

November 4, 2024

**Dear friends and supporters of Hand in Hand for Kenya,**

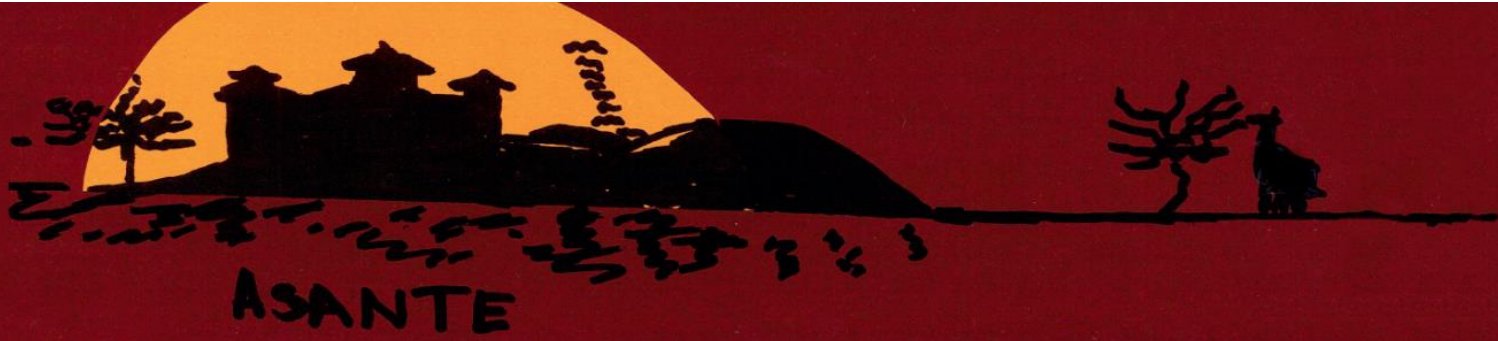
The third newsletter of the year, as always, marks the beginning of the last quarter. Time has flown for the children in Kenya as well, and by mid-October, "Term 3" came to an end, starting of the Christmas holidays. It feels far too early to us, but everything in Kenya revolves around the final exams of secondary schools. During this time, no other students are allowed on campus. At the same time, all primary schools also concluded their classes. While this is certainly a happy time for the children and teachers, it presents our team with a busy period ahead. However, as everyone is already well-coordinated and the next volunteers are ready to join, this time will be well-organized and filled until mid-December. Then, just like every year, the children from the MCC will go to their families and relatives and will return only for the New Year.

At the Academy of Maisha Mazuri (AMM), we have continued to work on improving the performance of students and teachers. There have been many great ideas that we developed together with the teaching staff, and some have already been implemented. For example, there have been numerous one-on-one conversations between students and teachers to identify individual challenges and the best ways to prepare for exams. Acquiring mock exams was an essential point, and another was setting realistic bonuses for teachers, which are very common in Kenya. For the first time, the school organized a day focused entirely on sexual education and health awareness (*a report about this can be found on our homepage, Kenya Current Archive - Hand in Hand for Kenya e.V.*). Another day was dedicated to career counseling and an information day on choosing a course of study. A significant first was the additional study week offered to the graduating class during the summer holidays: these intensive hours outside of school time were very well received by the students.

At the Maisha Mazuri Children Center (MCC), our new housemother, Miriam, is settling in very well. She quickly connected with the children through her interests in playing soccer, practicing taekwondo, and baking. She has also integrated seamlessly into the team and is liked by everyone.

Vorstand: Barbara Krohne   Anita Wimmer   Helen Milkau

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Tutoring teacher Beatrice continues to visit the MCC regularly, and her small group tutoring has now become a staple part of daily life at the MCC. The children love and appreciate her, and we are delighted that this long-planned support for the kids and volunteers has been implemented so effectively this year.

Last but not least, there are also positive updates regarding the garden and the animals at the MCC. Thanks to the abundant rainfalls at the beginning of the year, the river is still well-filled, allowing gardener Boniface to irrigate the farm throughout the year. There has been a rich harvest of sukuma wiki, tomatoes, and capsicum (bell peppers), which were even sold to the MCC Primary School and the Skill Center. The harvest of bananas, beans, and corn met our own needs.

