



Kenya Drylands Education Fund

2024

Annual Report



kdef.org

AT KDEF, WE BELIEVE:

- Every child has a right to an education
- Every girl deserves access to menstrual health products and knowledge
- All children should learn in safe, supportive environments
- School feeding programs are essential to children's health, growth and ability to thrive
- Clean, accessible water is a fundamental human right—for every person, in every place

Together, we are working to make these rights a reality for children in Northern Kenya.

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We were shocked when we found Basiana in the remote village of Loiyangalani. There she was, a girl 18 years old, thin as a rail, working at the construction site of Elmosaretu Girls High School, doing hard labor in the heat and sun for \$6 a day. All day long she pushed wheelbarrows of sand, making concrete for what will be the first-ever girls' high school in the region ... a project KDEF funded.

The moment was unforgettable. Kura and I know Basiana. How could this bright young woman, a recent graduate of Bishop Cavallera Girls High School — who had excelled in her national exams and been accepted to the University of Nairobi Teachers College — be here doing hard labor?

The answer is sobering and tragic. Basiana's mother, a single parent with nine children to feed, breaks stones to make gravel to support her family. Determined to help in any way she could, Basiana chose to contribute her strength and time to help feed her family.

Basiana was lucky. With a full KDEF scholarship, she's now enrolled in college and someday will return to this very school—not as a laborer, but as a teacher inspiring the next generation of young students. Without the support of KDEF, Basiana's life would have been very different. She would've likely been already married to a man two to three times her age, with a child on her back, breaking stones beside her mother and shattering any dreams she might have had.

Stories like Basiana's reflect the transformative power of education in the Kenya Drylands and are at the heart of this report. Together with the students and families of Northern Kenya, we extend our heartfelt thanks to you.

Ahmed Kura Sarah Hadden

WHERE WE WORK

KDEF works in the drylands of Northern Kenya, a remote and arid region spanning 100,000 square kilometers (38,600 square miles). These lands are home to semi-nomadic pastoral communities who have raised livestock for generations. Within this deeply patriarchal society, men traditionally manage herds, women care for the homestead, and children assist with chores, often sacrificing education to do so. **Girls, in particular, are more likely to drop out of school** to help their mothers or to enter arranged marriages.

Climate change is drastically reshaping this way of life. Cycles of severe drought and expanding desertification have made grazing lands scarce, forcing men to leave for months or migrate in search of work. This shift places new burdens on women, who must now raise livestock and earn incomes to support their families.

Less than nine percent of residents here obtain a high-school education, and only 26 percent can read or write. School enrollment rates are traditionally as low as 30 percent. **This keeps families locked in generational poverty.**



David Middleton

MEET A KDEF SCHOLAR: Elizabeth Leiyagu

Elizabeth Leiyagu was raised in the remote Northern Kenyan village of Mutirithia. She's the oldest of 12 siblings. Her father, a herder, has two wives. While her father has a high-school diploma, neither of his wives ever attended school.

"My father wanted us to have an education," she says. "He dreamed of college, but he had to take care of his livestock ... his sole source of income. He taught my sister and I how to read and write, and he sold his only bull to send us to high school. But that money was soon depleted."

As a KDEF Scholar, Elizabeth excelled and was accepted to Ashesi, one of Africa's most prestigious universities. She's now a sophomore majoring in Computer Science. Last semester, she made the Dean's List.

"School is interesting," she writes. "We had a career fair last week, and I got insights about the job market and how I can be ready. My goal for 2025 is to get an internship to build on my CV. I've been elected to the student parliament and I'm a math tutor and mentor. I've also secured a work-study position at the library."

"I hope to continue to serve my school, my country and Africa in general."



In Kenya, primary school is free. But secondary school is expensive, with costs far beyond the reach of the families we serve. That's why we provide scholarships to hard-working young Kenyans through our KDEF Scholars program. Since our founding in 2013, KDEF has sponsored 326 high-school and 64 university students with full scholarships that cover tuition, room and board, books and fees.

