

The Brothers from the New York and LINE districts came to Kenya in 1958 at the request of the local Bishop to staff Kamwenja Teachers Training College. For the past 25 years they have been responding to the needs of the local Church in a variety of apostolates including teaching in Government and Church schools, junior seminaries, pastoral institutes and youth centres.

The late President Jomo Kenyatta led his Kenyan people to independence in 1963 with the rallying cry "Harambee" - "Let us work together". His idea was that when the community sees a need they join together to solve the problem. Whether they give of their labour to re-build a neighbour's house gutted by fire or contribute cash to construct a dispensary they are acting in the Harambee spirit. Perhaps no-where has this been more exemplified than in the field of education. Although the Government devotes 16% of its budget to education, it is far too little in a country where more than half the people are under 19 years of age. Today Government maintained schools are far out-numbered by "Harambee schools" schools built and maintained by the local community.

One of these Harambee schools, run by the Brothers, is Rongai Secondary School in the central part of Kenya. The town and the school take their name from a Masai word meaning narrow, which describes the stream flowing on the eastern boundary of the town. Here, for the past eight years, seven different Brothers have laboured. Before independence the area was part of the "white highlands" of the Rift Valley. Now these European farms have mostly been broken up into small shareholdings and have passed to African hands. The land is poor; the people are poor.

As St. La Salle sought out the poor of his native city to lead them to God, so the Brothers, although not yet native, "are associated together to engage in educational work for the service of the poor" at Rongai. The late Brother Charles Henry stated that "the vocation of the Brother obliges him to enter fully into the movement of renewal and reform of the school... to an effort that is continuous in order to assure the quality of the education he imparts and the perfect adaptation of its program, its methods, its objectives". This, then is what we are trying to achieve at Rongai.

At a first glance, Rongai Harambee School might not appear much different from any other secondary school. Students dissect grasshoppers in the lab, struggle with English grammar and move from class to class at the clanging of the bell which, incidentally isn't a bell at all, but a two metre section of railway track! Our students do well in the National exams, but this is only what one expects in a Brothers school. It is after the time for formal lessons, however, that the real Harambee nature of the school becomes evident. The Brothers have instilled into the students that it is their school and it is up to them to keep it going — teachers and students working together. And they do!

In a country where white-collar jobs are becoming almost non-existent and 95% of the population is involved in agriculture, the students have to learn the dignity and necessity of farming. On top of a college oriented curriculum we teach agriculture and every day after school everyone gets his hands dirty. On our 2 hectare "shamba" our 200 boarding students practice intensive farming, using irrigation and lots of manure. They grow almost all their own food: maize

and beans, spinach and bananas. They keep about 100 pigs and grow canna to feed them and make all the pig food in our own mill. Every Saturday they slaughter a pig for Sunday dinner. Twenty boys care for 200 rabbits. Every few weeks 30 of them appear on the menu. Two men are employed to do the cooking, but they are helped by the students who grind the wheat and maize into flour, peel the potatoes and cut the fire wood that fuels the stoves. We have one maintenance man, but most of the jobs from painting to plumbing are handled by the students, who are responsible for the upkeep of the buildings. We have just built a woodworking shop and some students will be taught carpentry.

One of the Brothers helps the students prepare the weekly liturgy in the school and organizes an annual retreat for each class. On Sundays, our students, together with the catechist, arrange the parish liturgy.

After four years at Rongai Harambee Secondary School our boys leave us. We hope they have learned the meaning of "Harambee" and that they are now ready to face the world as self-reliant Kenyans and Christian gentlemen.

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