

# Africa SOMA news

Issue 1, September 2010

On July 31, 2010  
The Elangata Wuas Resource Center  
was officially OPENED!

**In celebration we dedicate our first newsletter to sharing with you the 10 foundational bricks on which we built this resource center...**

## 1. The Idea...

With the rise of the internet, many take the almost instantaneous and unbounded access to knowledge, to ideas, and to information for granted.

Yet, children in the Maasai community of Elangata Wuas in Southern Kenya have little access to books or

other readings materials apart from school textbooks that they share and that remain in the classrooms; adults have no access to newspapers,

magazines, or adult literacy resources; community activists have no central place to meet and store their meeting minutes documents; local NGOs have no place to display and disseminate their information. For these reasons, Africa SOMA Inc., a Canadian and US non-profit volunteer organization, and the newly established Elangata Wuas Resource Center (EWRC), a Kenyan registered community-based organization, partnered in 2006 to establish a community and library resource center.

The Elangata Wuas Resource Center, 2010

## 2. The creative design...

The EWRC boasts a one of a kind design, with the architectural help of Robbert Mutsaers. Robbert is the co-director of Green Power Kenya, which partners with local communities to build micro-hydro power stations in Central Kenya. The three-wing design of the EWRC symbolizes the three main constituencies it serves. The first wing, pointing to the nearby Elangata Wuas primary school, will serve the children of the region (ages 3-12 years old).

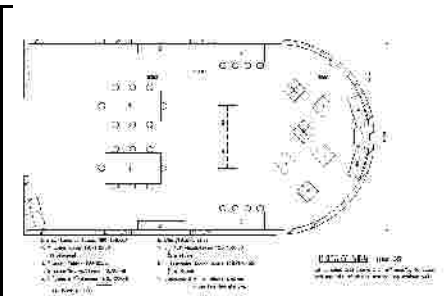


EWRC building plan, 2006

The second wing, pointing to the newly built secondary school, will serve the adolescent and youth community (ages 13-25). The third and final wing points to Mile 46, the small town and market center, and will serve the adult population. The central atrium of the EWRC is the librarians' space.

The library has an underground water tank and water catchment system on the roof. The roof and windows are specially designed to

improve circulation. The center has been outfitted with a solar lighting system. We now need to invest in solar panels. The building stands on the land belonging to the primary school.



Primary wing furnishing plan, 2009

### 3. A devoted management team...

The EWRC is governed by the Kenyan registered community based organization by the same name. This organization has members representing different backgrounds within the community: men/women, young/old, literate/illiterate, and from different locations across the Elangata Wuas zone. The committee has grown into its role, increasingly asserting itself with ideas for an unfamiliar institution. In an EWRC meeting that Caro (AS President) and



Curtain beaders taking a break, 2010

Jennie (AS Board member) attended in early 2010, the committee was debating priorities for the remainder of the funding it received in 2009 from the local government. Caro and Jennie thought an extra water tank and some final structural details should have priority, but the mamas were united in their insistence on curtains! ...and the curtains came out beautifully!



Members of the EWRC committee meet with Africa SOMA, 2007

### 4. Financial Support...

The EWRC has been fortunate to receive generous support of numerous individuals and several organizations. The construction of the library was funded through a grant of 25,000 Euros from the Netherlands Embassy Small Grants Program and 4,000 Euros from the Kenyan government Constituency Development Fund. The furnishings, start up resources, electric wiring, librarian and watchmen salaries, and the growing book collection has been made possible by the generous donations of friends and family, and through the fundraising efforts of our board members and volunteers as well as a grant from the Liberty Foundation Netherlands. We thank you all for your support.



Heinrich, Joost, and Caro Bike-a-Thon FunRaiser The White House, DC, 2009

### 5. Good builders...



Joel Keton, Robbert Mutsaers, and Muriuki roof planning, 2007

We were very fortunate to be able to call on the talents of Christopher and Muriuki, who have worked for years with Green Power in their home town of Kianyaga, building the microhydro power stations. To complete the project they established themselves for over a year in Elangata Wuas. They struggled with the difficult conditions for building (lack of water, poor infrastructure, no electricity, poor access to public transport, and HEAT). But they built a structure admired by many. They have

since been hired to build classrooms and have come back to visit new friends. They even picked up a little Maa (the local language).



Christopher, 2007



Muriuki, 2007

## 6. Engaged partners...

Eva Kaplan and Ariel Schwartz, co-founders and co-directors of Maria's Libraries ([www.mariaslibraries.org](http://www.mariaslibraries.org)), have been kind to include us in their growing network of small, community based library initiatives in Kenya. They have not only provided the EWRC with book donations, but have also introduced us to Smallbean, ([www.smallbean.org](http://www.smallbean.org)), an NGO dedicated to bridging the digital divide. Smallbean



Smallbean train the EWRC Citizen Archivists, 2010



William (librarian) and trained Citizen Archivist interviews an elder, 2010

has started up our first EWRC program, the 'Citizen Archive' project, which trains local youth in media technology, including uploading and processing oral history interviews, photographs, and video footage of community life. Sean and his Smallbean team conducted the training two weeks before the opening of the library. They have donated the equipment, including a solar panel, to enable the project's long-term success. Visit their blog for detailed insights into their training and experience working with the EWRC and Elangata Wuas community.

