SALT/YAMEN Service Opportunity

Assignment Title & Partner Organization: SALT/YAMEN: Community Development Assistant – Olepolos Mennonite Church

Term: August 17, 2021 – July 21, 2022
FTE: 1.0
Location: Olepolos, Kenya
Date Required: August 17, 2021

Program information and policies can be found at mcc.org/salt or mcc.org/yamen

*MCC is an equal opportunity employer, committed to employment equity. MCC values diversity and invites all qualified candidates to apply.*

Synopsis:

The SALT/YAMENer will serve with Olepolos Mennonite Church which recognizes community development as an essential part of their programs. The participant will serve alongside the church development staff in the mobilization and organization of community development outreach programs, exploring ways in which they can continue to work in participatory approaches based on Kingdom values.

Qualifications:

*All MCC workers are expected to exhibit a commitment to personal Christian faith and discipleship; active church membership; and nonviolent peacemaking.*

*An invitation to an assignment is contingent on the successful completion of a criminal background check.*

- Bachelor’s degree in community development, social work, agricultural and livestock development, or peace studies.
- Strong oral and written English skills.
- Work experience in community development, social work, agricultural and livestock development, or peace studies, while not required, is desirable and will be useful in this placement.
- Willingness and motivation to prioritize learning a new language.
- Ability to organize/mobilize the community for community development activities using available/minimal resources.
- Passionate about environmental conservation, peace, and reconciliation, social services (health, education), spiritual and value-based lifestyle with a non-discriminatory attitude towards race, gender, and social status.
- Ability to identify gaps and taking initiative.
- Ability to work independently as assigned or cooperatively as a team member.
- Strong computer skills (should be well versed with MS Office, especially Word and Excel and electronic communication).
- Willingness to attend/participate in a local church.
- Willingness to live in a rural area with limited amenities with a host family.
• Willingness and ability to be flexible as assignment responsibilities may change or be refined over time.

Assignment Narrative:

The SALT/YAMENer will serve with Olepolos Mennonite Church which recognizes community development as an essential part of their programming. The church was planted in 1997 by Clair and Beth Good and local community leaders. The Goods were then missionaries with Eastern Mennonite Missions (EMM) and lived in the community for over ten years. At that time there was no church, no school, no roads, no clinic, not many schooled people, and the situation was dire because of poverty, disease and ignorance. However, it is now a vibrant Mennonite community with a population of 2,000 to 5,000 community members. In 1998, a baseline survey was done to see how much the community had achieved in development over the past 20 years, and the community invited facilitators to work together to discover the dreams the people of Olepolos had for their future. They created a baseline document to record and reflect on what resources they had available then. Since that exercise, the community has seen amazing development for over 20 years.

The issues that were revealed from the first baseline -- lack of food-security, illiteracy, poverty, spiritual poverty, and drunkenness -- have since become non-issues. Twenty years later, the community wished to re-evaluate how far they had come and what their new goals for the future were. Therefore, in 2020, a follow-up baseline survey, facilitated by funds from MCC, was done to see how far the community had come since 1998. This baseline aimed to update the information available so that they could begin from the actual state of the village in 2020. Facilitators from within the community were used and following the book "UMOJA: Transforming Communities" by Francis Njoroge et al, the second baseline survey was carried out. This process involved an initial all-community meeting, workshops for the information gathering teams, data collection, compilation, analysis, and a final reflective all-community meeting. This new baseline will help the villagers to engage in another cycle of vision casting and implementation.

The SALT/YAMENer stationed in this position will assist in the implementation of this 2020 baseline document. The partner would like to explore ways in which they can continue to work in participatory community development using approaches based on Kingdom values. The participant will serve alongside the church development staff in the mobilization and organization of community development outreach programs. This position will require significant initiative and creativity to walk alongside an under-resourced community. The participant must exemplify flexibility and patience as assignment responsibilities may change based on community/partner needs.

MCC has been working in Kenya since 1974 and implements projects through local partner organizations in food-security, education, health, and peace. MCC Kenya offers capacity building and funds to help partner organizations to implement their programs. Currently, the MCC Kenya staff composition is seven program staff and two service workers, and in addition, each year there are usually two to three SALT/YAMENers in the program.

