The Tweed Kenya Mentoring Program

Overview

The Tweed Kenya Mentoring Program (TKMP) is a unique relationship that has grown between the Tweed Shire Council, the Tweed community and a number of rural villages in the Siaya district of Western Kenya faced with economic hardship. The program connects water and people, recognising the fundamental similarity of our communities need for water, but extreme difference in our ability to access and manage water.

The program has resulted in increased access to safe water and sanitation, improved community and environmental health for Kenyan families and strengthened bonds of friendship with the Tweed Community.

Background

Mike Rayner, former General Manager (and then Director of Engineering) of Tweed Shire Council met Olita Ogonjo, a community development worker from Kenya's Maji na Ufanisi (Water for Life) at the 3rd World Water Forum in Kyoto in March 2003. At the conference, the two immediately saw the vast contrast and common themes in their organisations’ work, and an opportunity to share and learn from each other.

In February 2004 a mentoring partnership was officially launched after investigating the feasibility of establishing a longterm relationship. The objective of the relationship was to use Tweed’s experience in water and sanitation management to assist partner communities to increase their capacity to access these services.

The program has since been hosted in Kenya by Gallamoro Network (GNet), a registered charity whose aim is to increase community access to information on the care and support of people affected by HIV/AIDS. GNet has mainstreamed water, sanitation and environmental education into its core activities and operates in Nairobi and the rural district of Siaya in western Kenya.
Implementation

The Tweed Kenya Mentoring Program (TKMP) has been in operation since September 2005. The program has evolved over the years as Tweed and Kenyan participants respond to changing circumstances, lessons learnt and experience gained. TKMP has established an effective model of cooperative community development at the grassroots level, based on the strength of personal relationships across two continents.

The Tweed community has gained insights into a vastly different culture and an enhanced appreciation of the need to value and protect its lifestyle and natural assets. The program retains the services of committed Kenyan staff, and operates within three villages where Tweed Shire Council staff members have volunteered to install water purification equipment at local dams. Kenyan staff work with local villages to operate and maintain these ‘Safewater stations’ and visit local schools to raise awareness of environmental issues and organise youth development activities based around sport.

TKMP is funded by voluntary monetary contributions made by a significant number of Tweed Shire Council staff, the sum of which is matched by Tweed Shire Council. Significant annual sponsorship is also received from the Peden family, and a large number of individuals and community services organisations. The International River Foundation in Brisbane assists with the programs financial management, enabling donations to the program to be made tax deductible. Skyjuice Foundation has also provided significant support through the donation of equipment and expertise over many years. The base program funding is $50,000 per year, covering personnel, office and communications costs.

Outcomes

Over the years, the program has evolved to respond to changing circumstances and continuous improvement strategies. The following outcomes were achieved between 2010 and 2012:

- 2010-2011 Olita Ogonjo attains Masters Degree in Integrated Water Resources Management through the International Water Centre in Brisbane, after having been awarded the Ken Thiess scholarship.
- 2010 - 2012: Maintenance of Safe Water projects 2 and 3 at Tinga and Ochillo villages. Includes providing support to dam water user committees. Good quality drinking water available to residents and three schools.
- March 2010: Completion of Safe Water 3 Project. Water filtration system installed at Ochillo School. System provides water to village and school students.
- 2010 - 2012: On-going planting of trees in the upper Nairobi river catchment with school students.
- 2010 - 2012: Urban program activities - on-going environmental awareness lecture series and establishment of environmental clubs, environmental leaders’ awards and school seedling nurseries and gardens in Nairobi.
- 2011: Establishment of Siaya rural office to focus on maintenance of Safe Water operations.
- 2011: Successful registration of YCLEAN (Youth Community Lead Environmental Action Network) as a youth association.
- February 2012: Rehabilitation/excavation of Gona Dam (village of Obambo Kadenge) and replacement of four Skyjuice filters to restore operations at the site of TKMP’s first Safe Water 1 project. Works also included installation of gutters and rain water tanks and concreting class room floors at Kubar Primary School.
- February 2012: Community health education and clinic treatments in Safe Water villages in conjunction with Kenya Health.

Key Learnings

Two way communication is imperative. Tweed Shire Council receives written reports from the Kenya desk quarterly. These contain detailed records of activities and expenditure. Reports are provided to the International River Foundation and reviewed by the TKMP working group in Tweed.
It is important to maintain accurate and transparent financial records and submit quarterly reports that satisfy project supporters.

The relationship provides unique insights into life in a developing country, which promotes reflection on the great advantages enjoyed by Australians due to our healthy environment and strong community institutions.

The Tweed Kenya Mentoring Program needs more sponsorship. Community members and businesses interested in sponsoring this initiative should contact the project steering committee. Sponsors are recognised on the TKMP website, media and promotional events undertaken by the program.

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