school leaders, then sending emails to Eloise for clarifications. This partnership was invaluable, in that she had a reliable partner on site in Kenya working with her in all of the preparations.

The daily structure included time for opening introductory remarks at the start of each day, tea breaks, lunch, and end-of-the-day group debriefing sessions. As Eloise and her group developed the overall schedule, the structure was set so that Eloise, as team leader, would teach the first introductory sessions, then allow the other team members to team teach and plan the remaining sessions. While one person was teaching, the rest of the team would interact and participate right along with the Kenyan teachers and leaders. The rationale for this strategy was to help the team members acclimate to the type of teaching, pacing, and interactions which would be culturally appropriate, in addition to integrating with the Kenyan teachers. At one point during the planning sessions, one of the team members suggested, “Let’s just take out the opening part so that we have more time for our teaching.” This statement provided a key opportunity for Eloise to explain the importance of the Kenyans’ cultural practice of welcoming visitors, introducing the event and setting the stage for the work to come. It was also important for the team to be reminded they were guests in another culture and needed to be respectful to the Kenyans’ practices and procedures and not assert their own agenda.¹³ This attitude demonstrated humility in practice and served as the foundation for the work in the village.

Once Eloise and her team arrived in the village, the learning curve was high for the rest of the team. This team of U.S. teachers were committed to

the trip and dedicated to teach the content they had prepared. But more importantly, they were also committed to learning as much about the culture as possible. In order to engage with the culture at a deeper level, Eloise arranged for this team to stay in homes and not in a local guesthouse or hotel. Throughout their time with their Kenyan hosts and the teachers in Muliro Village, all began forming strong bonds with one another. Conversations and interactions occurred before sessions, during breaks, during meals, after the sessions concluded for the day, and well into the night in the homes. The U.S. team also participated in group sessions with the Kenyan teachers while another member was teaching. Interacting with each other was the primary focus. The Kenyan teachers also became teachers to Eloise’s team in sharing cultural songs and dances, basic Swahili words, and giving each person a Kenyan name to commemorate the event. These types of authentic interactions do not just happen without intentional and ongoing relationship building.

This first professional development session was a learning experience for all involved. First of all, Eloise’s group had been invited for this initial professional development session. As the relationships continued to build between Eloise, John, and Rose, the teachers trusted all of them to assist in areas where the school had need. The teachers acknowledged both their needs and desires for more training in teaching pedagogy in order to help their students. Eloise and her team were able to provide the content these teachers needed in order to better serve the students in the Musembe school and the surrounding village. These efforts were bearing fruit, and all believed there was more to come. Once again, Eloise and John would wait and see what doors God would open next.

13. Elmer, *Cross-cultural Servanthood*, 140.