

HABARI

A voice for young people in Africa



Issue 40 | Summer 2010

The Women's Edition



**The need for protection:
how sanitary care is improving
the lives of African girls**

Also inside:

'Our light of hope': Nyassimo Jamillah and the Buliisa Orphans Project • A Health Club for all: Mrs Kimani and the children of Echariria • The remarkable women of the Village Savings and Loans Associations

Editor's letter



Welcome to the Summer 2010 Women's Edition of Habari. Gender equality is naturally a primary objective of all of Build Africa's programmes. We believe that education is a fundamental human right that every child is entitled to and that improved income opportunities should be equally available to men and women.

Specifically, through the Build a School programme, we address the issues that cause girls to drop out of school, such as the need for improved sanitation and access to sanitary pads. We lobby for more female teachers and support the great work teachers are doing championing the needs of female students. We also promote a teacher training programme that considers the specific learning needs of girls as well as boys.

Our income generating projects have been particularly popular with the women in the community. They account for more than 70% of our Village Savings and Loans Association scheme members for example. Similarly, the Buliisa Orphans Project is providing a lifeline to the women of all ages afflicted with HIV/AIDS, as well as to the mothers and grandmothers who have been left as the sole guardians of their families due to the epidemic.

Our programmes succeed because we partner with inspirational individuals. In this edition we feature a selection of women whose spirit and resourcefulness is giving hope to the impoverished rural communities of Kenya and Uganda. Women like Kimani Martha, Iculet Selina, Panina Wambua, Nyassimo Jamillah: these are just some of the voices that need to be heard if change is to take place at all. I hope you enjoy reading their stories.

Chris Pearson
Editor, Habari

Please don't hesitate to contact us with your thoughts, comments and opinions:

Build Africa, 27 Church Road, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN1 1HT, United Kingdom.
Tel: +44 (0)1892 519619 or Freephone 0800 652 62 94 • Fax: +44 (0)1892 529029
Email: hello@build-africa.org

www.build-africa.org

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‘Our light of hope’:

Nyassimo Jamillah and the Buliisa Orphans Project

Nyassimo Jamillah lives in the remote and rural District of Buliisa in Uganda. Hundreds of kilometres from the capital and with no local road network, its village communities feel well and truly cut off from the rest of the country. Bordered on the west by Lake Albert, the livelihoods of the local people depend on a precarious relationship with lake and land (fishing and tobacco cultivation being their main sources of income).

The district has been badly hit by the HIV/AIDS epidemic, with 26% of its population currently affected by the virus (compared with a national average of 6.4% of the population). The reasons are complex, but the sex trade that exists amongst Lake Albert’s fishing communities and the large number of people displaced by wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo and northern Uganda are significant contributory factors. The result is an orphan population of over 16,000. The poverty, emotional devastation, and other hardships brought about by losing one’s parents means that the care and protection of orphans in Buliisa, as elsewhere in Uganda, should be of paramount importance. But financial resources are limited. Also, because of its remote location the district is among those considered hard to reach by the government and as a result not enough is done to support its vulnerable children.

A mother of six, Jamillah provides for the basic needs of her children through her meagre farming income. She became the sole provider to the family when her husband passed away:

“The turning point in my life was in April 2005 when my husband died after suffering a long illness due to HIV/AIDS. We were left poorer as most of the assets we had bought over the years were sold off to save his life. But it was in vain. Now I provide every need in this household”.

The Buliisa Orphans Project is addressing the need for support. Its goal is to improve the lives of orphans and vulnerable children by encouraging income generation through Village Savings and Loans Associations and better diet by donating seeds and training farmers



Jamillah's sons help with the peeling of the cassava

in more modern agricultural practices. Gardens are supplying families who care for orphans with the nutrition they need. In addition, the project promotes child protection awareness by educating the carers and their children about children’s rights.