The SALT/YAMENer will work closely with the MCC Kenya Representatives and the MCC Exchange Coordinator who will be in charge of making sure that they are doing well at work and in other aspects of their lives. The MCC Reps and MCC Exchange Coordinator live in Nairobi and work out of the MCC Nairobi office, about a four-hour bus ride from Olepolos. While the MCC Kenya team is spread out, we meet weekly for team devotions and check-in via Zoom and quarterly for meetings in-person to share about our work and other emerging issues in MCC. There is also an annual
significant challenge to the people of Narok County. Dr. Land is a key leader in commerce in the county. Emurua Dikirir is home to aFa 17,942 people. The Maasai community.

There will be limited contact with people outside of the local community. The area is 4 hours by bus from Nairobi where the MCC Kenya office is located. The closest town is Narok which is small compared to Nairobi. We advise the SALT/YAMEner to make connections with the people around the community so that they don’t feel isolated. The MCC Kenya staff in other locations will regularly keep in touch to provide support and guidance.

Narok County is named after, Enkare Narok, the river flowing through Narok town. It covers an area of 17,944 sq km and has a population of 850,920. The temperature range is 54 to 82 degrees Fahrenheit (12 to 28° C) and the average rainfall range is 20 to 70 inches (508 to 1778 mm) per annum. The Maasai Mara National Park, a famous tourist destination, is in Narok County. This park is home to the great wildebeest migration which is one of the “Seven New Wonders of the World.” It constitutes 6 sub-counties: Kilgoris, Narok North, Narok South, Narok East, Narok West, and Emurua Dikirr. Narok town is the capital of Narok County and stands as the primary centre of commerce in the county.

Land issues and disputes are problems that have been experienced in Narok County for over five decades. Drought is also a significant challenge for the pastoralists and mixed farmers. Drought causes low yields, lack of animal feed, and drying up of the seasonal rivers which pose a challenge in access to water for animal and household needs. Lack of markets to sell farm produce is a significant challenge to the people of Narok County. This forces them to sell their produce to

Duties:

• Assist the Community Development Officer in the implementation of the 2020 baseline document.
• Assist in writing grant proposals and researching potential donors.
• Assist in working at ways to persuade people to use what God has entrusted to them to achieve their development goals (land, livestock, labour, and other resources).
• Assist the community to map out realistic and sustainable development goals using the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) approach.
• Assist in implementing the monitoring and evaluation plan and feedback for improvement.
• Assist with project planning and reporting.
• Assist in documentation and dissemination of projects stories.
• Support exploring ways in which they can continue to work in participatory community development using approaches based on Kingdom values.
• Attend the Olepolos Mennonite Church and participate in any activities that might come up associated with the development arm of the church.
• Be part of the MCC Kenya team and fully involved in any MCC Kenya staff activities such as team meetings and the annual retreat.

Location Description:

This assignment is located in Olepolos, Ololulunga in Narok County found along the Great Rift Valley in Kenya. The placement is affiliated with a Mennonite congregation, and the area is inhabited by the Maasai community.

There will be limited contact with people outside of the local community. The area is 4 hours by bus from Nairobi where the MCC Kenya office is located. The closest town is Narok which is small compared to Nairobi. We advise the SALT/YAMEner to make connections with the people around the community so that they don’t feel isolated. The MCC Kenya staff in other locations will regularly keep in touch to provide support and guidance.

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brokers at low prices. The high costs of production, harvesting, and transportation, along with a lack of reliable markets have posed significant challenges to members of this community.

The area is warm with significant rain and primarily rural. The placement is affiliated with a Mennonite congregation, and the area is inhabited by the Maasai community. Most of the population is Christian. Transportation is via public means such as buses, small taxi “matatu,” and motorbikes. The location is about 4 hours away by bus on a tarred highway from the MCC office in the capital city of Nairobi. Cell reception is good, and one can access the internet via cellular service.

