



Kenya Drylands Education Fund

# 2023

## Annual Report



[kdef.org](http://kdef.org)

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## Co-Executive Directors

Sarah Hadden

Ahmed Kura

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*Kenya Drylands Education*

*Fund (KDEF) is a U.S.*

*501(c)(3) nonprofit*

*organization and a*

*registered Kenyan NGO.*

*All donations are tax-*

*deductible.*



KDEF co-directors Kura Omar and Sarah Hadden co-founded the Kenya Drylands Education Fund in 2013. Our mission is to overcome the region's deep-seated barriers to education.

We write this letter from Northern Kenya, which is slowly emerging from the longest sustained drought in 40 years. Its impact was devastating: Across this remote and rural region, families lost 60 percent of all livestock and 80 percent of their goats and cows. Extreme poverty, hunger, disease, forced child marriage and school drop-out rates have all risen dramatically.

This places tremendous pressure on KDEF. Though we retain our singular focus on expanding access to education, we understand a fundamental truth: If families do not have food, if communities do not have water, they cannot send their children to school. We respond to crisis in the moment — saving lives — while advancing long-term solutions that boost school enrollment, attendance, retention and transition for the young people of Northern Kenya.

In 2023, we celebrated our 10th anniversary. In this report, you'll learn more about our decade-long impact. You'll read about some of the year's highlights, meet our students and donors, and see what we hope to achieve in 2024.

For us, one of the best memories of 2023 is the day we arrived in Nachola, an extremely poor, remote village in the conflict-ridden Baragoi region. Tribes are at war here, fighting over scarce resources like livestock and water. Yet hundreds and hundreds of residents — of all ethnic backgrounds — lined the dirt road to welcome us, clapping and cheering and singing, when we arrived to open new KDEF-constructed housing for teachers. It was a day of joy and unity, and similar celebrations now greet us in almost every village we visit.

None of this would be possible without you, and for that, we join the students and families of Northern Kenya in saying:

Asante-sana ... thank you very much!

Ahmed Kura Sarah Hadden

# OUR MISSION:

Kenya Drylands Education Fund (KDEF) strives to improve educational opportunities for underserved populations in the drylands of Kenya.

In developing nations around the world, major progress has been made toward achieving the inspiring United Nations Sustainable Development Goal: to ensure that all children have access to free, equitable and quality education by 2030. In a remote, rural and ultra-poor region of Northern Kenya, we're answering the call.

The Kenya Drylands Education Fund (KDEF) works to expand access to education for students in Marsabit and Samburu Counties. By engaging deeply with communities—listening and learning—we have developed a holistic approach that helps families to overcome the cultural and economic barriers that have traditionally led to school enrollment rates as low as 30 percent.

Less than nine percent of residents here obtain a high-school education, and only 26 percent can read and write. This keeps families locked in generational poverty.

KDEF breaks this cycle through a student-responsive, multi-faceted model we call EnART: Enrollment, Attendance, Retention and Transition. You can learn more about this innovative model at our website ([kdef.org](http://kdef.org))



Enrollment • Attendance & Retention • Transition

## KDEF SCHOLARS: Our Impact

Since our founding in 2013, KDEF has sponsored 329 high-school and 83 college students with scholarships that cover tuition, room and board, books and fees.



# MEET A KDEF SCHOLAR:

## Monica Pirisi Lekupe

In Kenya, primary school is free but secondary school is expensive, far beyond the reach of many families. With the help of individual donors and foundations, KDEF provides promising students from vulnerable families with the resources they need to attend high-quality high schools and universities.

Monica Lekupe was raised by a single mother who is illiterate, survived two abusive marriages, and supported her children by selling charcoal. Monica calls her mom “her hero” for teaching her important lessons about hope, determination and perseverance.

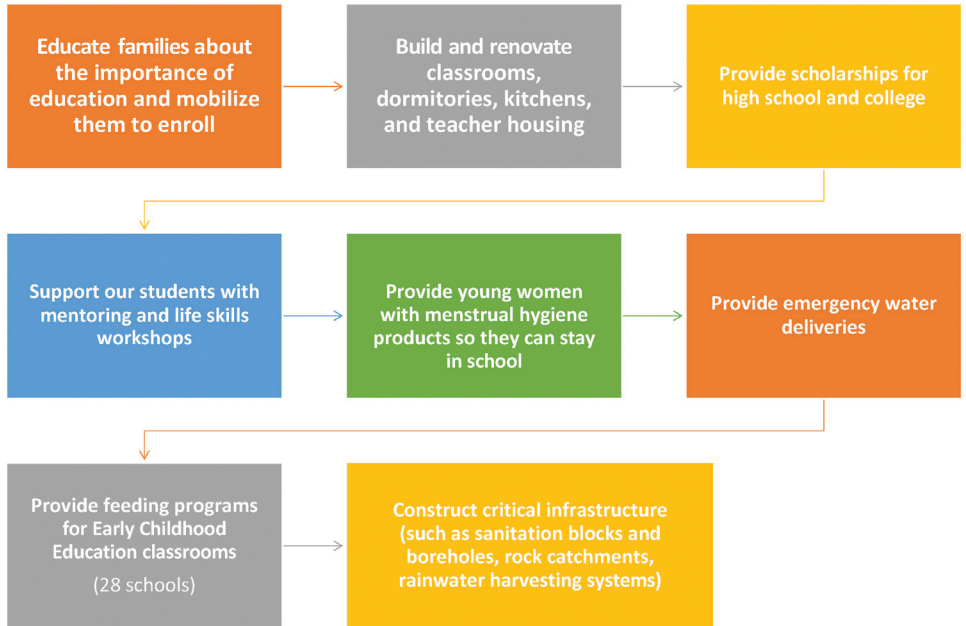
Supported by a KDEF scholarship, Monica attended secondary school far from home and spent breaks in the girls’ dormitory at our KDEF Center. With a comfortable and safe place to live — and a library with electricity so she could keep up with her studies — she excelled academically and was a role model to other students. She’s now in her second year at Ashesi — one of Africa’s leading universities — and is pursuing a BS in management information systems.

