

A roof over their heads

25 students from 6 different countries come together to build an accommodation block for 200 schoolgirls in Homa Bay, Western Kenya.

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“Until now we had to share one bed between three”, says Emilly Akiryia a student at *Josephine Bakhita Girls Secondary School* in the community of Nyalienga near Homa Bay in western Kenya. “But thanks to your help this will soon change”, adds the

17-year old Kenyan. She is one of almost 400 students currently studying at the school. It is envisaged that the school will educate 1000 girls in the long run.

Because at *Josephine Bakhita Girls Secondary School* many things are lacking, "Schule statt Straße", an initiative of members of the Catholic Prelature Opus Dei in Germany, helped with the construction of a dining hall in the summer of 2013 and a second dormitory for the girls one year later. In total 45 young volunteers, students from Germany, England, Kenya, the Netherlands, Austria and Portugal, participated in the two projects which took 3 weeks each.

The secondary school in Nyalienga provides shelter and food for the girls. It is their home because 40 percent of the pupils currently at the school are raised without father and/

or mother. Because HIV is widely spread in western Kenya, the number of Aids orphans is high. The school protects the girls from sexual abuse and the risk of infection.

However, until now, there was not sufficient space in the fast growing school which was founded upon an initiative of the community of Nyalienga and the Catholic diocese of Homa Bay. Demand for a place at the school is high as it offers education to girls facing difficult situations in western Kenya. Many families lack the financial means to provide continuous school education for their own or adopted children. In particular education of girls is often neglected, thus a significant number enter relationships at a young age and become mothers themselves.

The social help provided in 2013 and 2014 in western Kenya was only possible because of generous

donations. Over 35.000 Euros were collected for both projects. The money was used to buy the materials needed for construction and for the salaries of local experts in construction who directed the volunteers in the project. Costs for flight, transfer and visa were covered by the individual participant.

For them the project and stay in Nyalienga was both a volunteer service and a youth exchange. For three weeks they worked together and had exchanges with people their age from different social, ethnic and religious backgrounds, as next to the young Christians - Catholics and Protestants - Muslim students also participated in the project. The motivation for all was the realisation, that changes are actually possible where forces are joined. Thus the motto: "Making hearts smile".

Both projects were supported by the Rhein-Donau-Stiftung based in Cologne and Munich as well as the Strathmore University in Nairobi. Strathmore was founded in 1961 upon the encouragement of Saint Josemaria, funder of the Opus Dei. It was the first college in eastern Africa open to all races and creeds. This was a condition set by Saint Josemaria, not very warmly received by the British colonial authorities in Kenya at the time.

By Reinhard Backes

mail(at)schule-statt-strasse.de

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