Jamillah says, “Before support from the Buliisa Orphans Project, life was hard to live. It was hard for me to provide food daily to my family, access medical care and school materials for my children. I depended on casual work whenever an opportunity showed up. Our light of hope was seen when Build Africa, through the Orphans Project, started supplying me cassava stems and bean seeds and training me in the methods of the Village Savings and Loans Association. Now we have food and financial help to support the orphans and vulnerable children in our families.”

Jamilla’s life has been turned around. Used to the precarious life of a subsistence farmer, she now hopes to increase her agricultural production, selling surplus produce to improve the family income. With this newly found income she can send her children to school. She can also dare to hope that their ambitions will come true:

“We work together as a family and I am trying to teach my children to understand the value of education. Every day after school I try to help my children understand what they learnt at school. All of the older children have a dream: Abdu wants to be an aeroplane engineer, Zabair wants to be a bus driver, Sulaiman wants to be a teacher and Jamillah (my only daughter) wants to be a nurse”.





Panina Wambua



The need for protection: how sanitary care is improving the lives of African girls



Build Africa works with local communities to ensure that every child, regardless of gender, has access to a quality education. The education of girls is a priority. In Uganda and Kenya, as elsewhere in the developing world, a variety of factors work against female education, including ingrained beliefs and practices that fail to appreciate the value of sending girls to school. As Panina Wambua, a School Management Committee member at Itherero Primary School in the Naivasha District of Kenya, tells us:

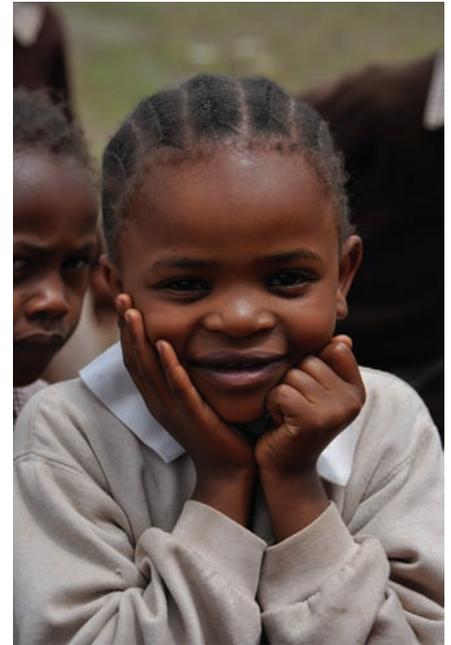
“In the school I have three children and six grandchildren. The problem we have is that many of the parents (because of their tradition) at times do not want to educate the girls, and this has been a hindrance. Not all parents understand the importance

of education. At times mothers who are single parents are forced to make their child go and get married because the income is not there. Recently there was a famine in this part of Kenya and because of this some parents encouraged their daughters to get married because they could not afford to keep them.”

There is a great deal of pressure on girls to leave school before they complete their studies: the withdrawal of family support, for example, or the sudden pressure to marry or to leave the community to find a job. Activities such as farm work, household chores and caring for other children also mean that girls are in the fields or in the home when they should be in the classroom. However, one simple contributing factor has recently been

highlighted as having a huge impact on absenteeism amongst girls: post-pubescent girls were missing school as many as five days each month due to inadequate menstrual care. In the rural locations where Build Africa works the impact of menstruation upon girls is particularly noticeable because of a lack of toilet or washing facilities, a lack of privacy, and a lack of sanitary products. Because of the fear of embarrassment girls attend school irregularly, perform poorly, and eventually drop out.

Studies such as that carried out by the Said Business School at Oxford University have shown that sanitary protection raises the educational opportunities of girls in developing countries, improving attendance, concentration, confidence



levels and participation in a range of everyday activities. As Catherine Dolan, a member of the study team, points out: "These improvements in girl's self-esteem are particularly important. A positive self-image will not only provide girls with a more rewarding and effective experience of school but will help them to participate fully in their families, communities and societies."

It is a conclusion wholly supported by our field staff and beneficiaries. Panina Wambua is in no doubt as to the benefits of sanitary protection:

"Here at Itherero Primary School we have been having help from Build Africa, they have built for us four toilets which are very beautiful and we are very grateful for that.

