



The Seje Initiative

A Missions Project in Kenya



Creating Sustainable Villages

Creating Sustainable Lives Through Jesus Christ

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Introduction to this Paper

The purpose of this paper is to introduce people to our partner village of Seje, Kenya and the work that Community Bible Church (CBC) is doing to help build a sustainable community there. Additionally, the paper identifies ways that people can join us to make a difference to those in need, and in the process profoundly change their own lives.

The paper is organization as follows:

- Section 1: Overview - high level view of this missions project
- Section 2: Our partner community of Seje - description of the land and its people
- Section 3: The Participants and Organizations Involved - an introduction to the people and groups that are involved in this project
- Section 4: Project Plan - what has been accomplished to date and what we are planning to do next
- Section 5: How Can I Make a Difference - description of roles needed to accomplish this project
- Section 6: God is Calling Us to Greatness - conclusion
- Appendix A: About the Region - description of Kenya and Siaya district (which Seje is part of)

This paper references a couple of websites that would be helpful to look at:

- You Feed Them (organization that we are partnering with): www.youfeedthem.com
- Video from our April 2011 trip to Seje: www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxO2a5bTNsE
- Our Church website can be found at: www.cbcstittsville.com

If you wish to make a donation, please write a cheque to Community Bible Church, denoting that the money is to be allocated to: "Missions (Seje)".

Seje Missions Project

1. Overview

Community Bible Church is partnering with the community of Seje in Kenya to work together to build a sustainable community. Sustainability and dignity are the key components to this initiative. By working with the community's leaders, leveraging the knowledge and resources of experienced organizations, and by following God's lead we aspire to profoundly change the lives of the people in this region in Africa.

Achieving our objectives entails the following for the community of Seje:

- Establishing a personal relationship with Jesus Christ for those who are lost
- Helping them develop an understanding of God's word and walking daily with Him
- Enabling accessibility to basic resources such as food and clean water
- Providing access to education and health services
- Initiating sustainable management of the resources and services by the community.

The latter point is most critical for the project. The aim is to work with the community leaders to establish operating models that enables the community to own, maintain, and improve upon what is provided to them. The goal is that within 5 years we have helped build a healthy self-sustainable community which no longer requires our support and we have moved the focus of our project to other villages.

We also see this relationship as mutually beneficial. For although we certainly have a role in growing their local economy, the people of Seje have much they can teach us. Things that we in the industrial world have mostly forgotten such as:

- Having a deep, authentic relationship with God
- Completely trusting God and witnessing daily His hand at work
- Finding joy in life regardless of your circumstances (in contrast to some of us here who materially have everything yet lack joy in our lives)

It has been said that God is doing amazing things in Africa, and from the recent experience of the CBC team in traveling there we can attest to that statement. We feel honoured that He has invited us to be a part of the transformation that He is initiating. And we are excited about the transformations He is enacting in our own lives as we follow His will.

The context for this project is Community Bible Church's statement on missions, which is:

Mission initiatives at Community Bible Church seek to glorify God by fulfilling the Great Commission to go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation and the Great Commandment to love God and others.

To achieve this, CBC supports missions which present the Good News of Jesus Christ to everyone, make obedient disciples of Jesus Christ among all peoples and minister to the totality of human need by providing food, shelter, and clothing to those in need.

Fundamentally, this project is about reaching those in need to help feed them physically and to help feed them spiritually.

2. Our Partner Community of Seje

Seje is a cluster of 5 villages with an rough population estimate of 5000. The name refers to both the area and the people who occupy it, as Seje is a sub-clan within the Luo tribe.

Our project will initially focus on two villages on the eastern part of Seje that form a cohesive area. These villages are called: Ndori and Ulamba. The population of the two villages is estimated to be approximately 1500 in an approximate area of 5 km². To find the location on the map, the GPS coordinates are: 0.000N, 34.197E. We have just had the villages do a census and will be compiling the data to provide a more precise view of the population. Neither village has electricity or a medical clinic.

Seje is predominately Christian. Although the populace believes in God, only a small percentage actively attend church or can be considered saved. This is attributed to several factors, including lack of pastoral training, lack of resources, poor understanding of the gospel, and a general lack of hope amongst the poorer people in the community. Plus there are people involved in more traditional religions such as witch doctors or those practicing black magic.

Seje is on a ridge roughly 150 feet above the Yala river valley and the ground is typically dry and rocky. Presently people may spend hours walking or cycling several kilometres each way to draw water from the river - which unfortunately lacks in cleanliness. We are presently investigating the feasibility of digging wells but the geological characteristics of the region indicate a risk that suitable well water may not be available.