WHAT WE DO

KDEF works to expand access to education in the remote, rural Marsabit and Samburu districts of Northern Kenya. By engaging deeply with communities — listening and learning — we’ve developed **a holistic approach** that helps families overcome deep-seated cultural and economic barriers to education.

We break this cycle through a student-responsive model we call EnART: **school enrollment, attendance, retention and transition.**

We work with communities and families — often one on one — to get children enrolled in school. We support attendance through feeding and menstrual hygiene programs. We offer scholarships to cover the cost of tuition, books, uniforms and fees. We build critical education infrastructure: schools, science centers, and dorms for students and teachers. We also recognize the life-saving role of water in drought-stricken communities: We deliver water during droughts and build wells, boreholes and sanitation stations for villages.



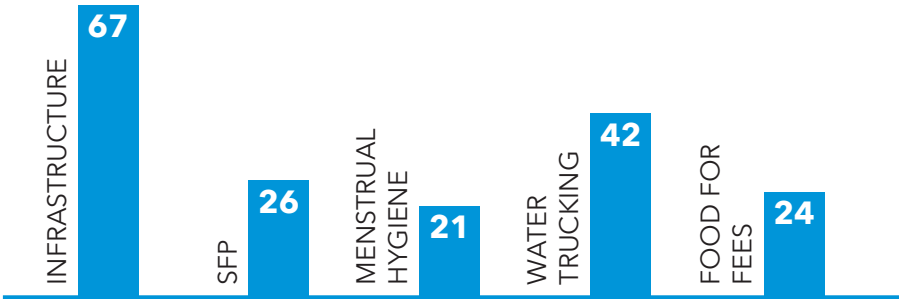
Enrollment • Attendance & Retention • Transition



David Middleton

OUR IMPACT

KDEF is transforming Northern Kenya by providing families and villages with every tool they need to support education. We start by engaging residents and leaders in extensive Community Conversations, working face-to-face to identify challenges and solutions. This year alone, we finished 67 infrastructure projects — including building 14 classrooms, 15 washrooms, four teacher housing units, two student dorms and providing five communities with sustainable water projects. We’re feeding students in 26 schools, providing menstrual hygiene supplies in 21 schools, trucking water to 42 schools and villages, and supporting nutrition (and helping families pay for tuition) with our “Food for Fees” program in 24 schools. What a year!



2024: OUR FINANCES

KDEF relies heavily on foundation and individual donations to advance our work in an extremely remote and ultra-poor part 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 what it takes to break down deep-seated cultural and economic barriers to school attendance, and to overcome generational poverty. We are exceedingly grateful to the generous donors who support this work.

2024 INCOME		
Grants	\$1,486,646.00	66%
Individual	\$762,698.00	34%
TOTAL	\$2,249,344.00	
2024 EXPENSES		
Program Costs	\$2,011,287.00	95%
Direct Program Expenses	\$42,041.00	2%
Administrative Costs	\$64,991.00	3%
TOTAL	\$2,118,319.00	

DONOR PROFILE: The Miksis Family

Our family has been KDEF supporters for some time now, but we took our first trip to Kenya in June 2024 to see firsthand what the organization really does. Having Kura as our guide was more than we could have hoped for—his positive influence and the impact that KDEF has had on so many is literally everywhere.

We saw that impact directly while visiting the Merille Mixed Secondary School, where the children were hard at work in their new science center built by KDEF. The students delighted in showing off their knowledge, all while preparing for the university entrance exam.

We also toured their dormitories, which allow many children from great distances to have a quality education that would otherwise not be possible.

In the United States, we often take the availability of a clean and plentiful water supply for granted. Not so in Kenya, where many travel miles for water. Part of KDEF’s mission is to fund projects which create reliable water sources by drilling boreholes that will supply entire regions for years.

We saw up close how these drilling projects, along with the construction of rain storage tanks and KDEF water truck deliveries, have provided remote areas with this essential element of survival.