Last time Build Africa came they bought us some sanitary towels for the girls. I think my girls have been very grateful and very happy because of the pads. Because they know now, even when their periods appear, they are not going to be fearful. They enjoy, because they have the protection. So thank you for doing a very great job. With the provision of sanitary towels we can provide education for all the girls."

In 2010 Build Africa will continue to ensure that girls have access to separate latrine facilities. We will supply over 13,000 sanitary pads and support local radio broadcasts to discuss issues which contribute to high drop-out rates amongst girls. It is a simple formula, but it works. With better sanitary protection

comes the confidence to go to school and with improved attendance comes the opportunity to sit exams, to succeed at secondary school and ultimately to become an active, informed and respected member of the community.

The education of parents about health issues and the primary importance of female education are central to the School Development Plan process. Change does not happen overnight but without community members like Panina Wambua this process would be impossible. She (and countless others like her) is the catalyst transforming the education opportunities of girls all over rural Africa.

A Health Club for all: Mrs Kimani and the children of Echariria



In East Africa HIV/AIDS is perhaps the single biggest threat to the health and prosperity of its population, and it is the young women who are bearing the brunt of the epidemic with infection rates up to 3 to 5 times higher than those experienced by the young men. Women and girls also face the greatest burden of work, given their traditional responsibilities for growing much of the food and caring for the sick and dying. The epidemic has created large numbers of orphans who are being withdrawn from school to help lighten the family load: the

result is the loss of economic opportunities that result from a good education and the decline in the standards of living of the entire family.

It seems like a hopeless situation. But at Echariria Primary School the tireless efforts of a small band of inspirational people are making a difference to this hard hit community. Mrs Kimani Martha has been a teacher at Echariria for 17 years. But it is as Patron of the Health Club that she is best known, receiving a 'Best Health Club' award from a senior representative

of the Kenyan Government in 2009. Her club is active both in the school and in the local community, so it is no wonder the ceremony was so well attended. It was a chance for the local teachers, parents and children to say thank you to a woman who has made an invaluable contribution to the improved health attitudes of the rural population.

"As a mother, a teacher and a councillor here and out there in the community I feel more empowered. I feel good. Because it gives me the chance to know more about so many problems, and it gives me time to assist the young ones. It has also given me the knowledge I need. It's great, I have seen a difference. I have seen children changing their behaviour, and so many teachers wanting to join the club."

The club has been raising awareness of HIV/AIDS in the community for the past three years and Mrs Kimani has personally fought for the rights of infected children in that time. Her determination to see that every child is treated fairly has led her to obtain medical referrals free of charge so that poor children can be examined by a doctor. Tenacious, persistent, dogged: without Mrs Kimani's efforts the infected children would have been denied the most basic medical attention because of their extreme poverty:





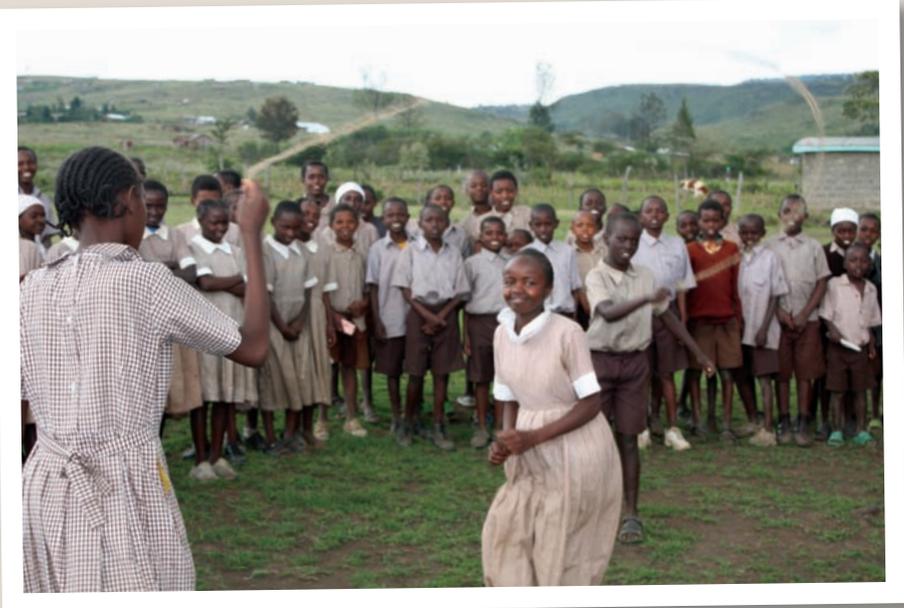
“In our community we have some mothers who have died of HIV/AIDS so there are many orphans around our school. We also have some children who are suffering from the virus. In the training, which was offered by Build Africa, I learnt so many things. I learnt more about the environment, about so many diseases. I learnt more about relationships and life skills. I have to educate the members in their roles. So, we have been talking more about the environment, health hygiene in this school, the fight against HIV/AIDS. It’s great, I have seen a difference.”