“My hope is that one day I become the voice of my people,” says Monica. “Young people who have a bright future — girls and boys with all kinds of talents — have lost faith. We must say no to archaic customs, to early marriages and to gender-based violence in our communities.”



# OUR IMPACT:

Changing the face of Northern Kenya since 2013.



Since our founding in 2013, KDEF has been changing the face of Northern Kenya through local solutions and local leadership. We believe the best and most enduring work is accomplished not for the people, but among and by the people. **Here's a snapshot of our work in 2023.**

- Built 8 classrooms, 1 school kitchen, 10 sanitation stations, 7 teacher housing units, 4 student dormitories and 2 high-school science centers
- Constructed 1 rainwater storage tank, 10 rainwater harvesting tanks, and four boreholes or other water projects
- Completed 60 water-trucking trips, delivering life-saving water to remote villages all along the way
- Installed 3 security fences around schools and dorms to protect students from wildlife and tribal violence
- Hosted 217 secondary school students from across Northern Kenya at our annual four-day mentorship workshop
- Provided hot, nutritious meals to students at 21 schools as part of the KDEF feeding program
- Purchased 50 school uniforms for students who could not afford them
- Provided full scholarships to 63 new high-school (241 total) and 39 college students
- Delivered menstrual hygiene supplies to 1,800 young women, so they can stay in school
- Helped 2,600 families with tuition through our Food for Fees and Goats for Fees program



## WHERE WE WORK

We work in Marsabit and Samburu Counties, a remote region that covers 34,000 square miles of arid and semi-arid land. It's home to semi-nomadic, pastoral communities that for centuries have lived by raising and selling livestock. It is a deeply patriarchal culture in which men manage the herds, women tend to the homestead, and children stay home from school to help with chores. Girls are far more likely than boys to leave school early to help their mothers or to enter an arranged marriage.

Climate change—severe cycles of drought and expanding desertification—is now disrupting this way of life. Men are gone for months, ranging far afield to find grazing territory or migrating to other countries to find work. Left at home to support the children, women are now raising animals, or picking up a meager income through unskilled labor.

This transition presents many challenges but also an opportunity to foster the economic empowerment of women. It's within this context that KDEF is focused on education as the most powerful level for transformation—for all children, but primarily for girls.

# 2023: OUR FINANCES

## EXPENSES

Program Costs	\$1,913,064.28	93%
Direct Program Support Costs	\$81,030.27	4%
Administrative	\$59,336.13	3%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$2,053,430.68</b>	

## INCOME

Grants	\$1,642,285.26	83%
Individual	\$335,565.70	17%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,977,850.96</b>	

KDEF relies heavily on foundation and individual donations to advance our work in an extremely remote and impoverished region of the world. Our approach to fundraising is simple: We try to raise flexible funds from donors who understand our approach and know that we need to be nimble. We spend our time in the field: Listening to locals, building programs that respond to their needs, and being willing to innovate — within our holistic EnART model — to reach our goals.

Our mission is to improve access to education across Northern Kenya. From delivering food and water to building classrooms and dorms, we understand — deeply — what it takes to break down deep-seated cultural barriers and overcome generational poverty.

We are exceedingly grateful to the generous donors who support this work.