The impact is real, and the math is so simple. Quality education plus a sustainable water supply equals lifelong prosperity and dignity. We couldn’t feel more proud to be part of that equation for the brighter future that KDEF makes possible for so many in northern Kenya.





OUR IMPACT


Changing the face of Northern Kenya since 2013

From 2019 to 2023, KDEF successfully implemented 582 projects, transforming education and community development across Northern Kenya. Here's a snapshot of what we've achieved:

 326 high-school and 64 college students received full scholarships.


 We provided 7,200 girls with menstrual hygiene products to support their health and school attendance.


 Every year, we help keep 4,000 students in school through our Food for Fees and Goats for Fees initiatives.


 We've established 6 new primary and secondary schools and 12 Early Childhood Development (ECD) centers.

 In remote areas, we built:


- 35 classrooms
- 9 school kitchens
- 67 school toilets

 To support teachers, we built 18 housing units near schools


 We built 14 dormitories to house students from the most remote areas, giving them safe and accessible education.


 Our water and sanitation impact over these four years includes:

- 23 water conservation projects, including masonry tanks, rock catchments, and rainwater harvesting systems
- 18 shallow wells rehabilitated for community and livestock use
- 4 major projects delivering clean water to schools and villages

 We fenced 16 schools to keep students safe

 We distributed 310 desks

 Implemented school feeding programs in 60 schools, supporting 400 learners with daily meals.

 Provided school uniforms for learners from extremely poor households.

Donate online: kdef.org

A MILESTONE ACHIEVEMENT Elmosaretu Girls High School

In early 2024, KDEF proudly launched the first all-girls high school in Loiyangalani. The inaugural Form One class includes 43 girls, each receiving full sponsorship for the next two years. The school's name—*Elmosaretu*—is derived from the region's four traditional tribes: Elmolo, Samburu, Rendille and Turkana. These tribes have a long history of violent conflict over land, water and livestock. Elmosaretu brings together girls from all four communities, symbolizing hope for unity and peace in the region.



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2024 HIGHLIGHT



A New Girls Dorm In Merille

When girls must walk long distances to and from school each day, they face significant risks. However, these concerns have now been addressed for students at Merille Mixed Day High School! KDEF previously built a state-of-the-art dormitory for boys, and now we've an equally impressive dormitory for the girls.

KDEF has completely transformed this school. Along with the new dormitories, we have built a science lab, a classroom, and a project that provides clean and sustainable water sources for the school and surrounding community. In 2025, we plan to build a library.



2024 HIGHLIGHTS

We Did It! New Science Center Opens in Nachola

On September 11, 2024, KDEF supporters raised an astonishing \$160,000 in a single night to support education in the war-torn community of Nachola in Baragoi, Kenya. Eight months later, KDEF proudly opened a fully equipped, state-of-the-art high-school science center at Nachola Mixed Secondary School, the largest single gift ever to an education institution in Samburu North! The community turned out in full color and celebration to receive this transformative facility. It will open doors to college and STEM careers like engineering and medicine for students from Nachola and beyond. A heartfelt thank you to KDEF supporters whose donations made this possible and to the KDEF team on the ground who turned those donations into a facility that will support the sciences for future generations to come.



Martha Galdayan: A Journey of Resilience and Hope

Martha Galdayan, 19, is a Form 4 (Grade 12) student at Karare Mixed Day School. Her path to education has been marked by incredible hardship, yet she has faced every challenge with unwavering determination, rising to become the top student in her class.

During the first term of her third year in high school, Martha's life took an unexpected turn—she became pregnant. The news brought her education to a halt and led to rejection by her own family. Alone and pregnant, Martha found support from an unexpected source: the family of her baby's father, who cared for her as one of their own.

After three years of raising her son, Martha resolved to return to school. Her decision was met with skepticism and discouragement. But Martha had a dream of becoming a lawyer, and nothing would stand in her way.