The position of Patron has also given Mrs Kimani the opportunity to talk to the other teachers about their treatment of infected children, to avoid the stigmatization that can result from a lack of understanding of the virus:

“I had a child in Class 3 some years ago when I started this club. A fellow teacher was nervous about being with this boy in the class because the boy had the virus. But, due to the knowledge and skills I have learnt from the trainings I have undergone I was able to help that boy by advising the teacher. Now the teacher is more understanding and the boy is doing very well in Class 6.”

The Health Club at Echariria Primary School has become a forum for the local people to discuss their health concerns. It provides an invaluable community service, acting as a drop-in centre open to anyone in need of support:

“The Health Club members from this school are spreading the good news, to their relatives, their neighbours. You might see parents or children popping in during break time. They want to say something. That’s why I have set aside this table here for counselling. Being positive means believing that they are not going to die. They can still live a long life if they observe their diet, the medical treatment and really follow the doctor’s advice. If they involve themselves in activities, they can live just like any other person, even living longer. That is my vision: I wish for them to live a longer life”.



Leading Build Africa: an interview with Susanne Niedrum and Oliver Kemp

We are sad to announce that after five-and-a-half years Susanne Niedrum will be stepping down as Build Africa's Chief Executive at the beginning of July. Her contribution to the continued success of Build Africa has been immeasurable: she leaves an organisation that is stronger, more focussed and growing every year.

But with this bad news comes a silver lining: the appointment of our current Director of Fundraising and Communications, Oliver Kemp, as Susanne's successor. With ten years' experience in international development, Oliver's appointment has been a popular one across the organisation. We are confident that he will carry Build Africa further towards the goal of becoming a leading charity for young people in Africa.

In the following interviews Susanne and Oliver talk candidly about their involvement with the organisation, outlining its challenges and achievements, as well as their visions for the future.



Susanne, when you began in 2004 did you have a clear vision of where you wanted to take Build Africa?

I certainly did. After 20 years living with communities in Africa I really wanted to create an organisation that was small enough to be nimble, yet professional enough to be able to build on all the good work being done out there.

My vision was twofold: firstly, I wanted to develop a model that could be applied to any rural community so that young people could get a decent education and then be able to make a decent living. Secondly, I wanted to create an organisation that would provide a bridge between supporters who want to make a difference and the communities who need their assistance. I wanted to make sure that supporters knew exactly how their money is spent and to be able to get involved.

How much of this vision has been realised? What have been Build Africa's main achievements?

We have moved a long way towards our vision. I am proud of the fact that we have built up such a wonderful group of knowledgeable and

committed donors who continue to make our work possible and that despite the recession we've managed to meet our commitments to communities and to donors every year. Our website is now one of the most transparent and informative of all international development charities. I love the fact that donors can click on a school to find out exactly what is going on. Last, but not least, I am proud of our finance systems and local finance staff, which give us 100% confidence in our accounting.

How has it been achieved?