If and when a well is drilled, it will be managed by the community and the water will be sold for roughly one cent per 20L container. This is slightly less than what a container sells in the area and will be sufficient to sustain the well over time by supporting a manager and building reserve funding.

The weather pattern is two rainy seasons - the heavier seasons occurring in the spring and a lesser one in the fall. Winter and Summer are hot and very dry. Combined with the ground conditions, this makes agriculture a challenge when using



One of our partner Churches



Riding to get water from the river - you need to walk the bike back when the containers are full

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traditional farming techniques. Thus the fields involve a lot of work by hand and do not generate high yields. The primary crops are maize and cassava (a shrubby plant with nutritious leaves and roots that grows well in hot dry regions). Fruits and cash crops are also grown in the area. Farm animals are also an important part of the village comprising cattle, goats, and the omnipresent free-range chicken.

Most people live in housing compounds comprised of 2-6 huts, depending on the size of the extended family. The huts are built of mud walls with either grass or metal roofs - the latter is preferred if they can afford it. The mud walls are composed of cow dung and mud and thus bring a risk of parasites to the occupants.

The area was once heavily treed but many of them have been cut down over the past half century. Still, the landscape is beautiful and the view that the villages have over the Yala valley is spectacular. Furthermore, the people are warm and welcoming and genuinely appreciate visitors from Canada.



Typical Homestead

3. The Participants and Organizations Involved

Community Bible Church was introduced to this mission through a sister church, Trinity Bible Church of Osgoode (TCBO). TCBO had started its You Feed Them (YFT) initiative in 2008 when they were introduced to Silas Oduor, originally from Yogo and now living in Ottawa. YFT initially focused on improving agricultural performance but over the years it has helped the village of Yogo in a variety of ways, in the process fundamentally improving the economic, social, and spiritual dynamics of the community. Please look at the You Feed Them Website at <http://www.youfeedthem.com/> for further details. Our plan is to replicate the successes that TCBO has built in Yogo and introduce new ideas as we address the unique needs of Seje.

Silas operates as the liaison between CBC and the village of Seje as he does between TCBO and Yogo. This is a tremendous advantage to the project given his familiarity with the culture and with many people within the community.

Roland Poirier from TCBO (seen beside Silas in the picture, the latter standing at the far right), provides the technical leadership particularly as it pertains to agriculture as he has a background in organic farming. Through the sustainable approaches, tailored to the local context, that Roland has implemented, fields have seen a ten-fold increase in performance. Furthermore, local farmers have been adopting the practices on their own initiative and have seen improved yields.

The picture also shows the CBC leadership that participated in the first trip. From left to right: Steve Rolston (who leads Outreach within the church) is leading the water initiative; Diana Rolston is leading the school initiative; Pastor Steve Stewart is leading the Seje church initiative; and Ron Killeen, who is the project lead.



Seje Project Team

Seje was highlighted as a potential partner community with CBC by the TCBO leadership who had decided it was time to expand its concept beyond Yogo. Seje was the logical choice as it had indicated strong interest, its elders were willing to commit to providing a community leadership role. Furthermore, although Seje and Yogo are roughly 10 km apart (as the crow flies, a 40 minute drive on less-than-ideal roads) Seje has a long-standing relationship with Yogo. Both are of the same Alego clan and Yogo has previously provided food aid to Seje from its YFT farm.

The community of Seje is represented by a Community Based Organization (CBO) which is a legal entity registered with the Kenyan government. The CBO is comprised of respected community leaders that are committed to the success of the project. The CBO will set priorities and identify the neediest recipients within the community. The CBO also owns the assets (e.g., a new well or school) on behalf of the community and is responsible for its

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operations and maintenance.

Some of the members of the Seje CBO (seen on the front row of the picture below) that you should know are:

- Pastor Sylvester Otieno (extreme left of photo) – secretary
- Joseph Oduor Ahaya (beside Sylvester) – CBO Chairman
- Mama Plister (beside Joseph) – treasurer and senior community leader
- William Moto Plister (second from right) – patron (a senior, well respected elder whose presence provides credibility and assurance of propriety)



Some of the Seje CBO Members (Front Row)

We spent several days meeting with the CBO and through our discussions we developed a good level of understanding and respect for them as well as building enthusiasm for the relationships we are building. They are committed to the success of the project and bettering the lives of the people of Seje in the name of Jesus Christ.

