

QHOLAQHOE MOUNTAIN CONNECTIONS



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2015 Newsletter

By Lynn Minderman

"We live like elephants. When a mother dies, the herd gathers around the young."

Chief Thabo Matela

In February and March, QMC board members Linda Gorham and I made the annual QMC trip to Qholaqhoe, Lesotho. It is a joy to cross from South Africa at the Caldensport Gate into Lesotho. People walking, cows in the road, taxis slowly making their rounds, children playing, and women with babies on their backs; nothing appears to change. When we leave the paved road to head up Qholaqhoe Mountain, the villages and people along the way have names familiar to us; our friends from our many visits over the years share experiences with us, creating a sense of belonging. Somehow, our friends know we are coming so there are many stops to share news, hugs and the Basotho handshake.



It is a fragile environment on Qholaqhoe Mountain. Drought has ravaged the region for 5 years, growing worse with each passing year. The eroded soil is parched and cracked, fields of maize stunted and brown. Early spring downpours wash out early plantings and add further eroded fields, damaging life way more than helping it. Second plantings to replace the lost crop are exposed to summer sun, heat and brutal drought. There are few natural protections from severe weather on the bare, rocky mountains and in the deep, eroded valleys. Buildings constructed with dung, mud, thatch, cement blocks, and corrugated steel are not strong. These same storms tear roofs off homes, school classrooms and barns. Survival in this difficult, fragile environment and the hardships it creates continue as the focus of our work this year.

As a matter of principle, QMC supports local efforts to achieve sustainable food, water and education resources. QMC does not suggest projects; we rely on our long-standing relationships with strong willed, determined people at Qholaqhoe High School and Likoting Orphan Village to identify, define and propose the work to be funded by QMC to improve the lives of families and their communities.

Likoting Orphan Village

“An empty stomach does not listen to explanation.”

Me Mampho Moukuinini, Garden Manager

Me Mampho Moukuinini and Me Mamotloang Moukuinini, the grandmothers who started the Orphan Garden more than 10 years ago and have maintained and grown it ever since, are fine. Me Mampho, elected Qholaqhoe Counselor two years ago, works closely with Chief Matela providing the only local government for a large number of villages. This critical service draws her time and presence away from the Garden.



Me Mamotloang looks tired (she has been fighting TB for some time), though she always wears a smile and exudes a constant happiness. She is “a little slip of nothing;” her strength resides in her character rather than her size.

Mpho, Me Mampho’s son, who graduated from university and returned to Likoting after his father’s death two years ago, has taken a job with World Vision in Butha Buthe, important work that also reduces his time at the Garden.

In their absence, Lebohang Khorong has stepped forward to continue the work. A lifelong orphan, Lebohang has lived her entire life at Likoting, calling the grandmothers her “two mothers.” For the present, she has put aside her dreams of studying at the Polytechnic College to dedicate herself to the work of the Orphan Garden.

The ravages of weather and drought are evident at the Orphan Village. Half of the roof was torn off the “emergency shelter” by the early spring storms; the chicken barn lost the entire roof; the rabbit shed roof collapsed and killed most of the rabbits. Those early storms wiped out the Orphan Garden’s first planting; drought, and an empty water storage tank have severely stunted the second planting. What water that is available is reserved for the cows, chickens and pigs, which are producing well, perhaps the sole remaining food source for the 132 orphans fed at Likoting.

The five pigs provided by QMC and the five provided by World Vision are healthy and thriving. The orphans and villagers have built a sturdy, secure, cement pen system with feed and water troughs. The sows have produced 10 piglets. The plan is to maintain breeding stock and sell the piglets in order to buy food and essential supplies for the orphans. One hundred chickens produce about 90 eggs a day; everyone gets eggs each Saturday to take away to eat during the week. The rest are sold. The Jersey milk cows are healthy and productive, having delivered two heifer calves and a bull, which will be sold to provide orphan supplies. The youngest children have a constant source of protein rich milk available. The cattle are all registered with the Lesotho Agriculture Department, which provides artificial insemination. The oldest heifer will be artificially bred soon.