I really want to pay tribute to our staff and donors. We have some of the most committed and experienced staff in the sector, and the same could be said about our donors! Everyone knows their part and everyone pushes to improve.

I do think that one of the reasons we have achieved so much is because we have purposefully chosen to follow a focussed approach (both geographically and in our programmes) rather than becoming a jack of all trades and spreading ourselves too thinly.

Another critical component has been trust. Tackling poverty is no easy task. Trust is essential between us and the communities we work with, between our staff and our donors, and between our UK staff and our African staff. This is why an important part of our ethos is long term commitment, because building trust takes time.

So what will be the challenges facing Oliver?

I have been inspired by Oliver since we first met in 2007. We held an extremely rigorous recruitment

process for my successor and Oliver was the clear leader. It is wonderful to be able to promote from within, and to put our money where our mouth is as a young people's organisation. I am totally confident that Oliver is the right person to lead Build Africa in the next stage of our development.

The biggest challenge for Oliver will be raising the profile of Build Africa and continuing to attract funding so we can continue our good work.



What and who will you miss the most?

The teams in all three countries. They have become like family. I'll also miss the sense of achievement at the end of each year when we manage to raise the money needed and are able to honour our commitments to the communities.

What inspires you?

My inspiration is threefold: the positive spirit and ingenuity of the communities we work with, the generosity of our donors and the unstinting hard work of our staff. It is a very inspirational job!

As a woman who has successfully steered a dynamic and growing organisation how do you view the role of women in Africa today? What do you think African women can achieve in the future?

African women are the mainstay of their families and communities (though the men don't like to admit it!). They work hard behind the scenes, often in difficult conditions. Though things are still tough, there has been improvement in the 24 years since I first came to Africa (as there has been in the UK!). Discrimination and abuse are more openly discussed now and there are lots of examples of women making it in a man's world. So I think there is a lot of hope.

What were the reasons for your decision and what plans do you have for the future?

This was an incredibly difficult decision for me. I have put my life and soul into Build Africa and I have learnt so much. But, after 24 years of full on work, I have the chance of a lifetime to take some time off. This is not goodbye, however: I hope to be of assistance as a volunteer and as a supporter.



Oliver, by way of introduction could you tell us about your career in international development?

I first decided this was what I wanted to do when I was 12 years old playing football in Gambia. I joined a charity called Education Action International when I was 21, and was promoted to run the fundraising team after three years.

After taking some time out to run my own business I worked on an advocacy project in India for children with Haemophilia. I then joined Build Africa two years ago as the Director of Fundraising.

What skills do you need to succeed in international development?

The challenges that face the world's poor are incredibly hard to overcome: it takes commitment, innovation and drive. I think the most rewarding thing about international development is seeing the real changes that Build Africa has made by harnessing these attributes.

You are a young chief executive, only in your early 30's! Are you a driven person? What are your life goals?

Yes, I am driven to make sure that we can achieve the best possible results for the people that we work with in Africa. I always wanted to be part of an effective organisation that placed people in the developing world at the heart of everything they do. Build Africa is such an organisation.

How has your time here been as Director of Fundraising and Communications?

I've loved it. The team is the best I've worked with. They're committed, clever and focussed. In addition, I'd like to take the opportunity to thank all our supporters who understand our needs and have continued their support during a tough financial period.

Why did you decide to apply for the job of Chief Executive?

I think that the best reason to do a job like this is the people we work with in Kenya and Uganda. So many people that you meet show you their tremendous strength in times of adversity and they never fail to inspire me to do more and continue to try and make a positive difference to their lives.

Will Susanne be a hard act to follow? What condition is the organisation in right now?

Certainly, she has taken the organisation to a whole new level. There are good people, good systems and rigorous and well thought out projects overseas. She has guided the organisation through difficult times and it has come out much stronger than most.

The turbulent financial times may continue for a while and government funding has already been withdrawn in many areas. However, the organisation is in a strong position which gives me the best chance of overcoming these challenges.

What is your vision for the future of the organisation?