A final key point to raise is financial accountability. It is well recognized that aid projects in the developing world are at risk to misappropriation of funds. To address the concern, we are applying the processes successfully used by TCBO such as:

- Creating a formal, legal relationship between all involved parties. Leveraging the legal documents used with TCBO and the Yogo CBO, we have established an agreement between CBC and the Seje CBO that enables us to transfer money between the two in accordance with international money transfer laws
- Establishing accountability. As the registered liaison between CBC and Seje, Silas Oduor is accountable for the spending of all money. All expenses in Kenya must have a receipt that are reviewed by Silas. Silas will periodically meet with the CBC project lead and treasurer to go through the expenses. Furthermore, Silas and others from CBC and TCBO periodically travel to the villages to validate that the money has been applied in accordance with expectations. And we rely on reputable people within Kenya to monitor the projects. In particular, Doctor Peter Okoth, who is a director of a regional hospital and a respected leader in the region, provides a local project oversight and support role for both Seje and Yogo.
- Minimizing opportunities for fiscal abuse by limiting the usage of funding. All money raised by CBC goes directly to Kenya - there are no overhead charges for the project.
- Respecting and empowering the leaders of our partner community. This is a project that is ultimately led and managed by the Seje CBO. We are not imposing our views but rather working with them to achieve their goals for the community. They are ultimately accountable to Seje for the long term outcomes of the project.

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4. Project Plan

The intention is to form teams, each dedicated to accomplishing a specific objective. These objectives may be outcome focused, such as providing water or schools for Seje, or they may be support roles, such as fundraising or administration. All are critical to the success of the project.

The current state of the project is:

- The project has been approved by the church leadership and presented at the Jan. 2011 congregational meeting.
- We have had several meetings with TBCO and YFT to build a level of understanding and to receive guidance on how to proceed with the project
- A team from CBC has traveled to Kenya. It visited Yogo to learn what has already been accomplished and it visited Seje to meet with the CBO and to see the community. The team has also developed relationships with government ministries, local leaders, and businesses in the area.
- A set of project objectives were jointly defined with the Seje CBO and we are now starting to address them.
- Some of the initial teams have been put into place including:
 - Water: Led by Stephen Rolston
 - Schools: Led by Diana Rolston. This team also addresses orphans, children, and woman empowerment.
 - Church and community outreach: Led by Steve Stewart
 - Operational oversight of our project teams (e.g., scheduling and progress tracking): Led by Stephen Leuty
 - Project Chairman: Ron Killeen
- A high level preliminary strategy and operational plan was developed
- A post trip communication meeting was held at CBC.
- A video of the trip has been created and posted on the YFT You Tube channel at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxO2a5bTNsE>
- Some fund raising initiatives (garage sale and a Christmas sale in Nov. called the "Sow Good Sale") have started under the leadership of Judy Peasley
- Some funding has already been raised

The next steps we need to take are:

- Building out the teams
- Developing detailed team plans. The philosophy is that each team will take its own initiative, coordinating with the project leadership and other teams as appropriate.
- Initiating additional fund raising initiatives including encouraging people to subscribe to monthly donations, or to provide lump sum donations.
- Reaching out to the broader community and to other churches to encourage their participation.

This is a God-driven project and it has been evident that He has been blessing it from the beginning. Thus we continue to lift up this project to Him and rely on Him for guidance. To that point, we are mindful not to over-plan or be so focused on our goals that we do not leave room for God to reveal His will.

5. How Can I Make a Difference?

We here in Eastern Ontario live truly blessed lives. Most of us earn incomes that place us in the top 1% globally. We have an abundance of clean water and a wide range of food. We have access to reliable energy and quality medical services. Almost everyone has secondary education and many of us have post-secondary education. What we take for granted, the vast majority of humanity cannot even imagine ever attaining.

As God has blessed us, so He wants us to share our blessings with those in need. Whether it be the urban poor living in Canada or those living in disadvantaged countries overseas, we are compelled to share our time, compassion, expertise, and resources with God's children.

(1 Peter 4:10) Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.

But, where can you help? The lists below identify the areas that we are addressing and the skills sets that would help accomplish the goals. But I would recommend that after looking at the lists, the next step is to spend time with God to see where He is directing you. When a person serves where God is directing them, leveraging their spiritual gifts and natural skills then a couple of things happen: the work they are doing is enjoyable and they are highly effective at what they are doing. And usually God is finding ways to stretch you and grow you along the way.

Not all the areas listed below are being implemented immediately. The priorities are based on the direction from the Seje CBO and our capacity to deliver. More importantly, we are relying on God's direction and allowing Him to show us His path and for Him to create the opportunities and to bring the people who can help.

