

Hope's Promise Kenya Short Term Mission March 28-April 10

Part 5: Options for orphans?



Children in a Kenyan institutional orphanage

On Friday, April 6, the team received a most unexpected gift. Joram Mwenda is an attorney in Nairobi who rescued me during my daughter's adoption. After two failed court processes over three months of being "stuck" in Kenya, he stepped in and successfully completed Lily's process. He also became a dear family friend. Lily's adoption was his first international adoption; but, after we left Kenya, he helped many other families and rose to the top echelons of international adoption policy-influencers in Kenya. Pastor Karau mentioned that Mwenda wanted to stop by and visit me at SoH. I anticipated an enjoyable personal conversation over chai, but I was wonderfully surprised when he arrived with an associate in his law firm and two directors of a Kenyan adoption agency. The four professionals gave a presentation to the entire team that clarified and summarized many issues affecting orphans in Kenya.

Gaciku is the founder and Executive Director of KKPI (Kenya to Kenya Peace Initiative), a Kenyan adoption agency founded after the 2008 election violence so that children orphaned by the crisis could be adopted. She described the orphan and adoption culture of Kenya: *Many orphans in Kenya are institutionalized. While Kenyans want children to stay in Kenya, Kenyans in general are not willing to adopt strangers' children. Kenyans accept that it is better for children to be adopted to another country than to remain in institutions. Local adoptions are rare because of the following issues:*

- *Lack of awareness: Many Kenyans don't know there is a legal process of adoption. Local adoption services are almost free, but most Kenyans don't know.*

- *Misconceptions: Many Kenyans think that adoption agencies “sell” children.*
- *Taboos: Many Kenyans believe that adopting a child will cause other children in their family to die or become “foolish.” Communities in general do not support adoptive families because they are viewed as a bad omen. Bloodlines are vitally important in Kenyan culture.*
- *Inheritance issues: Adding members to a family impacts who inherits what, particularly with the issue of land. Adoptive parents may be treated with outright hostility by other family members who resent that resources are diverted to non-blood relatives.*
- *Gender issues: 70-80% of children in orphanages are boys, primarily due to inheritance issues. Girls are not regarded as a threat to inheritance because when they marry, they are assimilated into the new family. Girls are more acceptable for single parents to take with them into a remarriage. For these reasons, the majority of local adoptions are of girls. Kenyans will not adopt boys older than age two.*
- *Lack of documentation: Many children in orphanage are un-adoptable because their basic personal documentation is not in order and the facility lacks the resources to document the child. For example, an orphanage may have 150 residents, but only two will be sufficiently documented to be available for adoption. Out of the Unicef estimate of 2 million orphans in Kenya, maybe only 200 are available for adoption.*
- *Lack of resources in adoption community: The government allocated some money to adoption societies to educate and influence the culture, but it is very little. The greatest need is resources to send agency representatives to orphanages to help them get paperwork in order so that children can be adoptable. Gaciku visits church frequently to raise awareness and resources.*

We learned during the presentation that adoptions of Kenyan children by Americans are once again open after closing in 2009. Although the three-month residency foster period that is required for adoption is unlikely to ever be repealed, the process continues to stream-line with an anticipated total residency of 6-8 months. (Hope’s Promise is investigating the process of registration in Kenya as an Inter-Country Placing Agency.)

This concise presentation of adoption and orphan issues reveals both the greatest treasure and the greatest challenge for the SoH/HP-Kenya ministry. Our Country Coordinators, the Karaus, are filled with the love of Jesus for children who are not their own, which is miraculous in and of itself; but, they are also extremely counter-cultural.

Please pray with us for God to raise up more Kenyans with “Karau-hearts” for the multitudes of orphans in Kenya who need loving families.





Left: SoH #1 family in 2007, within the first six months of opening. *Right:* SoH #1 family in April 2012