My vision of Build Africa is of an organisation combining highly cost effective education and enterprise programmes that create long lasting development. I want to prove the effectiveness of this combined model as a way of reducing poverty in the long run. If we can do this then not only will we be making a difference, but others will be following us.

Is there a message you would like to give to Build Africa's supporters?

That the organisation is in good hands and that I will ensure that it continues to grow and that it becomes even more effective. As an ex-fundraiser I will always appreciate the level of support that we have, and I'll make sure that it gets to the people who need it most.





The remarkable women of the Village Savings and Loans Associations

Iculet Selina struggled to make ends meet until Build Africa held an introductory Village Savings and Loans Association meeting in Angod parish in rural Uganda. As a subsistence farmer with seven children to support, Selina found it impossible to save despite her inexhaustible energy and never-say-die attitude. For a long time she had wanted to start up a small enterprise that would help improve the welfare of her family, but she could not raise the money. She saw the Village Savings and Loans Association as providing the solution. In fact she was so excited about its business possibilities that she soon became a founding member of her own savings group called 'Africa Nalolo' ('Africa of Today').

After saving for 6 weeks, she borrowed 5,000 Ugandan Shillings (£1.60), using the money to test the local demand for second hand clothing. She bought a few garments and hawked her merchandise around the commercial kiosks in the nearby villages. The sales were better than she expected and this enabled her to pay back the loan immediately. She went on to borrow more money, first 15,000 Ugandan Shillings (£4.80), then 63,000 UGS (£20.16) and most recently 100,000 UGS (£32.00).

Selina is excited about the results of her simple business experiment. She now has a stall in the trading center and also takes her merchandise to the nearby weekly markets. On average she makes 10,000 UGS (£3.20) each day, with a daily profit of 3,000 UGS (£0.96). These figures seem tiny by UK standards, but in Uganda (where average annual earnings are less than £150) they are on a scale that makes a real difference to the lives of the group members.

Life has changed for Selina and her family. She is now better able to provide for their basic needs (for soap, sugar, school materials and food on the table). Not surprisingly her savings in the group have improved as she now pays in more than 3,000 UGS every week. She is delighted about the change in her family situation so far but looks to the future for more: "I want to put up a 'mabati' (tin roofed) house for my children". This would have been impossible had she not joined the savings scheme.

Over 70% of the Village Savings and Loans Association members are women. Reading Selina's story it is easy to see why. As women begin to earn money through the business opportunities that the scheme provides, they are able to contribute financially to the household: many for the first time. They no longer have to ask their husbands' permission to spend money. With income of their own, women also often find that their

voices are heard and their opinions count more in terms of household decisions, like children's health and education. They have reported to us that their experiences with the Village Savings and Loans Associations – both through their economic and community benefits – have enabled them to build greater confidence and self-esteem. 'Even if I face difficulties, I know that I will pay the money back': it is a sentiment we hear again and again from members of the groups.

Selina's story highlights the remarkable - but previously untapped - reservoir of both energy and knowledge possessed by the women of these remote communities. For her, access to money has meant that she can put food on the table and provide lasting shelter for her family. She is driven. She is entrepreneurial. And, though poor, she is creating a culture of success that will benefit her children through school and beyond.



Fundraising News

Wellesley House School

Back in 2009 Build Africa were lucky enough to receive the support of Wellesley House School in Broadstairs, Kent. Since then the primary school has been coming up with some creative ways of raising money for their link school in Kenya.

Wellesley House School is linked with Kanorero Primary School in the Naivasha District of Kenya. Living in a modern, well connected country like the UK, it is difficult to imagine a school as remote and inaccessible at Kanorero. But it takes more than an hours drive over rough terrain to get there from the nearest town. And because of limited resources the children are forced to use either unsafe classrooms or sit outside at the mercy of the elements. This is why the pupils at Wellesley House decided to focus their fundraising efforts on helping Kanorero build and furnish a desperately needed new classroom.