Areas that we are supporting

- Water: this is of primary concern due to the needs of the community. The immediate focus is to drill a well but there also needs to be a longer term strategy for how water can be better distributed and sustainably managed throughout the region.
- Schools: the initial interest is in supporting primary school education, particularly to those children who are in need of financial support and thus currently cannot afford to go to school. But in order for the early school education to be significant, it must be eventually followed up with a full primary and secondary education program.
- Orphan/children support: some of this is done through the schools where they are taught and fed but the need in this area is significant in terms of nutrition, health, and education.
- Women empowerment: the women are the foundation of the community and through empowerment initiatives, strengthening them strengthens the community.
- Micro-financing: an important way to develop sustainability is to help support the formation of small enterprises. Micro-financing has proven to be a successful model that empowers individuals and helps build the local economy.
- Agriculture/food: You Feed Them was based on the idea of using sustainable

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agriculture practices to grow crops at high yields which are used to support the community. We will need to work with the community of Seje to address their particular challenges. The CBO is also interested in building a chicken coop.

- Church: a key aim is to spread the gospel to the region by strengthening the church, its infrastructure, and the theological training of the pastors. Infrastructure does not just include buildings but also items such as sound equipment.
- Health services: the community does not have local access to health services and would benefit from having a clinic built and supported in the area. Additionally, an inoculation program is needed, particularly to help address child mortality rates. Health education and drug accessibility are also needed.
- Housing: involves fixing or building homes for those in need (e.g., widows who lack resources to repair their house)
- Profitable businesses: perhaps the best long terms way to create sustainability is to build profitable enterprises that hire the local populace and bring money and applicable skills development into the local economy. This may also be the best approach to keeping men living in the village and thus improving the overall well-being of the community.

Roles for project participants

- Prayer: this is a role that we take seriously. We have felt God being part of this from the beginning and we want to ensure that we continue to stay on His path. We are looking for committed prayer warriors who would love to spend time – individually and collectively – praying for the project, its members, and Seje.
- Treasurer: it is imperative that we maintain quality financial records
- Administrators: teams generate the best outcomes when they are properly managed and coordinated. Ideally, each team should have someone with a passion for organizing.
- Leaders: likewise, teams require a leader to define vision, set objectives, and direct team members.
- Marketing and communication: both to reach out to our congregation and to the community at large. This may involve media relations, using social networks, and newsletters.
- Community outreach: leveraging your network and passion to meet with other people, these outreach roles can help get others supporting a team
- Fundraising: obviously essential if projects are going to generate outcomes. In addition to an overall fundraising group to support the entire project, teams can also initiate fund raising drives to meet specific goals.
- Research: in any of our initiatives we can benefit from building up more knowledge and learning from other organizations that have investigated the region or analysed the results of past projects. Certainly those that love researching information over the web, reading research papers, contacting research organizations and so on, would enjoy this role.
- Partnerships: whatever initiatives we are doing, there are other organizations that have worked at achieving similar objectives. There are also government ministries, NGOs, and businesses operating in the area. By engaging with them and possibly forming a partnership we may be able to leverage their expertise and resources.

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Someone who has a penchant for business development would thrive in this role.

- Mission trips: meeting with the people in Seje gives them hope and enables you to better understand the community and its needs. It also allows us to monitor progress and respond to issues as they arise. But most importantly these trips will fundamentally transform you. You will never look at your life or your relationship with God the same way once you have visited Africa.

All the above are important and there are people needed for each of these. But if God is pointing you in a direction that is not listed then you need to talk to one of the project leaders. It is possible that He is speaking through you to direct us on an exciting new path.

Perhaps some of the roles where there is a more immediate need for team members include:

- Agriculture and food: this is of prime concern to Seje that we need to start focusing on. The Seje CBO has identified that building a chicken coop is its first farming priority. Note, that it is not necessary that one have a farming background as information is available from YFT and from similar initiatives in the region.
- Fund raising: It is critical that we launch a comprehensive effort now. This involves a range of roles but does not require that each individual contact others to ask for donations since we are aware that doing that is not in everyone's comfort zone. But there are several other support tasks that can help support those who are comfortable doing that.
- Event organization: in addition to the events planned, we would like to see a few additional events throughout the year. One thought has been to plan a "Kenya evening" complete with Kenyan cuisine and musicians.
- Church: it is critical that we help spread the gospel in Seje and strengthen the theological underpinnings of current believers. In the near term, our hope is to equip the local churches with a generator and sound equipment.

In all these roles, please be assured that there has already been some progress and thinking on them and there are experts that we are aware that we can engage. Thus, when joining an initiative, there are people we can connect you to and guidance that we will provide. Really it's just a matter of going where you are being led.