With improved and more varied feed for the rabbits and chickens, their production and health have significantly improved, which also pleases our cook, Julius.

Our teams in Kenya and Germany are jointly looking back with joy and motivation at this year's developments, filled with energy and optimism for what's to come. As always, a special thank you goes to all of you who have supported us financially throughout the year, making it possible for our team on-site to provide for and nurture our many children and young people.

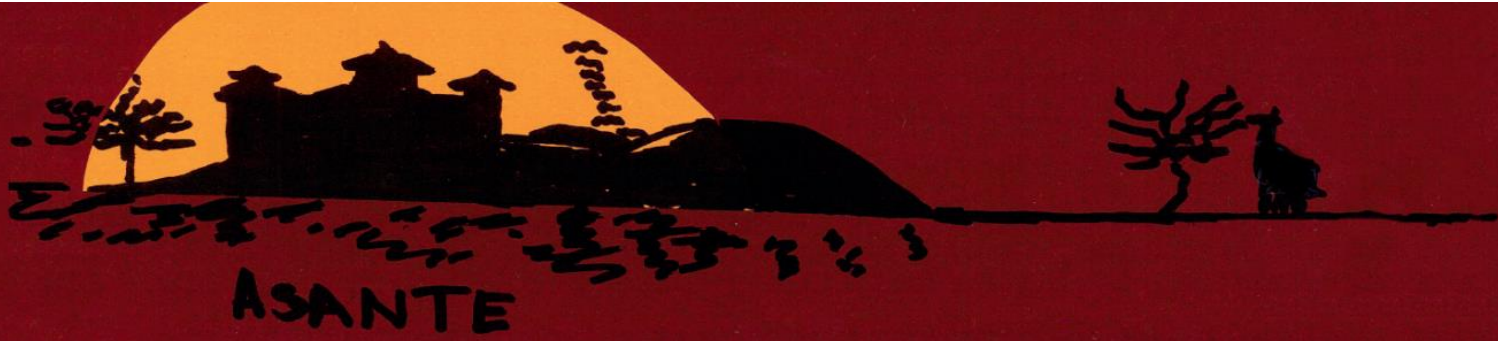
**"Making a difference together"** was once again the motto for this year's traditional school runs organized by our students. This year, we managed to raise an impressive total of around 40,000 euros. All participants deserve great respect for their athletic achievements. Thanks to your commitment—athletic, organizational, and especially social—our organization can confidently look ahead to the end of the year and even implement a few remaining projects and investments for the Academy. We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all the sponsors who have been incredibly generous this year, especially the school administrations.

### **Insights into the Lives of Our Volunteers**

I still vividly remember my first day: while transferring at the airport, I realized that I was embarking on a journey into a completely new and foreign world. As I boarded the plane, I quickly noticed that my skin color was different from most of the other passengers, who I suspected were, for the most part, on their way home. And what about me?

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In this newsletter, we would like to offer you a deeper insight into the lives of the volunteers on-site—despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that our volunteers Antonia and Rebekka said to me:

*“What we’ve experienced in the past few weeks cannot be put into words.”*

The bridge that connects the team in Germany, the volunteers, the children, and the people in Kenya is unique, and as an organization, we could not implement the project as we have over the past nine years without them.

My name is Anne, and at the beginning of 2018, I had the wonderful opportunity to live at the Maisha Mazuri Children Centre (MCC) for three months as an intern and volunteer. Surrounded by many children, vast savannahs, and small houses filled with animals, it’s easy to feel quite foreign as a volunteer. It’s no surprise, as Kenya and Germany, Africa and Europe—these are different worlds not just geographically and climatically, but especially linguistically and culturally.

But I can tell you from my own experience that the initial discomfort fades within just a few hours, at the latest upon arrival at the MCC, the new home for the next few months. If you don’t happen to arrive at night—which would be quite unfortunate because you wouldn’t want to miss the welcoming festivities!—you’ll be greeted with great anticipation by the kids and the team. The welcome at arrival is incredibly joyful and warm-hearted. If there’s time, the children won’t hesitate to carry our heavy suitcases inside and show us newcomers around their home. On the upper floor of the MCC, there is a designated area just for the volunteers, featuring very simple bedrooms, a toilet, and a shower. There’s also a “store room” from which all games, craft supplies, and footballs are managed—an extremely important and responsible task taken on by the interns from the very beginning.