She recalled hearing from a friend about someone named Kura, the director of Kenya Drylands Education Fund, who could be found at the KDEF Center in Ngurunit. Despite never having met him, Martha found a way to travel 120 km (74 miles) to the center. When she arrived, Kura was away in the field. For a month, she stayed with a friend and walked long distances each day to the center, holding on to hope for a chance to meet him.

Eventually, her persistence paid off. When she finally met Kura, there were many others waiting to speak with him, but after several hours, she had her moment. As she poured out her story, through tears and fatigue, Kura saw a girl thin from hunger, weakened by pneumonia, but still holding onto hope. He sprang into action, reaching out to several schools in search of a spot for her. It was a difficult time, as most schools were already full, but Karare Mixed Day School offered her a place.

Today, thanks to the support of Kura, KDEF, her sponsor—the First Congregational Church of Manchester in Vermont—her teachers, and a principal, all who believed in her, Martha is thriving. She is the top student in her class and also a school prefect and a role model to many marginalized students.

2024 HIGHLIGHTS



A Field of Dreams in Ngurunit

In the remote village of Ngurunit, in the drylands of northern Kenya, KDEF has built a one-of-a-kind sports complex—made possible by a generous donor. Designed to serve both as a recreational hub and a rainwater harvesting system, the facility has become a vital space for community gathering, especially in this drought-prone region.

In December 2024, the complex came alive as KDEF hosted the inaugural “Olympics of Northern Kenya”—a groundbreaking youth tournament. Over 500 boys and girls from 23 communities gathered to compete in soccer, volleyball, basketball, darts, and pool. The opening ceremony was a vibrant celebration, with teams parading in bright KDEF uniforms as hundreds of spectators cheered them on.

For three days, competition and camaraderie filled the air. The event culminated in a joyful closing ceremony with music, awards, and a powerful sense of shared achievement. At its heart, the tournament was more than a game—it was a peacebuilding initiative. By bringing together youth from diverse backgrounds, it fostered unity, understanding, and hope for a more inclusive future.



Where Water Flows, Future Begins

Today is a school day, but this young boy isn't in class. He wasn't there yesterday—and, in fact, he's never been. Instead of learning from books, his daily lessons revolve around survival: fetching water for his family.

He comes from HulaHula, a community of 10,000 people tucked into Mt. Marsabit in Marsabit County, Kenya. For more than 55 years, clean water has remained painfully out of reach. The only available source is a spring deep within the forest, where tribal conflicts over access are common—and sometimes fatal. In the dry season, the spring often dries up entirely, forcing villagers to walk over 10 kilometers in search of water, exposing them to exhaustion, dehydration, and even wildlife attacks.

Determined to change that, KDEF is doing what many thought impossible: locating a sustainable water source closer to the road and the heart of the community. With the support of local administrators and the expertise of geophysicists and technical teams, we successfully drilled 570 meters underground—uncovering a safe, sufficient water source that will serve schools, health facilities, and the entire village for years to come.

And now, this young boy has a chance at something more. No longer bound to the burden of water collection, he can step into a classroom for the first time.



David Middleton

A LIFE-CHANGING TRIP TO SEE OUR WORK FIRSTHAND

Photographer, author, educator and generous KDEF donor David Middleton traveled to Northern Kenya in 2024 to see our work firsthand. He came home profoundly impacted by the experience.

"In my travels with Kura and the KDEF team, I saw opportunity and hope blossom in villages and families where none had ever been. To see the excited faces of women at a new well, or to hear the deep gratitude of students given a chance to continue their studies, gave me concrete examples of the life-changing impact that KDEF is having in the drylands of Northern Kenya."

We are grateful to David for his generous support of our programs and, in particular, of our scholarship program. His iconic image on the front cover shows a child wearing a chip around her neck. This chip holds preloaded funds and is used to activate a water kiosk built by KDEF in the remote village of Karare. Water is supplied to the kiosk through a 154-meter-deep borehole, drilled by KDEF in a location where few believed water could ever be found.



Kenya Drylands Education Fund

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