

INTERNATIONAL

Kenya's poor children record lives on camera

By Philip Ngunjiri
Special to Sentinel-Voice

NAIROBI, Kenya — Most of the children of Mathare, Kenya's oldest slum, do not understand the Internet and many have never laid eyes on a computer. But a small group of youngsters in an internationally funded project is now involved in the construction of an interactive web site.

"This is the beginning of an Internet exchange of stories, ideas and images between children in Nairobi, London, Cape Town, Brooklyn and Dhaka which will form the basis of an interactive web site designed by the children themselves," said Lana Wong, coordinator of the Mathare Youth Sports Association's (MYSA) "Shoot Back" Project.

All this is part of an international children's photography and Internet project that includes an international touring exhibition that will end at the Photographers' Gallery in London in early 1999.

The sprawling Mathare slum, comprised of more than 10 villages, is home to about 500,000 Kenyans.

Just as in any other slum area in the world, illicit drugs, sex and crime are prevalent here, MYSA leader Francis Kimanzi said. "To keep youth off such vices, with the help of Wong, herself a photographer of no mean repute, we have come up with this important

project."

Since 1987, MYSA has pioneered many initiatives in youth sports, environmental improvement and community development. The MYSA Football League, with more than 500 teams from 50 slums, villages and estates, does more than simply keep the youngsters fit and off the streets. Every weekend, 23 to 30 teams from the MYSA league clear the garbage and ditches around their homes.

"Older kids who have been involved in MYSA since its beginning have become leaders and role models in the community and football has catalyzed their social, physical and intellectual development," Kimanzi said.

He said 126 boys and girls have received special training and now participate in HIV/AIDS awareness, prevention and counseling programs in Mathare, Kenya's second largest slum.

Just as football has been used as a tool for encouraging cooperation, raising self-esteem and promoting physical and environmental health in the Mathare community, "photography by and for the Mathare youths themselves is proving to be a powerful tool for youth development, education and creativity," Wong said.

In mid-1997, 16 girls and 16 boys ages 12 to 16 were chosen to participate in the Shoot Back Project, which

enables the youths from Mathare to "shoot back," with cameras, not with guns or drugs.

"The kids are using basic 'point-and-shoot' and SLR cameras to shoot aspects of their lives that they deem important, including family, community and personal issues," according to MYSA officials.

An exhibition consisting of 100 of their most interesting photographs has been moving around the country. It is now at the headquarters of the U.N. Environmental Program in Gigiri, Nairobi.

The explicit images say a lot about the social, civil and political problems common in most Kenyan slums. Many of them take visitors, especially those from the industrialized countries, by surprise.

Fifteen-year-old George Otieno, one of the boys involved in the project, believes his shots will help highlight the poverty in his community.

"What I know is that there is somebody out there who is willing to help, but doesn't know how to reach us," he said.

He particularly likes the photograph of a drunk asleep beside a rubbish pit near a filthy gutter. The caption reads: "This man has no house. The little money he begs from the city streets enables him to buy a glass of Chang'aa (illicit alcohol). After scavenging any edibles from the rubbish pit, he

goes to sleep and another day is gone."

Thirteen-year-old Edith Kando highlights the plight of street children.

"A high percentage of street kids have homes, parents or even guidance," runs the caption under her photograph of three children sniffing glue. "Due to different problems such as disagreement with the parents, they are chased away from their homes. When they are away from home, they lack food, shelter and clothing."

How did Kando find all this out? She knows both the kids and their parents.

In the second part of the project (1999 and beyond) the group hopes to set up a community darkroom in Mathare and publish a book of the teens photos to help raise funds for MYSA.

"Boys and girls who have shown special talent and enthusiasm for the program may be asked to help set up other shoot back programs in neighboring slums," Kimanzi said.

The Shoot Back program has been made possible by a grant from the Ford Foundation, sponsorship in kind from UNEP and support from the Color Labs, a company in the Village Market in Nairobi.

"Further sponsorship is being sought for additional photographic materials, book publications and exhibition tours," Wong said.

EOB

(Continued from Page 9)
for peaceful conflict resolution.

"If we teach them how to get along with each other, we can teach them how to get along in the world," she said. "We're here to help them learn how to get through life and be a man or woman of tomorrow, and that's why I like being here. We have to teach them to be the person they need to be to succeed."

A former school teacher and crossing guard, Taylor has worked with children all her life. A grandmother who admits she doesn't see her children and grandchildren as often as she would like, she gets a special feeling helping children given a tougher stake in life.

"These kids are just like mine," she said. "They're family when I'm here, and I hate to leave them. I wish I could take some of them home with me. It's just like home, just like family."