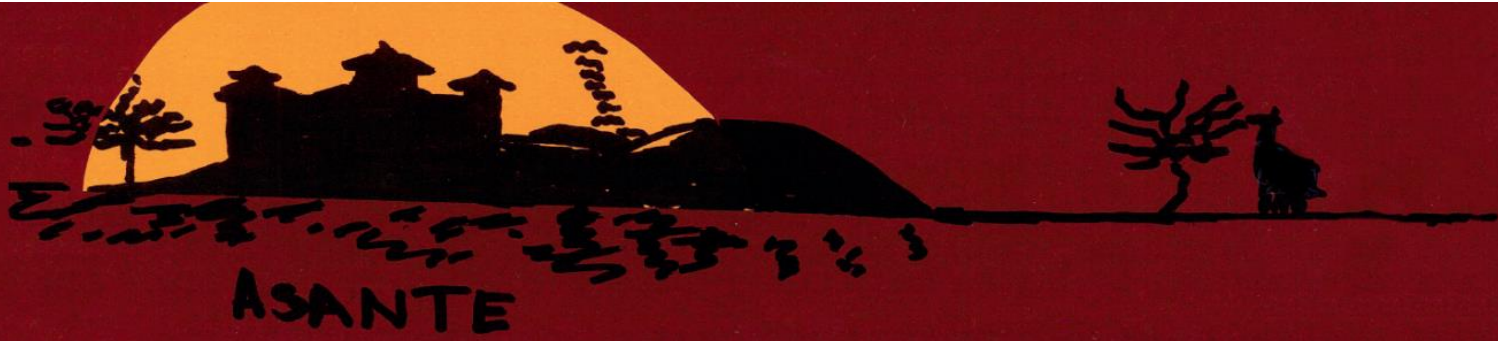
*“Every day is different”*; Rebekka and Antonia continue.

And indeed, daily life heavily depends on the interests and experiences the volunteers bring, as well as the time of year they are on-site (rainy or dry season? School time or holiday?). Together with the social workers Mercy and Joseph, an individual plan is crafted for each week. During my time as a volunteer, a typical week looked something like this: at 6 a.m., the first kids were already on their way to school. Late risers have a hard time, as in Kenya, the early bird catches the worm; however, based on experience, waking up isn’t too difficult because the loud chatter and singing of the children, along with the engines of the school buses, automatically end the night’s rest. You could spend the morning hours (yes, really hours!) cracking open bean pods in the kitchen for the next meals, or you could accompany the kids to school and help them with their homework, possibly even assist the teachers in the classroom.

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While the children are at school, Joseph and Mercy use their time for regular home visits to the families (75) in our partner program (MMP). As a volunteer, you are invited to join them and gain a unique, direct insight into the lives of local families. I remember that we walked on foot and were invited to have tea and cookies with a grandmother whose granddaughter attends primary school. Other volunteers travel even further for these visits, as some of our partner families live in the slums of Kibera and Mathare in Nairobi. However, our experiences all have one thing in common: these families, who live in tiny huts and struggle daily to survive, welcomed us with warm hospitality and immense gratitude, offering whatever they could share. Without the Maisha Mazuri partner program, their children would not be in school, but would instead have to work.