It is good that, on balance, the Orphan Garden, also known as the Likoting Orphan Support Group, finds a way to grow. In the past six months, five older children, four girls and a boy, arrived at the Village. Like all the other orphans, they came because they were hungry and alone. Without hesitation, Me Mampho and Me Mamotloang found them shelter and food. One girl now lives with Me Mampho. The boy lives in the half of the emergency shelter that has a roof. Three girls live in the kitchen storage room. They are all now enrolled at QHS and actively involved in caring for the vegetable garden and the animals. QMC purchased a school uniform and shoes for each child. However they came to be at Likoting, they are indeed fortunate to have found the BoMme and the care which lives at Likoting. The hardships and the struggles that are their lives present no mystery at the Orphan Garden, only an opportunity to save another life.

Qholaqhoe Water Project

"We need to be good neighbors."
Me Mamare Mosaase, Principal



For five years, QMC has been aware of the fresh water shortages at QHS and two close by villages. The only source of water is a small spring at the high school that provides an insufficient supply for the school and the villagers. When there is too little water, QHS closes and villagers are forced to travel long distances for their water, causing tension between school and community. Over the years, proposals have been made for QMC support but because they held no evidence of cooperation between school and community, and thus were not sustainable, we could not provide funding.

This year, with drought conditions worsening, a school/community collaboration created by village and school leaders yielded a proposal that promises, with the support of QMC, to sustain a fresh water supply for both QHS and the villages.

On Qholaqhoe Mountain, there are three "eternal springs," known for generations to herdsmen who travel high on the mountain to graze their animals. Water rights to these springs, controlled by Qholaqhoe Chief Thabo Matela and the elected Qholaqhoe counselor, can only be accessed if water is to be provided to many people equally and if money is found for pipeline and storage construction. Chief Matela, Counselor Me Mampho Mokuininihi and QHS Deputy Principal Andreas Khakhane brought the villages and the school together to design a permanent solution to the water problem. (For a complete description and report on the proposal click [here](#) .)

At a community meeting in early March, in which Linda and I participated, it was agreed that the 25 families living in two villages would each contribute 100 maluti, an extraordinarily large sum of money for subsistence farmers, to the project. In addition, residents committed to providing all the labor to dig

trenches, carry pipe and construction material up the mountain and to build storage tanks. QHS agreed to contribute 20,000 maluti and to coordinate parents to help with construction.

Once these funds are collected and certified by Chief Matela, QMC will contribute 156,000 maluti (\$15,300) in two installments to cover upfront costs and the balance when work is complete and water is running. A construction firm with experience providing water systems for rural villages and that shares in the belief that all should join in the labor and maintenance so that water will be available to many people, has signed on to the project.

The initial QMC funding has been sent and work has begun. People are carrying bags of cement, steel pipe, cement blocks and tools on their backs up the steep, mountain trails. Men and women from the two villages, helped by their children, are digging the long trenches. All thank QMC donors for their support of the Qholaqhoe Mountain peoples' efforts to overcome the challenges their fragile environment presents them. You may follow the progress of the water project through photographs and reports at www.qmconnect.org.

Qholaqhoe High School

"Education is the key to life."
Andreas Khakhane, Deputy Principal



We found at Qholaqhoe High School evidence of renewed energy and pride among students and faculty for their school. The buildings have undergone some significant maintenance and improvement: missing and broken windows have been replaced; roofs painted, doors repaired, full wall blackboards added to classrooms. Security doors have been added to protect these investments in education.

Uniform hats, designed with the school logo, have contributed to student pride in their school. All in all, physical improvements of the surroundings seem to have had a positive effect on the school climate.

Over the summer (mid-December to mid-January) recess, 14 older high school girls and a teacher attended a Girls Leading Our World Camp. GLOW is a long standing international girl's youth group, designed, funded and conducted by Peace Corp volunteers, to empower young girls to control their environment. When school re-opened at the end of January the girls and their teacher started QHS's very first Girls Club. The older girls reached out to bring younger schoolgirls into the Club, which now gathers twice a week at lunch or after school.

In a culture dominated by males, the Girls Club aims to encourage academic success among young women, build individual girl's strength and confidence and provide mutual support among young girls. We were thrilled by their



confidence, camaraderie, joy and determination as they presented us a skit demonstrating their newfound commitment to deal with unwanted advances by young men. The Club has invited Deputy Principal Andreas Khakhane to bring boys to join their meeting to discuss boy/girl relationships and mutual respect.