Build Africa first met with Wellesley School pupils back in October 2009 to share with them the work of Build Africa and introduce them to their link school. Our Community Fundraiser, Helen Sharpe, was immediately impressed by their commitment and drive:

"The response and enthusiasm of the pupils at Wellesley School to support their peers in Africa was fantastic. I knew after the insightful questions being asked that I would have energetic and creative fundraisers on my hands and I haven't been proved wrong! I am very much looking forward to accompanying teachers from Wellesley School to Kanorero so that they can see the difference their fundraising has made."

Since then the 136 pupils have worked tirelessly to raise the £6,500 needed to build and furnish a classroom at Kanorero. Pupils have participated in organised bike rides, spa days, car washes and walks to raise the necessary funds (hopefully having a lot of fun in the process).



Outdoor lessons are all too common at Kanorero Primary School

Build Africa and the community of Kanorero would like to extend their thanks to all the staff and pupils who have been involved in the fundraising at Wellesley. And a big thank you to all the families that have supported them too.

Contact Helen Sharpe at helen@build-africa.org.uk or call 01892 519619 if you would like to find out about how your school can link with a school in Kenya or Uganda. You really can make a whole world of difference to the education of African children. You will have a lot of fun in the process, and a visit to a Build Africa assisted school is an unforgettable experience. So get in touch!



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(This article is point 14 with a point 16 title in bold).

Fundraising News

London Marathon 2010

Stepping up to the challenge for Build Africa on the 25th April were Richard Thomas, Jean-Pierre Darque, Thomas Stofer, Ajit Tagore and Will Barsley. Many of you will know of Richard Thomas's fundraising credentials. A dedicated runner with 9 marathons and one 56 mile ultra marathon under his belt, he has made an incredible contribution to our fundraising efforts over the years. It was no surprise when Jean-Pierre Darque told us about his motivation for running the 2010 event:

"I was inspired initially by a photo of my friend Richard Thomas who visited one of your schools in Africa and I picked up some leaflets three years or so ago. I

have always been interested in helping children in developing countries and Build Africa fulfils that desire. Build Africa has excellent credentials and seem very good at what the charity is doing ... I am happy to put in the hours of training in the hope that my efforts will make a difference to children in the countries where you operate."

It is a sentiment shared by all our runners. We would like to say thanks to all of them for going the distance, for raising over £17,000 towards our projects in Uganda and Kenya and for posing for a photo that 'OK!' magazine featured in their 'World in Action' spread. Nice one guys!



Adidas Women's 5K Challenge, 2010

Ladies, if you feel inspired by the women of rural East Africa and want to do something that will make a difference to their lives, why not put your trainers on and get running for Build Africa on September 5th 2010. The adidas Women's 5K Challenge is a fun run for women of all ages taking place in Hyde Park, London. It's a great way to make you look and feel great. Tracey Hook, an Account Manager from Norfolk, ran for Build Africa in 2009. She told us:

"I really like the fact that you guys run sustainable projects and empower young people so they have the chance to make a better future for themselves... The day was really enjoyable. The atmosphere was great with so many people running for causes they are passionate about or in memory of a loved on."

So come on, get in touch and get ready for a great day of fundraising.



Kenyan Challenge Event 18th-27th February 2010

Support Build Africa this year by participating in an 86km trek across the breathtaking Kenyan landscape. This trek takes place in the heart of Kenya's stunning Rift Valley, an unspoilt area of East Africa that contains some of the most starkly beautiful natural scenery in the world. Immersed in the Maasai Mara you'll delve deep into the culture and wildlife of one of Africa's trekking delights.

At the end of the trip you will be offered the unique opportunity to visit one of the Build Africa schools that your fundraising has helped to support. Meeting with the teachers, children and local community will give a fantastic insight into our work.

The registration fee is £100, the fundraising commitment £3,500.

This really is the experience of a lifetime.



If you are interested in participating in the 2011 London Marathon, the Adidas 5K Women's Challenge or the Kenyan Challenge Event, please contact Helen Sharpe at helen@build-africa.org.uk or call **01892 519619**.