## KDEF Key Donors (\$5,000 or more)

Vibrant Village Foundation  
 Right Track Foundation  
 Anonymous Foundation  
 Schlossman Family Fund  
 Kingsberg Foundation  
 Journey Charitable Foundation  
 Polly and John Timken Jr. Foundation  
 H. Hovnanian Family Foundation

Lisa and John Cueman  
 Bill and Linda Drunisc  
 James and Babetta Ferris  
 Sarah and Bill Hadden  
 Susie Hunter  
 Robert and Karin Karol  
 Ellen and Roger Leeds  
 Kaye Manly  
 Elizabeth and Scott Marsh  
 Helen and Jeff Mattox  
 David Middleton  
 John and Polly Timken

To donate go to  
[KDEF.org](https://kdef.org) and click the  
 donate button

## OUR PROJECTS

\$3	Water for a month
\$10	Menstrual hygiene supplies
\$20	Goats for fees
\$30	Feed a child for a year
\$1,000	Sponsor a student (one-year high-school scholarship)
\$2,000	Classroom furniture
\$15,000	Build a classroom

# MEET A KDEF DONOR:

## Betty Marsh

I had the wonderful opportunity to return to Ngrunit and the KDEF headquarters with Sarah and Kura in late April of this year. What a difference a couple of years makes in the lives of the northern Kenyans when KDEF is involved!

The focus of the trip was to celebrate the opening of the new KDEF Sport and Community Center where villagers, young and old, will gather from miles away for games, community activities and KDEF programs. It was truly a day of community celebration as school children sang, elders danced, politicians spoke and games were played well into the evening. The basketball and volleyball courts were in constant use as was the darts room. Villagers also enjoyed ping pong, pool and games on an adjacent soccer field. The day culminated in the awarding of trophies, accompanied by much singing and dancing.

This is but one of the many projects that KDEF has completed over the course of two years. Wells have been dug and classrooms, dormitories and schools have been built as far north as the Ethiopian border. Mentoring workshops for students entering secondary school were held, food was distributed to drought-ridden villages, and partnerships forged with other area nonprofits. Both Sarah and Kura continue to be revered as they traverse the countryside, asking villagers what they need to improve their lives. As I return home, I continue to marvel at KDEF's accomplishments in a world where so many have so little. —*Elizabeth (Betty) Marsh*





# 2023 HIGHLIGHTS



KDEF's innovative Goats for Fees program has helped close to 2,000 students to stay in school during a period of sustained crisis. Residents sell goats at KDEF-sponsored markets and use the revenue to pay their school fees. KDEF then donates the goats to schools, which can sell the animals to raise money, or to supplement student meals with nutritious meat.



In Kenya, the national exams – which students take upon completing secondary school – are key to attending university. This important test includes a science section, for which students must demonstrate basic hands-on lab skills. Yet most secondary schools in Northern Kenya lack science labs and equipment. In 2023, we built science centers at two high schools, so students can succeed in the national exam.

On a beautiful September evening in Vermont, KDEF held its 10th anniversary celebration. Remarkably, our goal of providing 50 high-school scholarships was met in just one night!

In a country where secondary education is not free, and far beyond the financial reach of most families, KDEF's generous donors are making dreams come true.





Every December, several hundred students gather at the KDEF Center in Ngurunit for our four-day mentorship program. They learn important life skills, forge new friendships with peers and role models, and come away inspired to pursue their education and lift their families out of generational poverty.



In October, KDEF co-founder and country director, Kura Omar, was presented the Head of State Commendation Award by the president of Kenya in recognition of outstanding service to the nation. KDEF's hero is now Kenya's hero!



KDEF's school feeding program provides hot, nutritious meals to students who might not otherwise have food to eat. This saves lives and encourages school enrollment and attendance for families who struggle with food insecurity. KDEF is now offering its feeding program in 21 schools across the region.



This year, we're focused on reaching even more remote regions. Our targets include Illeret, a high-needs community with 19,000 residents near the Ethiopian border. It's the most distant and disadvantaged community that KDEF has ever worked in. Laikipia and Isiolo Counties have also asked for our partnership. In every region, our work begins with Community Conversations, bringing together local leaders and residents to help identify needs and develop a three-year plan.

KDEF built eight new classrooms across the region in 2023. This new facility, at the Nyiro Girls Secondary School in South Horr, included a classroom, a second dormitory for boarding students, showers, and a sanitation block with indoor toilets. KDEF also offers its Food for Fees program here.



# 2024:

## Our Approach

Northern Kenya is recovering from a series of catastrophes: The longest and most severe drought in 40 years, the COVID-19 pandemic, a locust invasion and torrential El Nino rains. These challenges have devastated families, many of whom lost their herds and have given up on pastoralism, a way of life here for centuries. Across villages, many residents now rely solely on food aid for sustenance, with no realistic way to make a living. Poverty, violence, food insecurity, school absenteeism and drop-out rates, teen pregnancy and forced marriage are all on the rise. People are suffering.

Since our founding in 2013, **KDEF has remained focused on our mission — to expand access to education in one of the poorest and most remote parts of Africa.** But we understand and affirm what we are told, time and again, by the people we serve: If families do not have food, if communities do not have water, if survival is at stake, it is harder to send children to school and to value the long-term investment of education. In times of crisis, KDEF will continue to view our mission through a people-powered lens: We identify all of the barriers to education, and we work hand-in-hand with villages and families to break those barriers down.



KDEF co-founders Kura Omar and Sarah Hadden toast the opening of a new classroom with joyful villagers in the village of Lare Orok.



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