The Club is also committed to raising funds to purchase personal hygiene items (sanitary pads, soap, shampoo, and toothpaste) to supply to girls in school and the



village. Thanks to a QHS sponsor, QMC was able to provide a start-up supply of these items and will be able to match any funds that the girls raise for this purpose. We discussed with them a “tippy tap” water/soap system for hand-washing, as there is no water at any of the school’s toilets.

Each year at the close of our visit and work at QHS, we host a meeting of scholarship students, their parents, the high school principal and deputy principal, board of education members and community leaders. This year, more than 60 adults from the villages that send students to QHS joined our students at

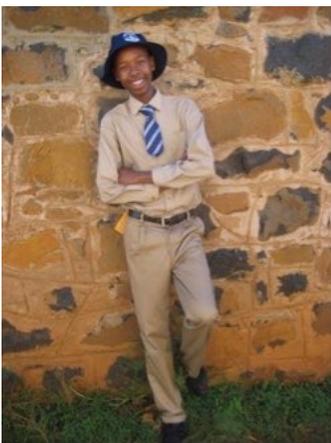
the annual Parent Meeting. As in all Basotho gatherings, this meeting commenced with a long period of quiet patience (difficult for we Americans) before a voice from within rose, starting a hymn, sung in harmony by all, then followed by prayer led by another member of the meeting.

Ntoboleng Molele spoke powerfully in English to her classmates and parents of her gratitude for the 4 years of high school she was offered by the scholarship program, an education and future she would not otherwise have had.

Tanki Katsi spoke in Sesotho about the waste of missing high school time to go up on the Mountain to the Boys Initiation School. He encouraged parents not to send their boys to this outdated cultural experience at the expense of three months of high school. Many parents spoke of their children’s need for time away from important home chores so they could study.



Deputy Principal Khakhane encouraged parents to be involved with their child’s progress at school. He reminded all parents of their commitment to provide the labor for the new water supply project so that school would not have to close in the future.



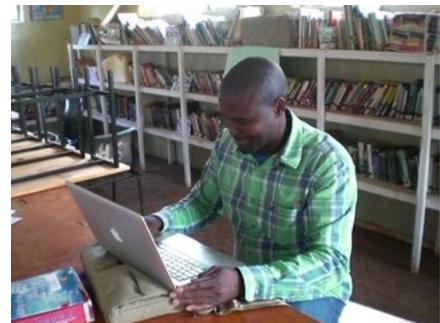
I spoke of QMC’s expectation that scholarship students attend school regularly and study hard to succeed academically and pass their courses and exams. I promised that all students who keep the faculty’s support through their attendance and academic success would have a QMC donor scholarship until they graduate. I was firm in reminding them that should a student fail to attend school and/or fail their courses for 2 semesters, thereby losing faculty support, QMC would withdraw the scholarship so that another child might be given an opportunity.

The formal meeting ended, students served juice and “biscuits” to the adults. Linda and I invited parents to join us in the courtyard for pictures, school uniform distribution, talk and laughter. As it does each year, this celebration sends us home feeling the appreciation and joy of these people we have come to know and love.

Highlights of QMC support for 2015

Qholaqhoe High School

- We met with each of our 67 students, visited the homes of six students.
- The Emergency Food Fund continues to be needed. More students were identified as having little or no food at home. Seven students are currently receiving food privately in their homes by a caring, trusted high school math teacher who coordinates the program.
- A new improved metal roof was installed in the library building, originally provided by a former Peace Corps Volunteer. The roof was damaged during severe spring storms.
- We gave four donated laptop computers to QHS teachers who help us maintain our scholarship program and provide extra academic support for students.
- Provided funding for bus transportation and college application fees for a 2014 graduate scholarship student who was awarded a Manpower Grant.
- Donated 100 African themed fiction books for the library.
- Provided school uniforms and shoes for all scholarship students and double orphans who were living at Likoting Orphan Village.
- Provided all scholarship students with a solar light which will provide needed light for studying. (They will be delivered soon.)



Future projects needed:

- Sanitary latrines for girls, boys and faculty.
- A science lab.
- Two new classrooms.
- Computers for students.
- College/training school support.



Likoting Orphan Village

- Hay, dairy meal, vet fees and medicine for Jersey dairy cows.
- Year supply of maize meal.
- Funds for used clothing and shoes.
- Twenty bags of feed for pigs.

Future projects needed:

- Repair of roof on emergency shelter.
- Repair of roof on large chicken barn.