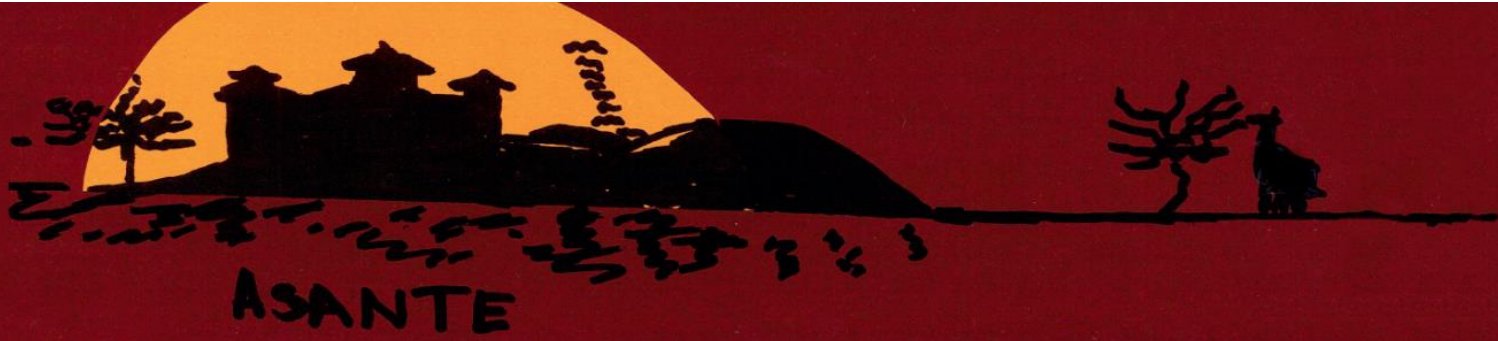
On weekends or during holidays, there's finally time for larger projects. Volunteers from previous years have been incredibly creative. Planning and executing these projects quickly reveals that things work a bit differently in Kenya, and even a perfectly thought-out plan often doesn't go as expected. Our recent returnees experienced this multiple times: taking the initiative, they started a fundraising campaign to gather the necessary funds to organize a trip for students of the Academy to the popular Lake Naivasha. However, heavy traffic on the roads meant they didn't return as planned on the evening of the same day, but rather the next morning.

**BUT:** You quickly adapt to a certain spontaneity and tranquility in Kenya, which certainly hasn't harmed anyone. **Hakuna Matata**, indeed! The volunteers quickly get involved in the daily hustle and bustle, and after just a few weeks, you feel like a part of the MCC family.

It's also important to mention that we volunteers maintain the awareness of being different and coming from another place at all times. At least that was the case for me. This is no great surprise, as Kenya and Germany really represent completely different worlds; yet, it remains a unique experience. With our different skin color, we stand out. The more people surround you, the more you feel different. For instance, while visiting the neighboring town of Tala, I noticed people looking at me wherever I went. Strangers on the street would call out "Mzungu" (white person), and sellers at the market would hope for a particularly good deal with me. On the bus to and from there, I was always offered priority seating, no matter how many people had already been waiting longer than I had.

At the MCC and in school, the children are also very enthusiastic about the volunteers, as they love to touse our hair and touch our skin. What particularly amused and challenged me was trying to tell the children apart in the first few days. As strange as it may sound, at first, I hesitated as a volunteer about whether I was facing a little boy or a girl. Most of them had short hairstyles, and T-shirts and pants were frequently swapped, with both boys and girls taking a liking to nail polish, as Lisa remembers. Conversely, I know that two volunteers were confused for weeks and that everyone thought we were sisters, even though the thought seemed

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completely absurd considering we had different hair colors—blond and brunette, tanned and fair skin. It was fortunate that we could just laugh about such mix-ups in Kenya. Isn't it fantastic how being different can enrich our lives?

At this point, there's so much more that could be said, but it would exceed the scope. For those who are curious, we highly recommend the wonderful volunteer reports on our website under *Internship Reports Archive - Hand in Hand for Kenya e.V.*

In conclusion, we want to highlight one more thing: being a volunteer in Kenya changes you, and you learn so much about togetherness and sharing, about willingness to help and gratitude, and about life. Above all, you realize that less can often be more. Saying goodbye is hard, and Britta said after her five months: *"Coming home was harder than arriving in Kenya."*

What makes our organization so special is the loyalty of many volunteers to the project. After their internships, some take on a partnership (MMP) and stay in touch with the children through regular letter exchanges. Alongside me, there are returnees like Christoph, who was one of the first interns in Kenya in 2014, when the project was still literally in its foundational stages. Since then, he has remained loyal to the organization and has, among other activities, played a major role in developing the volunteer interviews. About ten other former volunteers have taken on tasks within the German organization, bringing with them their own experiences and new ideas to the active circle. This year, we are pleased to welcome four newcomers, whom we warmly welcome once again.

Anne Roll