Essentially, whatever gifts God has given you; whatever skills you have; and wherever your passions lie; there is a role for you to play. We ask that you talk to any one of the project leaders – after suitable time praying with God, of course – to see where you can best make an impact for His kingdom.

6. God is Calling Us to Greatness

Although the need is great, God is greater! The expertise and resources that we can bring to help Seje can literally save hundreds, if not thousands of lives – both physically and spiritually. And what we are giving up in time and treasure are nothing compared to what we are storing up in Heaven.

God is calling upon you to make a difference in the lives of those in need and if you sense that His call for you is to make a difference in Africa, we would be honoured to have you join our project. Not only will you be making a significant impact but indeed, through this God will transform you in ways you cannot imagine.



Children from the Yogo School - a model we plan to replicate in Seje

The people of Seje and this project are in much need for your time and expertise. Furthermore, we would prayerfully ask that if it is within your means, a donation made to this Seje project would be greatly appreciated.

Appendix A: About the Region

The project is working with the community of Seje, which is a cluster of villages on the western edge of Kenya, Africa, approximately 25 kilometres from the Ugandan border.

Kenya is located in sub-Saharan Africa, along the equator. The country is a democratic republic with a generally open economy. Kenya was a British colony from which it gained independence in 1963, It has several tribal languages. Swahili is the official language whilst English is generally spoken by those with secondary education.



Corruption is a major impediment to economic development and social justice. The economy is based on agriculture and tourism, both of which are cyclical (particularly as the country is drought prone). Kenya is relatively poor but there are reasons to be optimistic about its future, and indeed one senses when traveling there that the country is on the verge of a major economic transformation (as is the case with a number of other African countries) much like the economic changes recently achieved in India.

Some specific information on Kenya includes:

- Population: 41 million (2011 estimated)
- Capital: Nairobi
- Area: 560,367 km² (compared to Canada at 9,984,870 km²)
- Life expectancy: 46 years
- GDP per capita: US\$800 (Canada in comparison is \$46,000)
- Human Development Index (United Nations, 2010): Poor – 128 out of 169 ranked countries

Our project is located in Siaya district which is part of Nyanza province. The district is north of Lake Victoria in a relatively remote part of Kenya. The nearest city is Kisumu, located on Lake Victoria. It takes nearly 2 hours over poor road conditions to travel to the region.

Although located on the equator, Siaya's climate is somewhat moderated by virtue of its elevation which is approximately 4000 ft. above sea level. The region is predominately dry, with two rainy seasons that occur in the spring and fall. During drought years, such as the last two years, the local economy and health suffers since local agriculture is the primary source of nutrition and income.

Within Kenya, Siaya district is below average in



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terms of income, health, and education statistics. Health is a major problem in that the region is a major malaria zone. AIDS is quite prevalent with infection rates estimated to be greater than 15%. Health is also impacted by malnutrition, dehydration, contamination (especially water), disease, and lack of access to doctors and medical drugs.

The Luo tribe is the predominant tribe in Siaya. Luo is also the name of their tribal language. The district is predominately Christian with Catholics, Anglicans, and evangelical denominations present. Theological underpinnings are not strong and often the Christian message is infused with traditional beliefs. The practice in witchcraft and black magic also exists.

Women tend to spend most of their days walking long distances to get water or to work in the fields. Farm fields tend to be rather small (perhaps a couple of acres) and are inefficiently farmed using hand tools. A large percentage of men have left the community (leaving their families behind to work the fields) to find jobs in towns or cities as few jobs exist locally. With men mostly absent, this creates several challenges, namely that it places excessive workload on the women; the children are not brought up with paternal influence.

Strengthening the local economy and the local church can do much to re-establish the physical and spiritual health of this district, and indeed, much of Africa. But this must be done carefully, considering the local requirements and cultural implications.

Specific data on Siaya district is sparse, and where provided, is often contradictory with other sources. Thus, the following information should be viewed with this consideration:

- Estimated population: 530,000
- Area: approximately 1500 km²
- Population density: 350 / km² (compared to Canada at 3.7 per km²)
- Families live on less than \$1/day
- Doctor/patient ratio: 1:96000 (compared to Canada at 1:470)
- Infant mortality rate is high. The official rate in the district is just over 1 in 10 but local sources advise that the number is much higher, perhaps up to 4 times the official rate.
- Working-age adult mortality rate is comparatively high (relative to the Kenyan average) due to health issues in general and AIDS related specifically, thus there is a large percentage of children who are orphans.

It should be stated that notwithstanding the challenges addressed in this paper, Kenya is truly a country of opportunity. The land is amazing and the people are great. So, yes, there are problems but contrasting that is a nation that you cannot help but fall in love with.