In fact, she said, she prefers Variety Day to being at home. "If I'm home, I'm not satisfied. I'd rather be here," she said. "I worry about the children when I'm gone, and I want to be with them."

Taylor recently had surgery on both eyes. Five days after the second surgery she was back at Variety Day.

"I couldn't see well enough to get to work," she confessed, "but I didn't tell anybody. As long as I live and am able to work, I intend to do this. I just love to work with children.



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy
Every morning Marie Alexander, foster grandparent, reviews the schoolwork done by the children at Variety Day Home.

and deputy director of the Foster Grandparent Program.

Like Taylor, the right person for the Foster Grandparent Program likes civic service, has patience, can work with children and is a caring individual, Rothstein said.

Foster grandparents must be able to commit twenty hours per week to the program — four hours a day, five days a week. If enough seniors sign up at one time, the program offers a one-week orientation, although most of the training takes place at the job site because the needs vary at each location. Volunteers usually work the same shift each weekday with the same children.

In addition to the small stipend, volunteers are reimbursed for their travel, 30 cents per mile if they drive their own vehicle. If they use public transportation, they receive free CAT paratransit or are reimbursed for their regular monthly CAT bus pass.

If you would like to volunteer, or for more information about the program, please call 647-1515.

When I come in in the morning, they all come and hug me. They don't get me angry, because I can go along with them. I understand. My aim is to make a difference."

Taylor said Variety Day Home's staff are equally pleasant.

"They're glad that I'm here to help," she said. "I think they love me and I love all of them," she said, adding that she loves working with Fred Morgan and Judy Rothstein, director

WORLD BRIEFS

VOLUNTARY STERILIZATION EYED TO CONTROL POPULATION IN SWAZILAND

MBABANE, Swaziland (AIA/GIN) — Voluntary sterilization, in the form of tubal ligation for women and vasectomy for men, has become an option for Swazi couples who do not want more children. The Family Life Association, which began offering this service at its Mbabane Clinic in 1995, said the procedure could contribute significantly toward controlling the country's annual population growth rate of 3.2 percent. However, according to Marjorie Mavuso, the association's research manager, cultural and religious backgrounds are discouraging people from using the method. She said by December 1995 only 25 women and five men had undergone the operation. An education program was launched, and since then another 61 adults have undergone the operation, most of them women. Between January and December of last year, the number of men who were sterilized outnumbered that of women for the first time since 1995. "We appeal to the people to first get the right information from us before they undergo this operation. We counsel them on the implications of the operation because we believe that a client has a right to be provided with all the information required to make an educated decision," Mavuso said. She admitted that changing attitudes will be a mammoth task. "Children are regarded as an investment and wealth by the traditional Swazi society. Most people also want lots of children because they believe they will be well cared for in their old age," she said.

\$20 MILLION SET ASIDE FOR SOUTH AFRICA'S APARTHEID VICTIMS

JOHANNESBURG, South Africa (AIA/GIN) — The South African government has set aside \$20 million this year to compensate victims of apartheid. The move, described by human rights groups as a significant first step, is part of an overall package of \$100 million to be disbursed within the next six years. "The allocation is substantially more than the \$10 million which we believe will be needed for interim reparations," said a spokesperson for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The commission winds up its work in June. Its plan for final reparations includes a proposal that victims receive individual grants of between \$3,500 and \$5,000 a year — the median household income — for six years. Presenting his budget to Parliament last month, Finance Minister Trevor Manuel said the amount set aside for reparations would rise by a further \$20 million every year. "While we recognize the pressure on resources in our country," the Truth Commission said, "the right of victims of gross violations of human rights to claim substantial damages has been expunged by amnesty, and the country owes them reasonable amounts for reparation. We shall, therefore, press for the allocations to be increased in future budgets."

Records

(Continued from Page 7)

If the number was 8060 in the morning and 8035 in the afternoon, you will know that the short term trend in the stock market was down. But if you compare 8035 with 6000 of a year ago, you might conclude that the long term trend is upward.

C & T Communications
Specializing in pagers, cellular phones & watch pagers by Seiko
360° Service • Cellular 2000
(NO CREDIT APPROVAL)

\$6.00 FIRST MONTH AIRTIME **657-0400**

Open 9 am to 5 pm Monday thru Friday • 10 am to 3 pm Saturdays
3254 N. CIVIC CENTER, STE A • OFF I-15 & CHEYENNE
(in the Cheyenne Square Shopping Center, just before NAPA Auto Parts)

Davey Deals

AUTOS • BIKES • BOATS

1717 FREMONT at BRUCE SHELDON WELCH

E-Z FINANCING & LOW PAYMENTS
HOME OF THE \$300 DOWN

WE SELL 'EM FAST
CUZ WE SELL 'EM CHEAP **474-7777**