



*This is a perfect example where a bad beginning had a good ending.*

Kasambara - Gilgil region lies between Nakuru and Gilgil towns – just some 150km north-west of Nairobi. Over a long time, residence of this region, only 24 km from Nakuru town, where far from any medical facility technically, because of cost implications. The available government dispensary at Ngorika – 21km away was ill equipped to meet the local population needs, compelling them to seek medical attention in private clinics in Nakuru town, often at unaffordable fee. Many, young and old people had prolonged battles with manageable communicable diseases which in some cases turned to life threatening status.

Amidst the gloom, came the Rhein valley Swiss hospital, founded by Stephan Holderegger, a Swiss who had lived in Kenya for more than 30 years and witnessed the wanting medical infrastructure in many under privileged regions of the country. It began its operation in 2004 providing medical care free of charge to the poorest patients, with others paying only a minimal admission charge.

Since the inauguration of the hospital, Ruth Schäfer (Mama Matata) has remained as the director, and a steady, purposeful and focused development, both of the hospital and its immediate environs has been witnessed. Through her consistent efforts a Child Welfare Clinic (CWC) that runs immunization programmes, out patient services, ante-natal clinic for pregnant mothers, Diabetic and hypertensive clinics are in place. Outreach clinics to less

accessible areas are conducted on monthly basis, and a 24 bed capacity in-patient and maternity wing is currently operational.

Ruth has stood firm in the face of challenges to the existence of the hospital. Individuals in the local community have occasionally interrupted the smooth running of the hospital, wanting to take it over. She has single handedly, thwarted their intentions, and kept the facility discharging its noble service. She speaks her mind wherever and whenever she feels it will help the local community clearly and strongly. She has remained loyal to the local people even during hard times when relocation of the hospital seemed a viable option. She insisted on continuing to provide medical services to the needy in the same area.

The post election violence in Kenya showed how selfless Ruth was. She housed Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), feed them and provided free medical care. She employed some of them temporarily in the hospital to sustain them and went on purchasing a piece of land to settle those that still could not go back on their former piece of land.

Madam Ruth (Mama Matata), has managed to attract a well trained staff and retained them. This has guaranteed stability in the staffing of the hospital and maintained consistency. The staff is well motivated with Continuous medical education seminars (CMEs) extended to the medical staff. Scheduled prize giving days have moulded the staff into a unified group where the staff exchange presents and come together occasionally. This has created unity of purpose with outstanding accomplishments. To be precise, with a staff of 35 employees, 131'709 out patient and 4'180 inpatients including maternity cases have been handled.

Despite frequent interruption from a few local individual in the running of the hospital, Madam Ruth (Mama Matata), not only pays fees for over 25 orphaned students, but also provides their basic needs i.e. clothing, food, paraffin for lighting, among others. She is kind, thoughtful and quite caring. She has gone further drilling a water borehole at Thugunui, approximately 12km from the hospital, to provide safe, clean drinking water to the surrounding community.

She is a good organizer and coordinator, as observed during an outbreak of cholera in the vicinity of the hospital in July 2008. She managed to liaise with other health provider NGOs, like UN World Food Programm and UNICEF , in the aid of the community. She has a good rapport with the ministry of health, providing them with relevant reports. This has made the ministry come in handy to assist where necessary, like during the cholera outbreak, government district hospital provided drugs to the hospital to contain the disease.

It is a blessing to the local community to have her in their midst, working, encouraging and motivating them to forge ahead as they strive to meet their health needs. The Rhein Valley Association Swiss has given the people of Kasambara a lifeline and by extension Kenyans. It is quite taxing for a developing country to effectively meet all demands for competing sectors in the country. For this GOD sent an angle, Stephan Holderegger, to the people of Kasambara coming in when no one else cared.

Thank you, Stephan, Ruth Schäfer (Mama Matata) and the Swiss Association for the hospital and what you are doing and continuing to do for the people of Kasambara.

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