There will be a language barrier to begin with because the placement is in a rural area inhabited by the Maasai community of Kenya. Communication in English will be limited, and the SALT/YAMENer will want to learn the local language (Maa or Swahili) to be able to communicate more effectively.

MCCers have typically found Kenyans to be hospitable and friendly, and English is spoken by many, especially in urban areas. Geographically, Kenya is an equatorial country in East Africa bordering the Indian Ocean. It had a population of 47.6 million by 2019. The country is home to more than forty ethnic and language groups, with rich and diverse cultural, religious, and social practices. The vast majority of Kenyans are Africans, comprising four distinct linguistic groups: Bantu, Nilotic, Nilo-Hamitic and Cushitic. The country’s geography encompasses savannah, lakelands, the Great Rift Valley and mountain highlands. Kenya is also home to wildlife such as the Big Five found in many national parks from Nairobi National Park within the city to the Maasai Mara Reserve, known for its annual wildebeest migrations. There is also Amboseli National Park, offering views of Tanzania’s Mt. Kilimanjaro, which at 19,340 feet (5,895 m) is the highest mountain in Africa. One can also go to the coast to enjoy the shores of the Indian Ocean or enjoy the thrill of climbing Mt Kenya and other smaller mountains like Mt Longonot, Kilimambogo, and many others.

In 2019, Kenya’s economic growth averaged 5.7%, placing Kenya as one of the fastest-growing economies in Sub-Saharan Africa. The recent economic expansion has been boosted by a stable macroeconomic environment, positive investor confidence and a resilient services sector. However, four-fifths of workers are in the informal economy, and 9.3% of the workforce is unemployed. Kenya’s HDI ranking in 2018 was 0.579 which put the country in the medium human development category, positioning it at 147 out of 189 countries and territories.

Challenges:

- The COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect countries around the world. While we remain hopeful that the pandemic will have stabilized by August 2021, to prioritize the well-being and limit risk to our participants and the local community, assessments of each assignment will continue on a regular basis. If it is deemed that an assignment is no longer viable, we will do our best to help you secure an alternative assignment.

- There may be challenges with internet connection and speed for personal and work use.

- Canada/U.S. standard of dental and medical care is not available in Olepolos; however, it is available in Nairobi. Professional counselling and mental health services are not available in Olepolos; however, counselling is available in Nairobi.

- There will be significant cultural differences. This being a rural area, the Maasai traditions and culture will take precedence when it comes to how to act and will impact living conditions. We ask the SALTYAMENer to keep an open mind and always seek clarification if they are unsure of how to act.
• There is a certain level of insecurity during times of election when ethnic tensions are high. MCC regularly assesses these issues of security but also relies on Kenyan neighbours and colleagues for advice and support. The SALT/YAMEner will live with a family in a part of Olepolos that is Christian. Adhering to advice from MCC, the local partner, and the host family will help to mitigate any threats posed to individual security. The next general election will be in August 2022.

• A large majority of Kenyans hold negative views of LGBTQ+ people, largely perceiving homosexuality as taboo and against cultural values and morality. Leaders within the dominant religions in Kenya—Catholic, Anglican, Pentecostal and Islamic—all publicly condemn LGBTQ+ identity as signs of corruption, disease, and immorality. The Kenya Mennonite Church holds the same view on the issue. Therefore, openly LGBTQ+ individuals will likely find it difficult to find support among those from the local context.

• Managing frustration when things don’t turn out as expected can be hard. While we do our best to determine and outline job responsibilities with our local partners, assignments come alive based on the passions, skills, and giftings of an individual. Responsibilities may change or be refined over time in communication with supervisors to meet the ongoing changes and needs within a local context. As such, the greatest characteristics a participant can bring to an assignment are adaptability, flexibility, patience, a willingness to get their hands dirty, and humility to complete even mundane tasks.

• For those who are very task-oriented, it can be a challenge to recognize the importance of "being" instead of always "doing" as building healthy relationships and mutually transformative learning is an important part of the participant experience. We hope participants will come with a desire to walk alongside our local partners, rather than see the assignment solely as a way to "get things done."