## 7. Hardworking volunteers...

Over many years, Africa SOMA interns and volunteers have made invaluable contributions to the success of this project. Our volunteers designed and researched library exhibits, endlessly taped plastic book covers on over one thousand books, brainstormed with the EWRC committee members during lengthy meetings, provided support to the new librarians, and worked tirelessly on many beautification projects. In 2007, Masa, Marieke, Sophie, and Jessika put together a comprehensive report on the library vision and needs. In 2008, Hinde researched and designed a cultural exhibit on life stage ceremonies to be displayed in the center while Frans and Sander worked on a health corner and Jennie



Amrita, Alysha, Lucia, Hester, Caro, Ellen, & Ariane, 2010



GP Engineering Trainees and Jennie, 2010

designed a catalogue system. In 2009, Julia S, Elske, Julia C-G and Alana furthered the exhibits and worked on the organization of our growing collection. Matthijs and Kevin expanded the health corner. In 2010, Jennie returned to organize the furnishing and interior decorating, and Ariane, Alysha, Amrita, Hester, Lucia, and Ellen handled the collection, the management, and the finishing touches for the opening. We also had the support from Green Power's Engineering Trainees, who came to spend a week at the EWRC fitting the center with a complete electrical system.

## 8. Enthusiastic librarians...



Catherine (librarian) with Enchorro children, 2010

Our 3 EWRC librarians were selected through a competitive call for librarians. They are Catherine, Joyce, and William. All three come from different parts of the Elangata Wuas Zone. None of them have library experience but they have graduated from secondary school and are very excited about taking up this challenge. They worked very hard through the summer with the interns to learn how to organize and manage such a resources center.



Joyce (librarian) at opening, 2010

## 9. Filling the library with interesting things...

We have received hundreds of book donations from Canada and the US, which have been carried over by our volunteers. As you can imagine, these donations have been largely English story books. Two weeks before the opening, Africa SOMA went to the Text Book Center in Nairobi where we bought: Swahili storybooks and novels, African story-books, African Writers series (short stories, novels, plays, and poetry), Vocational Training Books (reference books in Carpentry, Metal Work, Tailoring, Cooking, Electricity, Animal Husbandry, Bee Keeping, etc.), Business Management Books, Health Books, Environment Books, Maasai books, and much more. We also



The primary wing with numbered game boxes, 2010

bought many educational posters and other learning materials. But the EWRC is not only a library, it is more broadly a center for learning, and our intention is to run different exhibits on various issues of interest to the community. We opened the library with the first photographic exhibit titled: Life Stage Ceremonies among the Maasai: Marriage and Olingesherr. The photos capture two important ritual occasions in a man's and woman's life in Elangata Wuas. The exhibit was a huge attraction, especially among those who could find themselves in the photos. You can see the exhibits displayed in the library page of our website. Other popular points of interest during the opening: The Maasai Coffee Table Books, the Insect Poster, the Game Boxes, and the Balloons!



Elders gathered around the exhibit, 2010

## 10. The GRAND opening!



Library entrance on opening day, 2010

On July 31, 2010 we officially opened the EWRC. It was a remarkable day of festivity after four years of hard work. There were nearly 700 people in attendance. Many local chiefs, NGO delegates (Green Power, Dupoto e Maa, NIA, MTD, and Red Cross), and representatives of the District Education Office were present. The local Member of Parliament requested that Kennedy Matampash, director of NIA, attend on his behalf as the Guest of Honor. Six local schools presented original dances, poems, and plays composed and choreographed for the occasion in beautiful costume, and



Elangata Wuas Primary school dancers perform at opening, 2010

we had hours of speeches by the many representatives pledging continued commitment.

## Our wish list...

Africa SOMA and EWRC seek your continued assistance by:

Visiting our new and improved website: [www.africasoma.org](http://www.africasoma.org)

Signing up with us for updates, special events, and more.

Donating for the purchase of (additional):

Solar Panels / Laptops / Projector / Generator / Internet Subscription / Office Supplies / Filing Cabinet / Storage Cupboard / Book Carrying Boxes for Inter-School Book Loan / Book Display Racks / Vocational Training Equipment (e.g. Sewing machine) / Printer / Extra Water Tank / Maasai Books / African/East African Literature / Textbook Series / Educational DVDs / Science Set (e.g. Microscope) / Other Learning Resources (e.g. Globe), Exhibit Materials (e.g. Picture Frames) / Art Supplies / Shoe Racks / Display Cases / and more...



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